

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and David Greig's *Dunsinane*: a Machiavellian perspective

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Abstract: This study aims to show how Machiavelli's *Prince* provides a valuable lens for an understanding of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and David Greig's sequel *Dunsinane*. Following the logic of Machiavelli in the exposition of the appropriate course of action for acquiring and keeping a new principality, we examine issues of the conquest of power, the importance of military strength, and the qualities required in leaders. In both cases, failure to meet the conditions established by Machiavelli leads to tragedy – a tragedy of damnation for *Macbeth* and a more ironic tragedy of good intentions in *Dunsinane*, with Gruach emerging as true leader and the most genuinely Machiavellian character, combining military strength, *virtù*, patriotism, political astuteness and a capacity to act in harmony with Fortune.

Résumé : Cette étude examine le *Macbeth* de Shakespeare et la suite imaginée par David Greig, *Dunsinane* au prisme du *Prince* de Machiavel. En suivant la logique exposée par Machiavel concernant les moyens d'acquérir et de conserver une nouvelle principauté, nous examinons les questions de la conquête du pouvoir, de l'importance de la puissance militaire, et des qualités requises chez les dirigeants. Dans les deux cas, le non-respect des conditions établies par Machiavel conduit à la tragédie : tragédie de la damnation dans *Macbeth*, tragédie des bonnes intentions dans *Dunsinane*, tandis que Gruach émerge comme le personnage le plus authentiquement machiavélien, combinant la puissance militaire, la *virtù*, le patriotisme, l'intelligence politique et l'aptitude à agir en accord avec la Fortune.

Keywords: William Shakespeare – *Macbeth* – David Greig – *Dunsinane* – Niccolo Machiavelli – *The Prince* – power – tyranny – Fortune – patriotism – Scotland – tragedy – Malcolm – Siward – Gruach

Mots-clés : William Shakespeare – *Macbeth* – David Greig – *Dunsinane* – Nicolas Machiavel – *Le Prince* – pouvoir – tyrannie – Fortune – patriotisme – Écosse – tragédie – Malcolm – Siward – Gruach

In *Dunsinane*, his speculative sequel to Shakespeare's *Macbeth* exploring the aftermath of the overthrow of a tyrant, David Greig portrays Malcolm as a prudent, strategically astute, Machiavellian character who at first sight seems to be completely at odds with the Malcolm of Shakespeare's tragedy. In fact, Shakespeare already provided a hint of this side of Malcolm in the notoriously puzzling scene of his encounter with Macduff in England in act IV, scene 3 – a scene he did not invent, and which is the one episode that remains the same in the reports of all historians of the time.¹ A Machiavellian reading of *Macbeth* may seem paradoxical, considering that Machiavelli's works were largely unavailable in England outside the circles of power, which led to considerable distortion of his thought, and to his infamous reputation based on the crude caricature made popular on the Elizabethan stage in the figure of the "stage machiavel" – a by-word for a schemer professing and practising evil for evil's sake. However, as Barbara Riebling points out, "by the beginning of the seventeenth century the real Machiavelli started to replace the 'Machiavel'" (274), and I will argue that Machiavelli's concern in *The Prince* to set out the conditions for coming to and remaining in power provides a valuable lens for an understanding of these two plays.

The Prince opens on a famous series of dichotomies between hereditary and new principalities, which in turn may be completely new OR appendages to a hereditary state; between principalities used to living under a prince OR to being free; between those gained by the arms of others OR by one's own, either through Fortune OR through virtue (ch. I, p. 7). Following the logic of Machiavelli's *Prince*, which exposes the appropriate course of action for each of these situations, I propose to examine in turn the following issues: the manner of coming to

power, the importance of military strength, and the qualities required in leaders. But before I proceed further, I will give a summary of the plot of *Dunsinane*, which may not be as familiar as *Macbeth*.

Dunsinane is divided into four unequal parts named after the seasons, starting with spring; each part is introduced by the Boy soldier, writing to his mother, to whom he describes his impressions and experiences, starting with the excitement of the voyage from Kent to Scotland. The play proper opens on the death of the tyrant Macbeth in a fierce battle with the English army; they have come to install Malcolm (who had taken refuge in England) on the throne, which Siward, the English commanding officer, thought would be an easy, straightforward affair. But he soon discovers that things are not as simple as he was led to believe, as Macbeth's widow, Gruach, who is still alive (and even has a son from a first marriage, Lulach), claims to be the rightful Queen. As he is being acquainted with the intricacies of clan feuds, Siward realizes that his task will be more complex than he anticipated, but he is confident that by inviting all the clan chiefs to a parliament, a consensus can be achieved, which will bring peace and prosperity to a unified Scotland under the rule of Malcolm, and that by the following spring, all trace of the fight will have disappeared. The English army prepare to spend the summer in Scotland, a very inhospitable land with a hostile people speaking a language they do not understand. Siward has to face Scottish guerrilla and discontent among his inexperienced men who would rather be comfortable at home. Gruach insists on the prerogatives owed to her rank as Queen, she arranges for her son to be conveyed to safety and gets the upper hand on Siward; she soon seduces him and even offers to marry him and make him king, but he remains faithful to his mission.

All the clan chiefs come to the parliament, and seeing that no agreement can be reached, Siward proposes a marriage between Gruach and Malcolm to achieve lasting peace, a solution to which both parties agree – or so it seems, for on the night of the wedding Gruach's men storm the castle, allowing her to escape and killing several English soldiers in the process. Siward is infuriated, and is determined to fetch

the Queen and her son back to Dunsinane. As autumn sets in, the English army search for Gruach and Lulach across Scoland, more hostile and elusive than ever, and Siward grows increasingly fierce and ruthless. Eventually, Siward's men capture Lulach and Siward gives the order to kill him.

The English army is wintered in Dunsinane, while Siward and the Boy will go and return Lulach's body to Gruach. When they at last find her, the Queen is holding a baby who she claims is Lulach's child. She refuses Siward's plea to make peace with England, and tells him Lulach's son will be the next true king of Scotland; she swears to torment him as long as she reigns, and even after her death "until the end of time".

The conquest of power

This question is to be examined in relation with the frames of reference of the two plays, which are very different. Although both plays situate their action in 11th century Scotland, *Macbeth* is informed by the Elizabethan conception of the monarch as a sacred figure inherited from the Middle Ages, while *Dunsinane* mirrors the geopolitical debates of the late 20th century about Iraq and Afghanistan. In her "Virtue's Sacrifice : A Machiavellian Reading of *Macbeth*", Barbara Riebling's contention that Duncan's "gentle and trusting character has invited treason, civil war, and foreign invasion" (276) fails to take into account the Elizabethan conception of the King as God's anointed and vice-gerent on earth, endowed with a sacred aura, which Shakespeare superimposes onto the Medieval Scottish setting of the play. Macbeth is fully aware of the sacrilegious nature of regicide as he contemplates the murder of Duncan, emphasizing the triple betrayal of the allegiance he owes him not only as his king – and one particularly remarkable for his virtues – but also as his kinsman, and his guest, with a suggestion that hospitality is a sacred duty:

He's here in double trust;
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,

Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. (*Macbeth*, I.7.12-16)²

What is at stake here is the question of the legitimacy of the monarch, which according to Sir Thomas Smith's *De Republica Anglorum* is the first of the three criteria distinguishing a king from a tyrant:

Where one person beareth the rule they define a king, who by succession or election commeth with the good will of the people to that government, and doth administer the common wealth by the lawes of the same and equitie, and doth seeke the profit of the people as much as his owne. A tyraunt they name him, who by force commeth to the Monarchy against the will of the people, breaketh lawes alreadie made at his pleasure, maketh other without the advise of the people, and regardeth not the wealth of his people but the advancement of him selfe, his faction, and kindred. These definitions do containe three differences: the obtaining of the authoritie, the maner of administration thereof, and the butte or marke whereunto it doth tend and shoote (Book I, ch. 7, p. 53).³

Sir Thomas Smith refers to the two legitimate ways of coming to power, "by succession" (which was the case in England) "or election". In Scotland, David Scott Kastan explains, "the traditional mode of transferring sovereignty [...] had been a quasi-elective system of succession within an extended royal family, consciously devised to prevent both the succession of a minor and the perpetuation of tyrannical rule. It was Kenneth III, the grandfather of Shakespeare's Duncan, who imposed the patrilineal succession and, after poisoning the noble selected as future ruler, appointed his son as king", and Holinshed credits Macbeth with rightful claims to the throne by "the old laws of the realme" (173). In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare condenses several generations of rule so that Duncan seems to be introducing this mode of succession, against the tradition, immediately after he has lavished praise on Macbeth in words that seemed to entitle him with a rightful claim to the throne by "the old laws of the realme":

O worthiest cousin,
The sin of my ingratitude even now
Was heavy on me. Thou art so far before
That swiftest wing of recompense is slow

To overtake thee. Would thou hadst less deserved,
That the proportion both of thanks, and payment,
Might have been mine; only I have left to say,
More is thy due, than more than all can pay.
(I.4.14-21)

After Macbeth's protestations of loyalty: "The service and the loyalty I owe, / In doing it, pays itself" (ll. 22-23), Duncan goes on, somewhat ambiguously "I have begun to plant thee, and will labour / To make thee full of growing" (I.4.29-30), which might be interpreted as a sign that he will elevate Macbeth above the title of Thane of Cawdor with which he has just honoured him. Duncan's surreptitious introduction of the rule of primogeniture comes as a surprise

Sons, kinsmen, thanes,
And you whose places are the nearest, know
We will establish our estate upon
Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
The Prince of Cumberland (I.4.36-40)

Quite naturally, Duncan's appointment of his son Malcolm as heir to the throne leads Macbeth – and the audience – to consider that his rights have been by-passed: "The Prince of Cumberland: that is a step / On which I must fall down, or else o'er-leap, / For in my way it lies." (I.4.49-50) – all this in a single move in the space of thirty-five lines. In this way, Shakespeare purposely blurs the lines concerning the rules of succession, so as to maintain a certain ambiguity as to Macbeth's right to the throne, which is necessary if we are to retain sufficient sympathy for him to remain a tragic hero.

By contrast *Dunsinane* is set unambiguously in the context of the elective system: there is no reference to Malcolm's lineal descent, and issues of legitimacy are more complex. There are two contestants to the throne, Malcolm and Gruach (Macbeth's widow), with what appear to be equally strong claims on both sides. This raises an ambiguity as to whether Malcolm is attempting to (re)conquer his throne and free Scotland from "the tyrant" "by the arms of others", or whether Siward is installing a puppet king in order to secure the border and

establish peace in Scotland in England's interest, which would be a case of "conquering a new principality" as "appendage to a hereditary state" in Machiavellian terms, as Gruach's accusatory assertion seems to imply: "We had peace. / Until you came along" (Spring 86).

In either case, conquering a new principality, Machiavelli warned, necessarily entails using cruelty,⁴ but this cruelty can be put to good or bad use: "Those cruelties are well used (if it is permitted to speak well of evil) that are carried out in a single stroke, done out of necessity to protect oneself, and then are not continued, but are instead converted into the greatest possible benefits for the subjects" (*Prince* VIII, 33-34). Macbeth seems to understand as much when he contemplates the murder of Duncan:

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly: if the 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. (I.7.1-7)

However, the hypothetical mode betrays Macbeth's intimations that this course may prove impossible to hold, for both practical and moral reasons. Indeed, Macbeth soon realizes that the murder of Duncan will not be "the be-all and the end-all" he wished for as, remembering the prophecy concerning Banquo, he becomes aware that he does not stand secure on the throne: "To be thus is nothing; / But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo / Stick deep" and falls prey to the fear of being supplanted by "the seeds of Banquo" (III.1.47-49 and 69). From then on, he engages in a bloody course that will culminate in the massacre of the Macduff family in IV.2. In this, Shakespeare's Macbeth differs from the historical Macbeth, who upon his coming to power "determined", according to the Scottish historian George Buchanan, "to procure the favor of the vulgar by justice and equity", restored public peace and enacted many good and useful laws: "He so managed the government for ten years, that, if he had not obtained it by violence, he might have been accounted inferior to none of the

former kings” (Book 7, 211). The historical Macbeth thus provided an example of what Sir Thomas Smith described as “a tyrant by the entrie and getting of the rule and a king in the administration thereof” (*De Republica Anglorum*, I.7, p. 53). In practice, however, this kind of situation was extremely rare, as a usurper was inevitably challenged by the supporters of the legitimate monarch, which necessarily drew him into a cycle of violence in order to maintain himself on the throne.

Machiavelli’s advice on the necessity of cruelty similarly applies in *Dunsinane*. Soon after he has set foot in Scotland, Siward finds the situation is infinitely more complex than he was given to understand. He has been deceived by Malcolm into believing that his establishment on the throne would be a straightforward affair, concealing the fact that Macbeth’s widow was still alive and even had a son (Spring 74-78). In his own customary roundabout way, Malcolm is the first to hint at the necessity of killing the Queen under the circumstances: “the whole thing would be easier if she were dead” (Spring 76), and Macduff presents this more bluntly as the only alternative in answer to Siward’s question: “Is there another choice?” “Kill the Queen” (Spring 84). He even offers to take on the responsibility for the murder, thereby sacrificing his personal moral conscience for the good of his country, in order to prevent retaliation against Malcolm and thus avoid further bloodshed (Spring 90-92), in keeping with “Machiavellian notions of civic virtue that subordinate personal morality to considerations of political consequence” (Riebling 278).⁵ Avoiding further bloodshed is also Siward’s agenda, but he chooses the opposite course and, arguing that “There’s been too much blood spilled already” (Spring 92), he even goes so far as taking Gruach under his protection until Scotland decides her fate (92-94).

Thereafter the course of events illustrates Machiavelli’s observation that “those cruelties are badly used which, although few at the outset, increase with the passing of time instead of disappearing” and those who follow this method “cannot possibly maintain their positions” (34). Indeed, after Gruach’s flight in the middle of the wedding ceremony, which ruins all his efforts and his hopes of achieving a peaceful

succession, Siward is driven to increased cruelty, fuelling resistance to the violence of occupation which has turned the English army into “an invading force rather than a source of salvation” (Linnemann 8).

Military strength: foreign occupation and national resistance

Another essential condition for maintaining oneself in power, Machiavelli insists, is military strength, since armed forces are the principal foundations of all states – together with good laws, which are dependent on good armies (*Prince* XII, 42-43). The crucial issue at stake is “whether the prince has so much power that he can (if necessary) stand up on his own, or whether he always needs the protection of others” (X, 38). Machiavelli proceeds to discuss the various kinds of troops (XII), dismissing mercenary troops as unreliable and untrustworthy (43), while “auxiliary” troops (of a foreign prince) are much more dangerous, because they make the prince dependent on them, which cannot but lead him to ruin (XIII, 47). This is an accurate description of Malcolm’s predicament in *Dunsinane*. Indeed, contrary to *Macbeth*, where he is shown fighting along with Seyward (act V, scenes 4 and 6), in *Dunsinane* Malcolm is conspicuously absent from the battlefield and the army appears to be purely English. By Machiavelli’s standards, Malcolm is clearly deficient in the art of war, “the only art befitting one who commands” (chap 14, 50), and is entirely dependent on Siward’s troops⁶ – a very dangerous situation which Gruach hints at when she advises Siward to guard his own land rather than “fighting on behalf of some other man’s land”, a man she describes as “too weak and corrupt to hold his own land himself” (Spring 86).

Siward is similarly deficient in the art of war, although for different reasons. As a stranger in Scotland, he is totally ignorant of the geography – a major hindrance according to Machiavelli. The prince, he explains, “should never take his mind from [the] exercise of war” for which he must train himself permanently, and more especially in peace time. “This can be done in two ways: first, through physical exercise; second, by study”. The prince must learn the nature of terrains,

and know how mountains rise, how valleys open, how plains lie, and understand the nature of rivers and swamps. [... Thus,] one learns to know one's own country and can better understand how to defend it. [...] A prince who lacks this expertise lacks the most important quality in a commander, because it teaches you to find the enemy, choose a campsite, lead troops, organize them for battles, and besiege towns to your own advantage (*Prince XIV*, 51).

Siward's "cultural illiteracy" (Watson 238) extends to the people and the language, and his Scottish lieutenant Macduff is the only Scot he can rely on, since Malcolm, who has spent a long time in England, admits to being a stranger in his own kingdom: "It's quite ridiculous, isn't it. I'm King of this country and even I don't understand it" (*Spring 78*). Siward's ignorance is compounded by an ingenuity verging on arrogance, as when he invites the clan chiefs to a Parliament – which seems at once anachronistic and a very English way of settling things – or in the way he conceives of his mission:

My job is to build a new kingdom – not to settle old grudges. So I have to clear away the past now. I have to uproot now and clear away all past claims and –

That way there is a chance that we can establish a fair peace in Scotland (*Spring 86*)

Siward's delusion is reinforced by the unreliable, misleading information he has been fed by Malcolm:

You told me the tyrant had lost the support of the chiefs and he had no son and his queen had died of madness and so there would be no resistance to you but on the other hand we were likely to see a swift and general acceptance of your rule and the chance to establish a new and peaceful order. (*Spring 74*)

This misinformation, as Price observes, is derived straight from Shakespeare, who departed from Holinshed's account of the Thanes being divided between Macbeth and Malcolm (25).

In the face of such odds, Siward's mission stands very little chance of success. In the first place, the English troops are only "paid muscle power" (*Kurtulus 68*) who have no stakes in this war and turn out

to be reluctant occupiers of Scotland. Siward's English lieutenant, Egham, keeps complaining how he hates this inhospitable country which he judges unfit for human beings: 'God never meant people to live this far north', otherwise 'he would have given us fur' (Spring 98). He repeatedly wonders "why we're here" and "what's the point in being alive?" (Summer 132 and 102). His motto is 'Stay alive and be comfortable / Those are the purposes of life' (Spring 43); his main concern is with making profit, and he "sees and measures every issue in accordance with monetary gain" (Kurtulus 69). Given the opportunity, he opens up to Gruach to whom he aptly sums up the situation: "I know you don't want us to be here. Some of us don't want to be here either", and goes on to suggest they "ought to make arrangements – so as to make our stay as comfortable as possible" (Summer 122). He has no qualms betraying his country and agrees to convey her son to safety to Glen Lyon in exchange for "safe passage to market for [his] men to buy and sell goods" (Summer 124). Later on, he objects to Siward's decision of burning the men alive on the grounds that "there is value in hostages, not in corpses" (Autumn 196), and after Gruach's son has been captured, he orders his men to "sell [the other boys] as slaves to the Danes" and divide the gold between them as their reward (Autumn 210).

Egham provides a perfect illustration of the dangers Machiavelli warned against with regard to mercenary and auxiliary troops (chaps. XII and XIII). On the opposite side, the Scots fight for freedom, and forget their divisions in the face of the occupying force. Once again the situation is best described by Egham:

They're not fighting us because of their Queen. They're fighting us because we're here. The Scots will fight anyone who's standing in front of them. They like fighting. In fact, they're fighting us partly because we're stopping them from fighting each other." (Autumn 198)

Paradoxically, there is very little heroism in *Dunsinane*. Macbeth dies with "a spear in his back" (Spring 68), in sharp contrast to Shakespeare's Macbeth, who fights to the final assault in heroic isolation, with the great majority of Scots "giv[ing] him the revolt", so

that “none serve with him but constrained things, / Whose hearts are absent too” (V.4.12-14). The Scottish resistance takes the form of a guerrilla rather than open confrontation. The only heroic act is the sacrifice of the hengirl, who kills herself after freeing prisoners, urging them to “Rise and fight – / Fight the invader. / Fight” (Autumn 240). On the whole, the Scots favour cunning, as when Gruach attempts to seduce Siward into marrying her or when she escapes in the middle of the wedding she only seemingly agreed to. Scottish resistance is rather passive, as in replicating Lulach’s tattoo so as to make it impossible to identify him among other boys (Autumn 212), and what heroism they show is of the sacrificial type, in their capacity to undergo suffering to preserve their honour, as when all men are burnt alive for their refusal to reveal which boy is Lulach.

As a result, the English army becomes literally bogged down in a protracted war of attrition, and the play is increasingly concerned with the plight of the English soldiers: as Greig himself explains in an interview with Mark Brown for the *Herald Scotland*, *Dunsinane* “is a play about English people ... it’s about an English garrison trying to survive in hostile territory”. It is “meant to portray the encounter of two cultures – English and Scottish – in all its violence, awkwardness and misunderstandings (La Mura 28), with the ironical result that it is “only qualifiedly structured around a Scottish point of view. The protagonist is the English mercenary Siward, who is in Scotland fighting for Malcolm and Macduff in order to protect English interests in the internecine struggles of its northern neighbor” (Watson 236-237). Joyce McMillan even argues that “*Dunsinane* could be accused of showing plenty of empathy for the invaders, and less for the invaded” (*Scotsman Arts*, 28.4.2011). As Siward gains prominence over Malcolm as military leader, the question arises as to how he meets the other qualities required in leaders.

Qualities required in leaders

Machiavelli’s governing principle in defining the virtues required in leaders is the superior interest of the state, which alone must guide

the action of the Prince – with the corollary that the prince is to consider what *is* done rather than what *ought to be* done, for “there is such a distance between how one lives and how one ought to live, that anyone who abandons what is done for what ought to be done achieves his downfall rather than his preservation” (*Prince* XV, 53). As a result, the prince, as a public man, is not bound by the same moral rules as ordinary men. This, however, does not mean that he can do whatever he pleases, for contrary to the common over-simplified view derived from his dissociation of politics from religion, Machiavelli does not advocate or even endorse “wickedness”, that is, “when one becomes prince through some wicked and nefarious means” rather than through virtue or with the help of Fortune. For “it cannot be called virtue”, he maintains, “to kill one’s fellow citizens, to betray allies, to be without faith, without pity, without religion; by these means one can acquire power, but not glory” (*Prince* VIII, 31) – a description which exactly matches Macbeth’s accession to power. What Machiavelli means is rather that “it is necessary for [the Prince] to learn how not to be good, and to use this knowledge or not to use it according to necessity” (*Prince* XV, 53) – that is, as the superior interest of the state commands.

He then proceeds to examine those qualities (and their corresponding vices) that “bring [princes] either blame or praise” (*Prince* XV, 53), which he develops in the subsequent chapters: “generosity and miserliness” (XVI), “cruelty and mercy” (XVII), and “How a prince should keep his word” (XVIII). All of these qualities should be assessed in accordance with the criterion of expediency, which may lead the prince to make paradoxical decisions in terms of conventional morality, with the provision that he must “avoid being despised and hated” (XIX, 62). Chapter XXI further examines how on the contrary the prince should seek to acquire esteem, namely through “great undertakings and showing himself to be extraordinary” (76), and a final chapter (XXV) is devoted to the relation between human actions and Fortune. We shall now consider how Machiavelli’s advice on these points applies to *Macbeth* and to *Dunsinane*, and how it can further our understanding of those plays.

As we have seen, cruelty, although unavoidable in a new prince, should be carried out in a single stroke and be limited to what is strictly necessary for the security of the state. Shakespeare's Macbeth is trapped in his wickedness, as he discovers after the murder of Duncan that he cannot but continue his cruelty against Banquo and Macduff, but he does so for his own personal safety and against the superior interest of the kingdom. *Dunsinane* contrasts two positions on this question, as Malcolm and Siward follow diverging courses. Malcolm follows Machiavelli's advice when he orders to kill the farmer and burn the barn where two of the tyrant's lieutenants were hiding as an example to foster absolute loyalty immediately after he has hypocritically acquiesced to Siward's advocacy of mercy (Summer 116-120). In a more roundabout way, he also advocates cruelty towards Gruach, hinting that "it would be easier if she were [dead]", or wondering that "she might eat something" while Siward, anxious to avoid further bloodshed, chooses to spare her, and even takes her under his protection until the Scots decide her fate. Gruach's flight in the midst of the wedding at the end of the Summer section marks a turning point, as the failure of Siward's strategy drives him to ever increasing cruelty, to a point that Malcolm judges excessive and even counter-productive: "They say you show no mercy [...] I wonder if it isn't progressing *too* strongly [...] If things aren't going *too* well" (Autumn 218-220).

At this point, Malcolm seems to be anxious to "avoid hatred" (*Prince* XVII, 58) and advocates an indirect strategy: withdrawing the army to Dunsinane for the winter, wait for the Queen to make mistakes and let the chiefs plot against her (Autumn 226). As Siward expresses concern about the reactions of their allies, Malcolm's answer is to "give them money", in contradiction with the teaching of Machiavelli, who concedes that "it *would be* good to *be considered* generous" (XVI, 55, emphasis mine), but since the reputation of generosity cannot be earned without excessive expenditure for the benefit of a few and at the expense of the many, which would be damaging for the state, it is not advisable. Interestingly, the Scottish historian George Buchanan mentions a similar strategy used by Macbeth to secure his position immediately upon his crowning: "Mackbeth, to

confirm the ill-gotten kingdom to himself, procured the favor of the nobles by great gifts, being secure of the king's children because of their age, and of his neighboring princes, in regard of their mutual animosities and discords" (211). Malcolm views generosity as a means of securing the support of the clan chiefs in his conquest of power, which provokes Siward's surprise at this reversal of feudal obligations: "A chief should pay tribute to the king. It isn't the other way round" (Autumn, 228). This looks like an English point of view completely at odds with Scottish customs, since the exchange of gifts appears to be a matter of honour and an integral part of the intricate "networks of obligations" (Autumn 222), which Malcolm explains is fundamental for any understanding of Scotland – a reality Siward fails to appreciate altogether as he is puzzled by Luss and Kintyre's shame that they do not have a gift for him. And when he tells them he does not expect any other gift than peace, they point out that it is "a difficult gift", which they used to have but... "Not now. / Not anymore"; all they can offer him is an ironical "gift of our going" and "leave [him] in peace" (Autumn 214-218).

Malcolm's offer of money, it turns out, is a way of "repay[ing] ten fold" the chiefs' gifts (Autumn 228) and as such, it is evocative of the competitive logic of overbidding as display of power analysed by Marcel Mauss in his famous *Essai sur le don*. However, the nature of these gifts (wine and women) renders them problematic, since they are precisely of the kind that make a prince hated, which he must absolutely avoid: "This will always be the case when he abstains from the property of his citizens and subjects, and from their women" (XVII, 58). As a matter of fact, the chiefs' gifts resonate with Malcolm's earlier cynical declaration announcing a reign of terror:

If you make me king I promise you one thing only – total honesty. [...] I will govern entirely in the interests of me. In so far as I give consideration to you it will be to calibrate exactly how much I can take from you before you decide to attempt violence against me. I will periodically and arbitrarily commit acts of violence against some or other of you – in order that I can maintain a more general order in the country, I will not dispose my mind to the improvement of the country or to the conditions of its

ordinary people. I will not improve trade. I will maintain an army only in order to submit you to my will. As far as foreign powers are concerned I will submit to any humiliation in order to keep the friendship of England.

There are some positives:

I like dancing.

So I imagine I will hold big dances.

I like music and singing so when I visit you in your several castles you can look forward to having a good time for many days in a row.

And, most important of all, you need not waste even a minute of your long cold nights wondering about whether you are in or out of my favour. You are out of my favour. Now and always. (Summer 170-172)

– a declaration that is reminiscent of Malcolm's disparaging self-portrait in the scene in which he tests Macduff's loyalty (*Macbeth* IV.3.50-100). As Siward points out that the chiefs' gifts only encourage Malcolm's corruption and reinforce his weakness, Malcolm attempts to justify this weakness as the condition for the support of the chiefs: "they think – This King is easy – he won't cause trouble for us – all he wants is to be left alone to enjoy his wine and women – let him be king – better him than someone other – better him than someone strong" (Autumn 224). To Siward, this weakness can only lead to Malcolm "being despised", something from which, Machiavelli warns, "a prince must guard himself as if from a reef" (XIX, 63). Indeed, Malcolm displays all the vices that make a prince despised: "being considered changeable, frivolous, effeminate, cowardly, and irresolute" (XIX, 63). Siward's own contempt of Malcolm: "you disgust me; my boys are dying on your behalf; you are corrupt" (Autumn 224) echoes Gruach's earlier characterisation of Malcolm as "a man too weak and corrupt to hold his own land himself" (Spring 86). For all his efforts at justifying this weakness as part of a deliberate strategy of "creat[ing] the *appearance* of wallowing in venality" (emphasis mine) on the grounds that his apparent weakness makes his strength, Malcolm cannot convince Siward, who points out that his apparent weakness is all too real: "That might be a plausible strategy, Malcolm, were it not for the fact that you actually *do* want to be left alone to enjoy your wine and women – you actually *are* weak. It's not an appearance – it's true"

(Autumn 226). Malcolm's pathetically fallacious argument that "The best way to maintain the appearance of something being true is for it to actually be true" is similarly dismissed by Siward as mere empty words (Autumn 226). This conflation of *seeming* and *being* weak in Malcolm is an ironic reversal of Machiavelli's precept that although as a public man, the prince is not bound by the moral rules that apply to ordinary citizens and therefore need not possess all those qualities for which men are generally praised (XV), "it is very necessary for him to *appear* to possess them" (XVIII, 61, emphasis mine). This requirement is to be understood in relation with another requirement, namely the possession of two essential qualities, those of the lion and of the fox: "it is necessary to be a fox, in order to recognize the traps, and a lion, in order to frighten the wolves" (XVIII, 60). In the end, Malcolm gets enmeshed in his own oversubtlety and turns out to be only a would-be Machiavellian – and he certainly does not come up to Machiavelli's requirement that the prince "should acquire esteem through great undertakings and by showing himself to be extraordinary" (XXI, 76). Malcolm is a manipulator rather than a leader; he has none of the qualities required in leaders and is only a would-be Machiavellian for want of *virtù*, that subtle combination of bravery, authority, and political sense.

Bearing in mind Machiavelli's principle that the action of a prince should always be guided by the superior interest of the state, or love of one's country, which alone overrules all moral principles and to which therefore everything must be subordinated, the next issue to be considered is patriotism. Given that morality commands to act independently of one's interests, MacIntyre explains in "Is Patriotism A Virtue?"

The potential conflict between morality so understood and patriotism is at once clear. For patriotism requires me to exhibit peculiar devotion to my nation and you to yours. It requires me to regard such contingent social facts as where I was born and what government ruled over that place at that time [...] as deciding for me the question of what virtuous action is – at least insofar as it is the virtue of patriotism which is in the question.

Hence the moral standpoint and the patriotic standpoint are systematically incompatible (5, quoted by Kurtulus 68).

Patriotism is hardly an issue in *Macbeth*, if we except Macduff's despair at Malcolm's enumeration of his supposed vices in the testing scene: "O nation miserable!" (IV.3.103). Macbeth's motivations are not patriotic, but merely individual ambition, and the emphasis of the play is on resistance to tyranny. In *Dunsinane*, on the contrary, patriotism is a central concern, and resistance is against the occupier. Malcolm, who as we saw admits to being a stranger in his own kingdom, does not have an ounce of patriotism in him, and repeatedly yearns for "lovely England" (Autumn 228):

Lovely England.

I would have liked to have stayed in England. I like the way people speak in England. I liked hunting in those broad oak woods. I liked the dogs there and the horses. I liked the way that nobody in England wanted to kill me.

There's very little pleasure for me in being Scotland.

Give me back England... (Summer 114).

In this respect as in many others, he stands in sharp contrast with Gruach, who "has a strong drive to give back her country its freedom" and "is willing to go all the way, no matter what the losses, in order not to give up in her aim of regaining her version of her country's freedom" (Kurtulus 65-66). In particular, she subordinates personal and family interests to that of the country: she cares little for herself and has a strong capacity to endure suffering. When Siward tells her he killed her son and brings her the body for burial, she remains cold-blooded, and her reaction is entirely devoid of emotion "He was never a bold boy [...] He would have been a careful king" (Winter 266), and it does not matter for her if she or her heirs die as Scotland will always find another leader. Her firmness of purpose and determination in the face of adversity are more than a match for Siward's. In addition, she has undeniable leadership qualities; she asserts her royal title and authority, and commands unflinching loyalty from her supporters, as can be seen on several occasions. After the English army have taken the castle, even though she does not know where her son

escaped, she knows that “If he were dead – word would have come to [her]” (Spring 84); and when at the end Siward eventually gets to her and is surprised that “Nobody challenged [him]”, she tells him she is “guarded well enough” and adds “we knew you were coming” (Winter 266). All along she plays on English stereotypes about Scotland; she cultivates secrecy, elusiveness, and ambiguity as to her supposed powers as a “witch”, as when she tells Siward “My men know what I want without me having to form it into words” (Summer 150). The most spectacular instance is the way she organises an assault on the English soldiers in the middle of her wedding with Malcolm. When Scottish soldiers storm the hall, she quietly explains “They are mine. /They have come for me”, and then seems to vanish like the weird sisters in *Macbeth*:

No one saw how the Queen’s men entered Dunsinane.
The doors opened silently and afterwards we found that
All our sentries had been cut at the throat – but
However her men came the mysterious thing was her leaving,
How calmly she walked towards them – these blood-covered men –
And whether their coming came of witchcraft or of treachery
Or some combination of the two – as the great hall filled up
With fire and blood one thought filled the room like smoke.
She knew – she knew – she knew. (Summer 182-184)

Gruach emerges as the perfect embodiment of Machiavelli’s conception of a good and able ruler, at once strong and politically astute, a combination of the lion and the fox. She remains unaffected by the “world of uncertainty” Malcolm wants to create for his opponents at the end of autumn, and contrary to his expectation she does not “make mistakes” (Autumn 226).

This is probably her greatest advantage over Siward, and it touches on the issue that is Machiavelli’s object in chapter 25, the relation between human action and Fortune, who is “the arbiter of one half of our actions” (84). “Since Fortune varies and men remain obstinate in their ways,” Machiavelli explains, “men prosper when the two are in harmony and fail to prosper when they are not in accord” (86). In other words, it is essential to suit one’s action to the occasion, to act

when the time is ripe, at the critical moment (the Greek *kairos*) – a quality only rarely met, considering that “No man is so prudent that he knows how to adapt himself to this fact, [...] because he cannot deviate from that to which he is by nature inclined” (85-86).

This description perfectly fits the character of Siward, who appears to possess all the necessary qualities which Malcolm is deficient in: firmness of purpose, determination, perseverance, integrity. He remains faithful to his mission which he states in clear, straightforward terms, namely to put Malcolm on the throne and establish peace, and loyal to his country when he rejects Gruach’s offer of marriage. But his initial reluctance at applying limited cruelty leads him to ever greater cruelty which verges on savagery as he orders all the boys to be captured and all the men burnt alive for refusal to tell which boy was Lulach (Autumn 192-196), for the purpose of “cut[ting] off the rebellion at its head” – a strategy which Malcolm admits “*would* have been [an astute strategy] when [Gruach] was in [their] custody” (Autumn 218, emphasis mine). As it turns out, however, Siward’s ill-timed move has proved self-defeating, since Glen Lyon’s death has led those undecided to side with Gruach (220). In spite of Malcolm’s warning not to “lose his mind” (Autumn 228), Siward nevertheless persists along this course as he chooses to kill Lulach against Egham’s advice of keeping him hostage to “get the Queen to negotiate”. When he brings news of his death to Malcolm, confident that he has put an end to the Moray claim, Malcolm undeceives him in words that give the full measure of Siward’s alienation in Scotland:

MALCOLM The Moray do not accept that the dead boy is hers.

SIWARD What?

MALCOLM They say the Queen’s son escaped from Glen Lyon.

SIWARD No one escaped from Glen Lyon.

MALCOLM That’s what they’re saying.

[...] I think it’s more likely that by killing this boy you have given him eternal life.

He will come back. He’ll be seen in Orkney, or in some hall in Norway, he’ll come back from slavery in Ireland, or be found on the islands. As long as I am on the throne, the Queen’s son will haunt me until one day death

takes me and even if I die alone in my bed there will be people who will say – the Queen’s son did it.

Scotland does not accept his death. (Autumn 250-254)

Another justification of his belated cruelty adduced by Siward in answer to Egham’s baffled enquiry: “do we have to be quite so ruthless in the pursuit of peace?” is that “their queen showed the way” and he is merely reacting to her own ruthlessness: “Every day one or other of our boys comes back to us laid out on a cart and marked with wounds which come from *her* arrows – cuts which come from *her* knives” (Autumn 196). Indeed, excessive as it is – “Scandinavian”, Egham calls it – Siward’s cruelty is later judged insufficient by Gruach who tells him : “You killed the boys in Glen Lyon. / But you let the women go. / That was a mistake. / Lulach had a son. / This child. / This child is now the King” (Winter 270).

Suspicion then arises that Siward’s mission to establish peace may have been doomed all along and that he is clinging to an unattainable ideal. This is not an easy question: on the one hand Gruach proclaims “We had peace. / Until you came along” (Spring 86), which seems to be corroborated by Luss and Kintyre when they tell Siward that peace is “a difficult gift”, which they used to have but... “Not now. / Not anymore” (Autumn 216-218). Macduff also remembers: “there wasn’t always war here [...] Once there were markets and courts and monasteries” (Autumn 244). But on the other hand, the same Macduff expresses scepticism about Siward’s confident belief that “Malcolm will make a situation where everybody works together in the pursuit of the kingdom’s common interest” as he admits: “To create that situation would require a very large army and it would take a very long time” (Spring 82). Worse still, Malcolm does not believe in peace for Scotland: “You seem to think peace is a natural state, Siward, and conflict its interruption, but the truth is the exact opposite. Peace is [...] a rare and beautiful moment – something impossible – a glimpse of perfection...” (Autumn 256). And his conviction that “a settled kingdom is a kingdom in which everyone is dead” (Summer 114) would seem to confirm Egham’s intimation that “The Scots [...] like fighting. In fact – they’re fighting us partly because we’re stopping

them from fighting each other” (Autumn 198). Given these contradictions, peace in Scotland would seem to be only compatible with the rule of a tyrant, as can be inferred from Gruach’s tribute to her husband: “He was a good king. / He ruled for fifteen years. / Before him there were kings and kings and kings but not one of them could rule more than a year or so at the most before he would be killed by some chief or other. / But my king lasted fifteen years” (Spring 84).

At one point, when he admits to Macduff “I don’t understand your people. They’re a mystery”, Siward briefly appears to be won over by discouragement as he ponders over Malcolm’s earlier suggestion that he seems tired and would perhaps like to go back: “Maybe Malcolm is right. Maybe I should go home”. His doubts, however, remain short-lived and soon yield to his sense of duty: “What would it feel like to desert my own army?” (Autumn 244). But there is another, more personal reason for him to remain, as Macduff tells him he needs him “to stay and fight” and that he is haunted by the death of his wife and children: “My children are dead. / My wife is dead [...] I can’t leave. / And neither can you.” (Autumn 246). Macduff’s grief strikes a similar chord in Siward, whose loss of his own son reverberates through the play: “Each boy who dies, I feel it. / Each boy who dies on whatever side. I feel it” (Summer 140).

Duty and personal loss combine to further stiffen Siward’s mind and create a situation in which “he cannot deviate from that to which he is by nature inclined” (*Prince* chap 15, 86). Unlike the Scots who do not accept that Lulach is dead, he cannot be deluded by Egham’s view that “Winning isn’t a fact. Winning is a decision we take”. He cannot accept that “This war belongs to Malcolm and Macduff” and simply “leave a garrison [...] to protect Northumbria and [...] go back to England”, because he would then have to admit failure in his mission (Autumn 198). His mindset is aptly encapsulated in the conclusion of the Boy’s letter to his mother at the beginning of the Autumn season: “we always win. We win because if we don’t win – we lose – and if we lose – then what?” (188), and as he tells Gruach

in their final confrontation he “can’t go home without a settlement” (Winter 268).

Still echoing Siward’s loss of his son, there seems to be an even deeper, more personal motive to his hardening that leads him to “lose [his] mind” in spite of Malcolm’s warning (Autumn 198). After Gruach’s escape, Siward’s determination turns to obduracy and gradually slides into an obsession of personal revenge against her, as he chooses to kill her son rather than keep him hostage as a means of negotiation as Egham suggests (Autumn 250), thinking thereby to put an end to the Moray claim – although as Malcolm puts it: “it’s more likely that by killing this boy you have given him eternal life” (Autumn 254). As he relinquishes commandment to Egham to take the army back to Dunsinane for the winter with these ironically solemn words “You are England”, while he and the Boy soldier, who has become a surrogate son, will go on in their pursuit of the Queen (Autumn 258), it almost seems as if Gruach has become Siward’s white whale. And as they embark on their quest at the beginning of the Winter season, the Boy soldier notes that Siward is “not a soldier now [...] More like a beggar [or] a monk” (260).

When they at last find her, and Siward brings her the body of her dead son for burial, his final attempt at negotiating with Gruach over Lulach’s dead body is an ironic reversal of the earlier seduction scene. His invitation: “I came here to talk. Let’s talk. A man and a woman” (268) mirrors Gruach’s “Let’s pretend for a moment that we’re not enemies but only what we appear to be. A man and a woman drinking wine. / And talking. / No more than that” (Summer 144). Then “everything [was] possible” (Summer 152), and Siward was still looking ahead to the next spring, confident that “We’ll set a new king in Dunsinane and then summer will come and then a harvest and by next spring it’ll be as if there never was a fight here” – although by the end of spring he had been forced to admit: “we’ll be in Scotland a little longer than we expected” (Spring 68, 94). Now the prospects are radically altered “The war’s over for the winter but eventually spring will come and in the end we’ll have to fight again unless we

find a way to end it" (Winter 270). Siward, who in spring told Gruach "I'm not asking you for a favour. I'm giving you a chance" (88), has become a beggar and "want[s] to hear [her] proposal"; but his request is ill-timed and Gruach retorts with a sharp "Go home" (Winter 268). Since he "can't go home without a settlement" (268), Siward imposes his own terms in his accustomed straightforward, rational way: "Lulach is dead. Malcolm is the unchallenged King. The Moray claim is over" (270). But as he claims to "understand there is a dance of leaving" and suggests "Let's take the first steps together" (Winter 270) – another echo of Gruach's advice "There is a dance of leaving [...] – Try to learn the steps" (Summer 166) – Gruach answers with an unexpected "challenge" echoing Malcolm's intimation that Siward has given Lulach eternal life, and produces a baby: "Lulach had a son. / This child. / This child is now the King", telling him "You killed the boys in Glen Lyon. / But you let the women go. / That was a mistake" (270). In a last, desperate attempt, reminding her "We've both lost sons in Scotland, Gruach. / It's time for us both to do what's best for our people", Siward asks her to accept that "The Moray claim is over" and threatens to kill the child. But Gruach defiantly answers that "Scotland will find another child" (272), and curses him with dire prospects of eternal conflict with England "again and again and again until the end of time" (274). Siward at last gives back the boy to his mother, and the play closes in bitter irony: "You're a good man, Siward. / It would have been better if you weren't. / There would have been much less blood" (278).

Both plays end in tragedy: as a usurper, Macbeth is led to perpetuate cruelty, not for evil's sake (unlike Richard III, to whom he is often compared), but out of fear. He finds himself as it were trapped in wickedness which precipitates his downfall, while yet remaining a hero. His tragedy is the tragedy of damnation ensuing from the temptation of the witches which he did not resist. Contrary to Banquo, he failed to understand that "oftentimes, to win us to our harm, / The instruments of darkness tell us truths, / Win us with honest trifles, to betray's / In deepest consequence" (I.3.124-127) and only at the end of the play does he come to "doubt th'equivocation of the fiend

/ That lies like truth" (V.5.42-43). One could speculate whether, had Macbeth waited for the crown to come his way instead of precipitating the course of events in his feverish attempt to overreach for it, he might have become king of Scotland. As it is, Shakespeare seems to take issue with Machiavelli, suggesting that "Fortune, at least as presented in this play, cannot be conquered. It is only an intoxicating illusion that it can" (Zuckert 606). *Dunsinane* presents a more ironic version of tragedy, the tragedy of a good man "in love with his good intentions" in Gruach's words (Winter 274). Siward ends up the "proper hero", but a tragic character rather than a leader: "in trying to create peace you create more war [...] it is a tragedy" (Royal Shakespeare Company, "David Greig talks about Dunsinane"), while Gruach emerges as the true leader and the most genuinely Machiavellian character, combining military strength, *virtù*, patriotism, political astuteness and a sense of timeliness.

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¹ See William C. Carroll's edition of *Macbeth*, p. 119. John Major, *History of Greater Britain*, Bk III, ch. 5, pp. 122-123; George Buchanan, *Rerum Scotticarum Historia*, Book 7, pp. 213-214; and Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles*, EEBO page images 174-175.

² William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Nicholas Brooke, OUP, 1990. In a more recent study, Michael P. Zuckert also points out Duncan's flaws by Machiavellian standards (593-594), while simultaneously taking into account "the two main contexts" of the play, namely "the earthly or political context and the cosmic or superhuman context" (589). Acknowledging Duncan's status as a Christian prince (597), he points the witches' limited power and shows how "Macbeth, having taken [their] bait, is not in the service of Satan, but the reverse" (598).

³ On the sacred nature of the monarch, see Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* and Marc Bloch, *Les Rois thaumaturges*.

⁴ *Prince*, XVII "Of cruelty and mercy": "the new prince cannot escape the reputation for cruelty, since new states are full of dangers", but cruelty must be limited to what is necessary to "keep his subjects united and loyal" (57).

⁵ Riebling mentions a letter in which Machiavelli wrote: “I love my city more than I love my soul” (273), and adds that “late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century England is witness to a growing adiaphorism which relegates to the realm of things indifferent all matters that do not directly affect salvation” (278).

⁶ This point is also made by Barbara Riebling about Duncan in *Macbeth* (276), but the context of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is very different from that of sixteenth century Italy, and although Duncan is not personally involved in battle, Macbeth is clearly not a mercenary soldier, but the king’s liegeman (*Macbeth* I.4.22ff).