

Remaking Medieval Heroism:

Nationalism and Sexuality in *Braveheart*

Michael D. Sharp

Mel Gibson's movie *Braveheart* tells the story of the life of William Wallace, one of Scotland's great national heroes. Originally released in the late spring of 1995, the film received predominantly glowing reviews, and later in the year enjoyed a second run in theatres as Paramount Studios began marketing the film for consideration in the many end-of-the-year awards shows. Early in 1996 Mel Gibson was honoured at the Golden Globe Awards as the year's Best Director, and in March of the same year, *Braveheart* won five Academy Awards, including another Best Director award for Gibson as well as the award for Best Motion Picture of the Year.

Gibson's film has resonated with American audiences and critics in a way that few medieval-themed films have been able to accomplish. In addition to receiving many critical accolades, the film has generated a surprisingly fervent fan-base, evident, for instance, in the strength of the film's presence on the World Wide Web.¹ Its success with audiences in the United States is perhaps unsurprising: in its depiction of honest, hard-working people struggling for freedom against English oppressors, the story of Scotland's bid for independence echoes the standard, romanticised version of the United States' own early history.² *Braveheart* also benefits from opening in the United States at a time when frustration with the two-party system of government seems endemic. In *Braveheart*, the English and Scottish nobility, who in their official rhetoric are enemies, turn out to be in cahoots with one another, protecting their own titles and privileges at the expense of the common man and woman. This conception of the official power structure as a false dichotomy is of course commonplace in contemporary assessments of American politics. *Braveheart's* Wallace, standing as he

does outside the official system of governance, offers American audiences the medieval equivalent of a viable third-party candidate, a simple man whose convictions, determination and bravery are strong enough (momentarily) to overcome tyranny, punish corruption, and enact justice. *Braveheart's* popularity can be linked in part to the fact that it emerges during a time of political malaise, when a frustrated electorate yearns with false nostalgia for simple solutions to complex problems.

That the film speaks to contemporary social values is evident in the ways its popularity has been exploited to draw attention to widely divergent political concerns. I begin by considering the way this film about thirteenth-century politics has resonated with two very different twentieth-century political groups. In Scotland, the Scottish National Party (SNP) has seized upon this movie and the fervour that it generates among many Scottish citizens as an opportunity to inspire patriotic sentiment and fuel the cause for Scottish independence from England. *The New York Times* reports that "in some theaters where Mr. Gibson's movie is playing, the audience erupts in cheers. The Scottish nationalists, distributing leaflets outside the theaters, sign people up on the way out" (Darton). In these leaflets, the SNP tries to make the Scottish electorate see the argument for Scottish independence as not simply emotional, but rational as well:

Independence isn't just history. Most European nations have it. Scotland needs it again—and now almost 40 per cent of the Scottish people agree. Most of them vote SNP....Today, it's not just Bravehearts who choose Independence—it's also wise heads—and they use the ballot box! Independence—we need it more than ever! (Pringle)³

For the SNP, historical distance does not diminish the relevance of William Wallace's ideals. *The New York Times* quotes one Scottish movie-goer as conceding that the film may have a few historical inaccuracies, but "ah, it does stir the blood" (Darton).

The film stirred the blood of moviegoers on this side of the Atlantic as well, though the leaflets distributed outside theatres at the film's opening in such cities as Seattle, Portland, Chicago, and Detroit outline a set of concerns quite different from those of the Scottish nationalists. The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) staged protests of *Braveheart* in several major U.S. cities, handing out leaflets which read:

In "Braveheart," Mel Gibson has gone out of his way to use his powers as director and star to ridicule gays. This is not the first time. How brave is his

gay bashing—and how funny is it—when we are beaten up on the streets of America because of who we are and whom we love? ("Braveheart: GLAAD Flyer")

GLAAD objected specifically to the film's depiction of the English Prince Edward and his male companion, a depiction which they claim demonstrated a decidedly homophobic prejudice. Evidence of this prejudice includes the ridiculous attire (including lipstick and other make-up) and the comical naiveté of the prince and his entourage, as well as a scene in which Longshanks throws his son's male companion, Philip, out of a window to his death and then beats and kicks his son into submission after the son feebly attempts to avenge Philip's death. The violence of this scene, despite its strong resemblance to contemporary gay-bashing, is played for laughs (and in the audience with whom I saw the movie, cheers).⁴

These two contemporary political groups, the SNP and GLAAD, have both responded strongly to *Braveheart's* interpretation of history, the one group concerned with issues of nation and nationalism, the other concerned with issues of sexuality. Though their concerns appear quite different, I want to argue here that in *Braveheart*, these two discourses, nationalism and sexuality, are intimately intertwined, and that the film uses *male* sexuality in particular as a way of expressing the relationship between citizen and country. To the SNP, *Braveheart* is pro-Scottish. To GLAAD, it is anti-gay. While the SNP sees the film as beneficial to its campaign for an independent Scotland, GLAAD sees the film's gender politics as deleterious to the cause of gay rights: the film demonises homosexual men, making them into a signifier of not only political ineptitude, but also of national moral decay. *Braveheart's* representation of Prince Edward, however, is not simply anti-English, nor simply anti-gay: it is part of a much larger aesthetic project in the film, one which uses male sexuality generally, in a variety of different forms, as a means of expressing the moral worth of a nation.

Braveheart goes to extraordinary lengths to depict Scotland and England as absolute moral opposites. This opposition is expressed in clearly gendered terms, with Wallace representing a natural, even primal, masculinity in contrast to both the effete Scottish nobility, who want only to protect their own titles and properties, and the tyrannical English nobility, who are characterised by all manner of unnatural (and specifically unmanly) sexual desires. Wallace and his men are depicted as organically connected to their country; they have an immediate and visceral relationship to the Scottish land and the people who live and work on it. Wallace's English adversaries, on the other hand, are alienated from the land and the commoners. Their relationship

to the country is abstract and theoretical rather than physical. The opposition between Scotland and England in *Braveheart* is, in its most basic elements, an opposition between nature and culture, where the latter is seen as a corruption and, more specifically, an emasculation of the former.

The opening lines of the film, spoken by a disembodied narrative voice, introduce the nature/culture binary which will characterise Anglo-Scottish relations throughout the film: "I shall tell you of William Wallace. Historians from England will say I am a liar, but history is written by those who have hanged heroes." The film authorises its own fictitiousness from the outset by disputing the reliability of one of the hallmarks of culture: the written word. These opening lines claim the realm of the "real" in the name of Scotland, and cast the English as a savage horde of bookish liars. That is, England's civilised culture (represented by books) masks a truly bestial nature (represented by the bodies of hanged heroes). The English are associated with abstraction, the Scottish with corporeality. This opening distinction between the two countries and their relationship to truth is the first in a set of oppositions that will define Scotland (particularly the Scottish commoners) as healthy, vital, and honest against an England that is sick, decaying, and essentially corrupt.

The idea of defining Anglo-Scottish relationships in terms of a moral binary is not without precedent. The fifteenth-century Scottish epic *Wallace*, written by a man commonly known as "Blind" Hary,⁵ was a masterwork of anti-English propaganda which insisted that the differences between England and Scotland were not only political, but moral as well. In Hary's poem, the essential moral superiority of the Scottish can be seen, for instance, in the way that the two countries sack enemy villages: the English kill everyone, while the Scottish slaughter only healthy adult men, and take mercy on the rest.⁶ Gibson's interpretation of the Wallace legend picks up on this moral binary, but deploys it in a new and persistently gendered way, expressing conflict between the two nations as a conflict between competing masculinities. And while earlier versions of the Wallace legend might also be said to have masculinity as a primary concern, none is so emphatic or consistent in its use of male *sexuality* as a sign of a nation's moral strength.

The portrayal of Wallace as the film's "natural" man begins with its depiction of his humble origins. In *Braveheart*, Wallace is imagined as a peasant, a common man who earns his living behind a plow. Despite evidence that Wallace was not a peasant but rather the "landless younger son of a minor nobleman" (Mackay 9), the film eliminates any hint of title from his lineage in order to make the contrast between him

and his enemies that much sharper. This de-emphasis of lineage as a sign of worth is in marked contrast to the discussion of Wallace's origins in Hary's *Wallace*, where Wallace is "of worthi blude" (I 18) and his "forbearis" (I 21) come "Of hale lynage and trew lyne of Scotland" (I 22). Wallace's father is an important figure in *Braveheart*, but there is little if any sense in the film that Wallace's merit as a statesman or warrior stems from blood or family ties. By emphasising only the commonest aspects of Wallace's character, the film is able to construct a Wallace with a direct connection to the Scottish soil; this construction lends credibility to Wallace's later political role as champion of the Scottish commoner.

But this connection to the land does not in and of itself move Wallace to political action. It is the attempted rape and subsequent execution of his wife, Murron, at the hands of English soldiers that finally turns Wallace into a warrior for Scottish freedom. According to the film, Wallace's bride Murron is the primary reason that Wallace becomes involved in the wars of independence. Before Murron's death, Wallace wants simply to live in peace, and has *no* desire to challenge English rule ("I came back home to raise crops and, God willing, a family. If I can live in peace I will"). But immediately after their marriage, in the first post-nuptial scene, Murron is attacked in an attempted gang rape, and though Wallace intervenes and prevents the rape, Murron is eventually captured and her throat sliced. This brutality against his wife inspires Wallace first to strike out against the local English garrison, and then to take his campaign for freedom to a national level.

Wallace's sacking of the English garrison is punctuated by the revenge of yet another husband for the violation of his wife. The wife of this unnamed Scot was violated earlier in the film when the English lord claimed the right of *prima nocte*, a right extended to all lords by Longshanks as a means of demoralising the upstart Scots.⁷ Once the English garrison has been securely taken by Wallace and his men, Wallace turns the captured English lord over to this avenging husband. When the lord claims that taking the man's wife had been his lawful right, the man responds, "Your right!? Well, I'm here to claim the right of a *husband!*" He then pounds the lord to death with a mace. For both Wallace and his anonymous countryman, therefore, the assertion of a man's proprietary rights to his wife's body marks the beginning of his fight to regain the independence of his homeland.

The portrayal of the English as rapists further demonstrates *Braveheart's* insistence that sexual behavior be understood as the primary feature distinguishing the Scottish (men) from the English (men). In Hary's *Wallace*, the English do not try to rape

Murron, but instead impugn her chastity, claiming that she has been sleeping with a priest and that the son to which she has just given birth (a detail omitted in *Braveheart*) does not properly belong to Wallace. These insults are directed not at Murron, but at Wallace himself. Wallace responds by hacking off the arm of an accusing Englishman, resulting in a wound so severe that the gush of blood temporarily blinds Wallace (VI 164-69). Though Wallace escapes with his life, his violent outburst results in Murron's being put to death (VI 191-94). *Braveheart* rewrites Hary significantly in this case, omitting the pre-marital sex and pregnancy from its depiction of Wallace and Murron's relationship, and mapping "illicit" sexuality entirely onto the English.

Braveheart makes Murron's attempted rape and execution into the catalyst of Wallace's fierce nationalism, but the symbolic equivalence of wife and nation begins with one of the film's earliest scenes. A young Wallace has witnessed the burial of his father (who died at the hands of the English). While he stands alone contemplating his father's grave, a young girl (who, we find out later, is Murron) approaches him with a serious but tender look on her face and hands him a thistle, one of Scotland's national symbols. Thus Wallace's romantic connection to Murron is, from the beginning of the film, based at least in part on her understanding and support for his nationalist sentiment. After her death, Murron literally haunts the rest of the film, renewing Wallace's sense of political purpose whenever he seems in danger of faltering. Wallace's relationship to his country is thus expressed in terms of a marital metaphor. His role as good husband enables his subsequent role as freedom-fighter and patriot. The bond between Wallace and Scotland is based on the socially sanctioned affective bond that Wallace shared with his wife in marriage. Thus in *Braveheart*, patriotism is a product of sublimated heterosexual desire, and the desire for freedom is essentially equivalent to a man's desire for a woman.

It is the nature of male sexual desire that most sharply distinguishes the countries of Scotland and England from one another in this film. Though Wallace's heterosexual desire is in many ways the foundation of his patriotism, *Braveheart* does not explicitly sexualise him. All of his desires are essentially productive and procreative, means to a higher, community-oriented end rather than ends unto themselves. The sex that Wallace shares with Murron is innocent, devoid of the lustful passions common to many modern cinematic sex scenes. Naked, Wallace and Murron come together in the seclusion of a wooded grove; the edenic surroundings lend their union a pre-lapsarian aura, linking it imagistically to the natural and pre-erotic sex that Adam and Eve are often believed to have shared before the Fall.⁸

The English, on the other hand, are decidedly post-lapsarian in their sexual proclivities. Palpably and monstrously sexual, Wallace's adversaries are associated with all manner of sexual desire *except* the desire for a lawful marital union. The English occupying forces in Scotland are all figured as rapists. The drooling and lascivious English soldiers force themselves on defenceless women (including Wallace's wife Murrin), while the lord of the English garrison participates in what amounts to institutionally sanctioned rape in exercising the right of *prima nocte*. The English are also, at least implicitly, given to incestuous desire. The English soldier who initiates the attempted rape of Murrin tries first to flatter her, telling her that she reminds him "of his daughter back home." The incestuous nature of English sexual desire extends even to Longshanks himself. A voice-over during Prince Edward's marriage to Isabelle tells us that "it was widely whispered that in order for the Princess to conceive, Longshanks would have to do the honours himself. That may have been what he had in mind all along."

The most vivid use of sexuality as a mark of moral, spiritual and political decay, however, comes in the film's portrayal of Prince Edward, the king's visibly gay son. It is in Prince Edward that Gibson finds the ideal sexual foil for Wallace. Gibson makes the prince's sexuality an integral component of the film's symbolism, despite the fact that medieval Scottish historians and poets seem actually to have cared very little about the prince's sexual behavior. Harv's *Wallace*, for instance, has nothing to say about the sexual behavior of the prince.⁹ In *Braveheart*, however, not only is the prince represented as homosexual, but his homosexuality is clearly construed as a sign of his political ineptitude as well as his moral degeneracy. He is essentially a clown, a physically comic character who inspires unsympathetic laughter each time he appears on screen. Neither modern terms like "gay" or "homosexual," nor older ones like "sodomite" are ever used to describe the prince, and no one in the film ever refers directly to the prince's sexual practices.¹⁰ Rather, the prince wears his sexuality in his very physiognomy. He is gaunt and has a high, soft voice. He minces, primps, preens, and wears quite visible make-up. At one point Longshanks proclaims that he cannot send his "gentle son" to negotiate with Wallace because "the mere *sight* of him will only encourage an enemy to take over the whole country." The prince's sexuality is legible in his body, which signifies the weakness and martial incompetence, and thus the essential vulnerability, of England itself.

This insistence on the legibility of the gay body is common to modern representations of homosexuality. Lee Edelman writes that "heterosexist ideology ... throughout the twentieth century, has insisted on the necessity of 'reading' the body

as a signifier of sexual orientation" (Edelman 4). With male identity thus textualised, however, normative heterosexual masculinity must now "perform its self-evidence, must represent its own difference from the derivative and artificial 'masculinity' of the gay man" (Edelman 12). Thus Prince Edward is not the only man in *Braveheart* whose body is meant to be read. We are also invited to read the bodies of the Scotsmen, and to find there a sign of their moral, political, and physical superiority to the English. For instance, as if to reassure non-British audiences that the wearing of kilts does not compromise one's manhood, *Braveheart* invents a ceremonial act of mass exhibitionism, in which Wallace's soldiers lift their kilts (first in front, then behind), exposing themselves to the enemy before charging into battle. When the Scots expose their genitals to the English (and thus to us), they engage in what amounts to an oddly literal assertion of phallic authority. In addition to conveying a contemptuous irreverence toward the English, the inclusion of this kilt-lifting scene bespeaks an anxiety about sartorial signification—a concern that despite the valiance and bravery of the Scotsmen, somehow the kilts might yet, like the modern skirt, be read as feminising. Ironically, in Hary's poem, Wallace actually does cross-dress in order to avoid being captured by the English (IV 769ff.); such a scene, however, appears nowhere in *Braveheart*. In its anxious insistence on the incontrovertible masculinity of its hero, *Braveheart* omits the one scene that would, by displaying Wallace in explicitly feminine garb, confirm the normative masculinity of the standard kilt.

Though Wallace and Prince Edward never appear in a scene together, *Braveheart* is edited in such a way that the two are frequently juxtaposed, as the film cuts from the muscular, physically active body of Wallace to the effeminate, idle body of Prince Edward. The prince provides a striking visual contrast to Wallace, but the difference between the two men goes far deeper than their physical dissimilarity. Prince Edward's life of gay idleness is made to signify an entire practice of government which is irresponsible, morally bankrupt, and, in the logic of the film, deserving of extermination. From the moment the Prince appears on screen, the film encourages the audience to look upon him with contempt and derision. He treats his wife abominably; when she tries to comfort him at one point he recoils from her touch and shouts at her to get away from him. His pretension to knowledge about politics is laughable; when asked what he would do about the rebellious Wallace, he tells his father that he would simply have the local magistrate arrest Wallace (this after Wallace has already sacked the English garrison). Thus the film plays off contemporary stereotypes of homosexuality as, on the one hand, misogyny, and on the other, delusional self-absorption. We see Prince Edward not as historians saw him, nor even

as the fifteenth-century *Wallace* saw him. Rather, we see a composite of very contemporary gay stereotypes. *Braveheart* depicts not a cruel, incompetent prince who just happens to be gay, but a prince whose cruelty and incompetence are tied inextricably to his sexual identity.

GLAAD is not the only group to allege that this portrayal of Prince Edward exemplifies and reinforces contemporary anti-gay prejudice. Several movie reviewers have commented on the questionable sexual politics of the film as well. David Denby, movie reviewer for *New York* magazine, writes that the

prince is loathed by his father, and Gibson allows us to identify with the king's contempt...when the king throws his son's lover out the window—which we are supposed to find funny (the scene is staged for comic shock)—Gibson's direction collapses into simply gay-baiting. (Denby 48-49)

Even very positive reviews have taken exception to *Braveheart's* willingness to caricature homosexuality. Gene Seymour, in an otherwise favourable review, writes that Prince Edward's "pronounced sissiness verges dangerously close to stereotype" (Seymour).

Braveheart is not the first modern film to make Prince Edward's homosexuality the focal point of his character. Derek Jarman's *Edward II* (1992) offers a postmodern version of Christopher Marlowe's play that reads the fate of Edward and his favourite/lover Gaveston through the lens of the contemporary Gay Rights/Queer Power movement. Jarman's portrait of Edward stands in marked contrast to Gibson's. *Edward II* encourages its audience to read Edward as a forerunner of contemporary gay men who suffer under the oppressive policies of their governments. Jarman's "gay" Edward thus attempts to illuminate history (both medieval and modern) in provocative, complex, and sensitive ways. By contrast, Gibson's "gay" Edward is simply an assemblage of enduring homosexual clichés, a comic foil to the manly and heroic Wallace.

As I noted above, *Braveheart* consistently portrays Wallace as a "natural" man, a man of the soil and of the people whose ability to lead his country derives from his visceral connection to that country. Prince Edward, on the other hand, is portrayed as absolutely cut off from both the land and its inhabitants. Wallace is always outside, in the open, surrounded by his fellow countrymen; as for Prince Edward, we never see him outside the castle walls, nor do we see him speak to anyone but his family and

his entourage. In fact, until Wallace's execution at the end of the film, there is not a single exterior shot of England. Longshanks is shown once on the battlefield, but Prince Edward never once makes it out of the castle. Wallace fights outdoors, in hand-to-hand combat, with the fate of his nation at stake; Prince Edward holds little archery tournaments for himself and his favourites, indoors, with nothing but their individual pride at stake. *Braveheart* perpetuates an association of gayness with physical idleness and domesticity despite ample historical evidence suggesting the prince was in fact an outdoors enthusiast. Pierre Chaplais writes that the prince "had a passion for breeding horses, digging and ditching, rowing and swimming, and generally for rural occupations and mechanical arts, all of which were regarded as unfit for a king" (Chaplais 2). *Braveheart* reconceptualises the nature of "unfit" behaviour, erasing all hints of manly vigour from the prince's portrayal in order to sustain and sharpen the physical, visual contrast between Edward's and Wallace's versions of masculinity. The film is remarkably consistent in its visual reinforcement of the opposition between these masculinities, with outdoor shots reinforcing Wallace's intimate, community-oriented relationship with Scotland, and interior shots of the English castle signifying Prince Edward's alienation from (and contempt for) his own native land.

The equation of homosexuality with both excessive self-love and neglect of the common good sees its clearest visual expression in a scene wherein the prince and his favourites are walking through a courtyard talking idly while a page walks before them carrying a full-length mirror. The prince makes the page stop and then has one of his men stand before the mirror while he adjusts the sash on the man's robe. The homoeroticism of Edward's inner circle is thus expressed as part of an underlying narcissism, an inward-looking gaze that fosters a pride and vanity which infect England from within. Michael Warner writes that according to the logic of heterosexuality ("a sexuality of otherness"), "homoerotics is an unrecognised version of autoerotics, or more precisely of narcissism; both are seen as essentially an interest in self rather than in the other" (Warner 190). *Braveheart* reinforces this impoverished and prejudicial conception of homosexual desire. Though Longshanks is the true tyrant and represents the greatest threat to Scottish independence, *Braveheart* makes clear that the eventual collapse of English rule will be a direct result not of Longshanks' tyranny, but of Prince Edward's failure to assume his proper sexual role.

The film uses Isabelle, Prince Edward's wife, as an agent of England's final emasculation. She becomes the symbolic terrain on which Edward and Wallace enact their opposing versions of masculinity. *Braveheart* invents the meeting and (later)

romance between Wallace and Isabelle as a way of expressing, in sexual metaphor, the absolute triumph of Scottish patriotism over English tyranny. Again, a man's political ideals are indicated by the nature of his relationship with women. Prince Edward hates his wife and refuses even to converse with her respectfully. But when Wallace meets Isabelle, despite the fact that she is a messenger from his enemies, he treats her with great respect.

Isabelle's embassy to Wallace's camp in *Braveheart* has an exact parallel in Hary's *Wallace*. There, Edward I's queen, Margaret, is the woman ambassador sent to negotiate with the Scots. When she attempts to convince Wallace to cease hostilities, Wallace, though supremely courteous, absolutely refuses to negotiate a peace treaty with the queen *because she is a woman*; he is not angrily misogynist, but he insists that to make terms with a woman would be foolish and pointless: "On ȝou, in faith, no worschip is to wyn" (VIII 1440). In fact, when the English queen arrives with her entourage of fifty women, Wallace gives an extended speech to his men in which he warns of the treacherous nature of women (VIII 1248-66). In his private meeting with Margaret, Wallace insists that women have no authority in diplomatic affairs. The queen attempts to seduce Wallace, but he deftly and diplomatically avoids her advances; not only do the two not fall in love, but he sees her sweet words as a womanly ruse designed to entrap him. He tells her "in spech off luff suttell ye Sotheroun ar" (VIII 1431-42). In this fifteenth-century redaction of the Wallace legend, Wallace's heroism includes an understanding of women as inherently treacherous and untrustworthy.

Braveheart's interpretation of this embassy, however, puts a decidedly different spin on Wallace's perception of and relationship to women. In *Braveheart*, the visiting woman is now Isabelle, Prince Edward's wife. She directly challenges the security of Wallace's masculinity by asking him if he dare negotiate with a woman. And now, contrary to precedent, Wallace demonstrates none of his legendary anti-feminism. *Braveheart* re-imagines the masculinity of its hero by suppressing all hints of his anti-egalitarianism and using his meeting with Isabelle instead as an opportunity to package Wallace as a kind of proto-feminist, one who is perfectly willing to treat a woman as his diplomatic equal. Isabelle's worth is confirmed by her eventual support for Wallace's ideals.

Braveheart thus reconstructs heroic masculinity to accommodate contemporary values. Where overt sexism was essential to a fifteenth-century conception of the warrior-hero, twentieth-century viewers (especially the women viewers who comprise

a large and important segment of Gibson's audience) are less likely to respond well to blatant anti-feminism in a man who is supposed to be a national hero. *Braveheart* responds to this change in cultural values and audience expectations. While the film elides Wallace's sexism, it accentuates that of the English. Longshanks, for instance, is made to utter lines we have come to associate with the most stereotypical male chauvinist. At one point he dismisses Isabelle from his presence, telling her contemptuously, "you may return to your embroidery," and thus relegating her to the domestic sphere whence she came and where she belongs. When Isabelle tells Longshanks that she gave the money (which was intended to pay off Wallace) to the poor children victimised by war, the king smirks and says, "that's what happens when you send a woman." We also find on her return from Scotland that Isabelle was simply being used, that the King had no intention of honouring a truce with Wallace, and that even before Isabelle left for France, Longshanks had begun to amass troops from throughout his realm in preparation for a surprise attack on Wallace's forces.

Thus, in consistent and remarkable fashion, *Braveheart* appropriates the discourse of feminism as a means of distinguishing further the progressiveness of its hero's politics from the backwardness of his enemies'. There is, however, something politically disingenuous about this appropriation. *Braveheart* does little more than replace hostility toward women with condescension. Wallace plays a wise and gallant teacher to Isabelle's naive but good-hearted student. In praising Isabelle, Wallace is never without ulterior motive. His claim that Isabelle is destined to rule, and rule well, reads like (and functions like) a sexual advance. He even turns the story of his wife's murder into a means of winning Isabelle's favor. In Hary's poem, when Wallace tells the visiting Margaret the story of how the English murdered his wife, he cries quite openly, tears streaming down his face (VIII 1373-74). Crying, however, conflicts with *Braveheart's* conception of ideal masculinity. Succumbing to a modern (and masculine) prejudice which sees crying as an indication of femininity and weakness, *Braveheart* refuses to show its hero in tears. Instead, the film turns the story of Murron's death from a poignant expression of loss into an opportunity to accomplish a politically advantageous seduction. Speaking of Murron, Wallace says to Isabelle, "I see her strength in you." This earnestly uttered declaration clearly impresses the already smitten Isabelle, who now has the opportunity to become Wallace's new Murron. Women, then, are by their nature supplantable in *Braveheart's* conception of heroism, for the film never indicates that Wallace's sexual interest in Isabelle in any way conflicts with his faithfulness to Murron or to his country.

Isabelle's desire to do the right thing politically is inseparable from her newly awakened erotic desires. Her sexual interest in Wallace is apparent from the moment he first walks into her tent: we see her eyes go down, then up again, as she surveys his body. His physical presence clearly overwhelms her. In his speech to Isabelle, Wallace appeals to her higher faculties, her capacity for reason, and her sense of fairness. But the film's insistence on accentuating Isabelle's physical attraction to Wallace suggests that her significance (like that of the only other woman in the film) remains essentially sexual, as well as essentially symbolic. *Braveheart* uses women generally, and Isabelle in particular, to mark Wallace as fair, honest, and enlightened, and to mark the English as abusive and duplicitous. Though Isabelle is in a way the film's secondary hero, her main role is to accentuate the difference between the *men* and the nations they represent. Thus *Braveheart* is able to make a woman's desire for personal freedom and respect dovetail neatly with the larger story of Scotland's bid for national independence.

The climactic moment in this drama of competing masculinities comes when Isabelle whispers into the ear of the dying Longshanks (who is now too ill to speak) that she is pregnant with Wallace's child. Though *Braveheart* ends with Wallace's execution, in his fertilisation of Isabelle's womb Wallace emerges victorious, penetrating the English dynasty and thus usurping Prince Edward's marital and paternal roles. By impregnating Isabelle, Wallace becomes, ironically, the good son that Longshanks never had, one who is both willing to fight and able to father a son. Wallace essentially imitates the ideal of primogeniture, an ideal to which the prince himself cannot attain. Within *Braveheart's* rigorously sexual logic, it is finally the proper use of the penis that provides the clearest mark of distinction between England and Scotland, with Wallace's heterosexual potency held up as a sign of the worth and the perseverance of his country's political ideals.

University of Michigan

Endnotes

1 *Braveheart* has spawned a number of official and unofficial web sites, most of them uniformly reverential. There is an official site at Paramount Studios ("Braveheart" [Official]), an official international site ("Braveheart: Frontpage"), and numerous pages produced privately by fans of the movie all over the world. According to a recent *Entertainment Weekly* article ("Star Chamber"), *Braveheart* has the fourth highest number of "devotional sites" for a motion picture. All URL's (or World Wide

Web addresses) cited throughout this article were verified by the author 17 December 1996.

2 *Braveheart* has also been particularly well-received by self-styled "patriotic" groups. In an electronic journal entitled *The Southern Patriot*, a group called the Southern League "highly recommends" *Braveheart*, claiming that "unreconstructed Southerners will find it difficult to miss the parallels between Scots and our confederate forbears" ("Braveheart" [Patriot]).

3 I thank Kevin J. Pringle, Director of Communications and Research for the SNP, for providing me with the text of the SNP leaflet.

4 For more on the scope and substance of this protest, search "Braveheart" in GLAAD's electronic archives ("GLAAD").

5 The Official International Braveheart site on the World Wide Web ("About William Wallace") cites Hary's *Wallace* as the single most important source of information about Wallace's legendary tradition. Unlike Barbour's *Bruce*, the Scottish epic which chronicles the life of its titular king, Hary's *Wallace* is primarily legendary, lacking extensive historical documentation to confirm its account of Wallace's life (See Wilson 193).

6 See, for instance, III, 217-18; IV, 491-92, and *passim*.

7 *Prima nocte* (known more formally as *ius primae noctis*) derives from the concept of the *droit du seigneur* or *droit de cuissage*, by which a lord might extend his rights of ownership even to the very body of his female subjects on their wedding nights. Alain Boureau argues forcefully that the *droit de cuissage* never existed as an actual historical practice, at least not in France, and that the concept represents a (primarily modern) myth about the barbarism of the "Middle Ages": "Le discours de dénonciation ou de revendication n'est jamais adressé au réel" (Boureau 251).

8 On Augustine's theory of the "lustless sexuality of the Garden of Eden," see Miles 94-96.

9 It is primarily English writing that has linked Prince (later King) Edward's incompetence and eventual demise directly to his alleged homosexuality, and to his passionate relationship with Piers Gaveston in particular. For an examination of the historical evidence of Edward's "gayness," see Boswell 298-302. For a refutation of this evidence, see Chaplais 109, who calls the assumption that Edward and Piers were lovers "gratuitous."

10 By exploiting Edward's sexuality as a negative image of Wallace's idealised masculinity without ever once deigning to name Edward's gayness specifically, *Braveheart* reinscribes homosexual behavior as a crime *inter christianos non nominandum* (See Edelman 4-5).

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