

**“LOOK[ING] INTO THE FIERY EYES OF WAR”*:
BYRON’S WERNER**

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the ways in which Carl von Clausewitz’s theory of modern warfare, as described and studied in his fragmentary magnum opus *On War*, might elucidate heretofore underappreciated intricacies of Byron’s German drama *Werner*. Not only does it allow us to uncover new connotations of the drama besides the traditional ones, i.e. the Gothic, the melodrama, the *Sturm und Drang*, but it also allows us to connect these traditional approaches to our new perspective centred exclusively on the phenomenon of war and its crucial role in Byron’s drama. War is discussed in the immediate historical context (both of the seventeenth-century dramatic plot and of Byron’s own time), as well as in the ontological and the aesthetic sense, laying bare the impact of these on the traditional concept of ethics in relation to the drama and in general.

Keywords: Byron; drama; *Werner*; von Clausewitz; war; Deleuze and Guattari; war machine; Schiller; Thirty Years’ War

Byron’s German drama set during the Thirty Years War, *Werner, or the Inheritance*, is in many ways the odd one out in the Byronic dramatic canon, considering its setting, topic and genre execution. The plot revolves around the competition for the famed Siegendorf inheritance, sought by the rightful but disgraced and exiled heir, disguised for the sake of personal safety as the lowly Werner, his brave but mysterious son Ulric, and the unrelenting family foe also in pursuit of the inheritance, Stralenheim. Upon the murder of Stralenheim, Siegendorf reclaims his inheritance and his son Ulric becomes engaged with Stralenheim’s only heir, Ida. As can be expected, things then do not go according to plan as the identity of Stralenheim’s murderer is revealed, marring the potential reconciliation of the two aristocratic families. The Byronic ending then rocks the traditional feudal world order, as well as bending the rules of the tragic genre.

Notwithstanding the obvious aesthetic inspiration of the Gothic, manifest in its fictional predecessor, Harriet Lee’s “Kruitzner, or the German’s Tale,”¹ and the drama of the pre-Romantic *Sturm und Drang* tradition, war had particular appeal in the post-rev-

* *Werner* II.i.160.

¹ Published in Volume IV of Harriet and Sophia Lee’s popular *Canterbury Tales* (5 vols, 1797–1805).

olutionary and post-Napoleonic context. The agonistic game enjoyed by the audience in *Werner* is supplied by the contest of dramatic ironies deftly played against one another – while one set of characters is privy to Ulric’s marauder past, the other is privy to Ulric’s identity as Werner’s son but ignorant of his “forrester” identity, while everyone including the audience is left guessing as to the identity of the murderer. This has the dramatic drive of “who dunnit” about it and has perhaps contributed to the immense popularity of *Werner* on the nineteenth-century stage. However, for the purposes of this essay, we will need to think carefully about Byron’s understanding of war, and we will do so with the help of war theory, both modern and that written by Byron’s contemporary, the Prussian war theorist Carl von Clausewitz.

The consequences of an immoral act – the murder of Stralenheim – are clear insofar as Ulric’s ties with his family and fiancée are torn – the heir is disinherited, yet again,² this time, ultimately, as a moral outcast. This, however, is not the message that Byron’s ending unequivocally puts across³ – Ulric leaves of his own accord, and, given his disdainful speeches mocking the constraints of the social life of high feudal nobility at the castle that curtails his free spirit, he is more than happy to take off and go back to the life of a wandering outlaw and brigand chief wreaking havoc and prophesying war:

Ulric: What would you have? You have forbid my stirring
 For manly sports beyond the castle walls,
 And I obey; you bid me turn a chamberer,
 To pick up gloves, and fans, and knitting-needles.
 And list to songs and tunes, and watch for smiles,
 And smile at pretty prattle, and look into
 They eyes of feminine, as though they were
 The stars receding of a world-winning battle –
 What can a son or man do more? (IV.i.402–11)

His “nature” “not given / To outward fondling” (IV.i.329–30), Ulric cuts a bold, “manly,” “sporting” figure, here exhibiting a strong sense of being oppressed by filial duty. The courtly life of an aristocrat bores him and “feasts in castle halls, and social banquets, nurse not / [his] spirit” (IV.i.21–2). His bitter, ironic glance at the “stars receding of a world-winning battle” signals his true allegiances and aspirations.

In fact, throughout the drama, but especially in the final scene, Ulric is the symbol and precursor of an impending war soon to take over after the all-too-brief interlude guaranteed by the peace treaty. As Schiller’s *History of the Thirty Years’ War* puts it, the “treaty of Prague only covered the embers of a future war,”⁴ and, according to Jerome McGann, “Byron may owe to Schiller some of the historical particularity that encourages the revisionary view of the rebel hero” (McGann: 696). How exactly is Byron’s rebel hero “revisionary,” though? This question calls for a discussion of the character and his role in a wider scheme of things – specifically in the context of war. Undeniably nurtured in

² Repeating “the sins of the fathers,” referring to Werner’s own fleeing the castle of Siegendorf in his time. This facilitates the Freudian reading of the drama.

³ Cf. Shelley in the dedication to *The Cenci* (1819) openly maintains that tragedy has to transcend “what is vulgarly termed a moral purpose” (Shelley 1970: 276).

⁴ Schiller, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/6774/pg6774.html>.

the *Sturm und Drang* tradition featuring the likes of Schiller's Karl Moor⁵ and drawing to a certain extent on the Byronic Hero, the character of Ulric fulfils and transcends both these traditions to signify something far more interesting than the inherited dramatic conventions of the time – he is the epitome of a new order, or rather disorder, his actions not only marking the end of the feudal order but also the immediate onslaught of another thirteen years of war.

Indeed, Byron revises inherited literary notions of the “rebel hero” by scripting the personification of a certain kind of warfare, rather than simply rebellion. Ulric and his band of “forresters” (V.ii.47) are the agents of guerilla warfare, which Deleuze and Guattari describe as a “war machine” that is

of a different origin, is a different assemblage, than the State apparatus. It is of nomadic origin and is directed against the State apparatus. One of the fundamental problems of the State is to appropriate this war machine that is foreign to it and make it a piece in its apparatus, in the form of a stable military institution. (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 312)

We might even say that Ulric stands for the Ur-nature of war – the “nomadic” war that has its origin outside the state, is always “foreign to it,” and that is fundamentally, in its “very assemblage,” “directed against” the state, rather than rebelling against the state’s ideological hegemony from within. Ulric is “directed against” state authority in whatever guise this confronts him in, be it Stralenheim, the family foe, who is eliminated so that Werner and his family can reach their rightful Siegendorf inheritance, or Werner himself, on assuming the title of Count Siegendorf. Thus, we see that Ulric’s double identity as the chief of the *condottieri* insurgents and the heir of Siegendorf cannot hold. These identities belong to two systems, of “different origin[s]” and “foreign” to one another. The laws of one are not the laws of the other.

Ulric’s men, then, are not mere “marauders” (IV.i.57), but guerilla fighters, referred to as “our force” (IV.i.112), or “ten thousand swords, hearts, and hands” (V.ii.45–46) at Ulric’s disposal. The phantom menace of the frontier forests is uncovered at last. In Harriet Lee’s tale, the atrocities of war, lawlessness and anarchy are marked as “excesses [that were not] confined to the base or the ignorant alone.” As she puts it, “souls class themselves” (Lee 1832: 241). The shadow companies “came no one knew whence, vanished no one knew whither” (Lee 1832: 241), terrorizing the country. Crucially, Byron’s rendition of Ulric’s “black bands”⁶ places their existence beyond the confines of morality. “Unlike its model,” as Martin Procházka notes, “Byron’s *Werner* repudiates a generalized, ethical vision of society. [...]he general ethic of social duty is supplanted with individual strategies of power” (Procházka 2002: 218). Byron eschews moral issues such as whether

⁵ Friedrich Schiller, *The Robbers* (*Die Räuber*, 1781).

⁶ Gabor’s descriptive account of the activities of the *condottieri*: “banditti, / Whom either accident or enterprise / Had carried from their usual haunt – the forests / Of Bohemia – even into Lusatia. / Many amongst them were reported of / High rank – and martial law slept for a time. / At last they were escorted o’er the frontiers, / And placed beneath [...] civil jurisdiction.” (V.i.233–240) brings us to Clausewitz’ historian’s view of the *condottieri* phenomenon: “extremes of energy or exertion were conspicuous by their absence and fighting was generally a sham.” From their feudal heyday, “the *condottieri* survived into the Thirty Years’ War” (Clausewitz 1989: 587–8). This sober, de-romanticized historical rendition of the *condottieri* would suggest a counter-argument to the role of Ulric as a representative of new order, and see him rather in the waning light of another feudal remnant.

“the forresters” are driven by the base motive of greed; what repeatedly comes across is Ulric’s innate nomadic urge for essential freedom, unfettered by the state-ordained constraints of the feudal code. Ulric’s rebellion thus marks the limit of the old feudal order, and speaks instead in the tones of Rousseauesque freedom: “I’m a forester and breather / Of steep mountain-tops, where I love all / The eagle loves” (IV.i.222–4).

Ulric’s role is not, however, simply an affirmation of individualistic rebellion, nor of a spiritual, Rousseauesque freedom in nature. Ulric’s last retort, aimed at his father, now representing the state machine, is effectively a threat to plunge Europe back into full-blown military conflict, confirming Ulric’s anarchic role as an incendiary device: “Go tell / Your senators that they look well to Prague; / Their feast of peace was early for the Times” (V.ii.49–50). It would take thirteen more years of bloody chaos before the Westphalia Peace treaties were signed. As Fritz, Stralenheim’s valet, aptly remarks earlier on, the war “had dwindled into / A kind of general condottiero system / Of bandit warfare; each troop with its chief / And all against mankind” (II.i.126–9). Ulric reactivates precisely this kind of generalized warfare, with everyone fighting everyone else. According to Deleuze and Guattari, this is an inevitable by-product of the official (or “State”) war machine – particularly its potential to “continually recreate unexpected possibilities for counterattack, unforeseen initiatives determining revolutionary, popular, minority, mutant machines” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 313). But this is only part of the story in *Werner*. Ulric needs must be in opposition to the state machine, not simply because its own attacks on him, not least in the person of his own father, force him into counterattack but also because his heart, as we see in the final act, truly lies with his fellow “forresters” (V.ii.46). Their “different,” “nomadic origin” and their “different assemblage” at the margins of the “realm of [state] law” betray their polemic⁷ state of “wild dispositions” beyond the world of “order and progress.” Disavowing his filial ties to Werner, and in so doing his ties to the state, Ulric exits the official stage to take up arms at the fringe and wage war against the system, but not just for those reasons he brings with him from that system. Rather, his is an allegiance to war itself – to *polemos* – which “[l]eave[s] no less desolation, nay, even more / Than the most *open* warfare” (IV.i.53–4).

Stralenheim: [A]fter thirty years of conflict, peace
 Is but a petty war, as the times show us
 In every forest, or a mere arm’d truce.
 War will reclaim his own. (II.i.169–172)

As the antagonist aptly puts it, “peace is but a petty war” in the world of Byron’s drama and “war will reclaim his own.” It certainly reclaims Ulric. For this reason, we need to think a little bit more about exactly what war means to Byron in *Werner*, and the most comprehensive treatise on war, the Ur-text of all modern war theories, which emerged from the same historical context as Byron’s drama, Carl von Clausewitz’s opus magnum *On War (Vom Kriege)*, helps us to do precisely this.⁸

An obvious question presents itself at this point, however – namely – how exactly is Clausewitz’s theory of war relevant to reading Byron’s *Werner*? It is not a text Byron

⁷ ‘Polemic’ is used as the adjective of *polemos* here (not in its usual sense of ‘debate’).

⁸ The opus magnum is unfinished, published posthumously 1832–1834.

could have read (originally published in the 1830s) and I have not found any evidence as to Clausewitz ever having read Byron. There are, nonetheless, pertinent reasons for bringing Clausewitz into the picture. On the one hand, there is Clausewitz's "Romantic" approach to his subject, working against the established Enlightenment closed system of law and order discussed with the ironic detachment of a *philosophe*. What Clausewitz's unfinished treatise presents us with is an open system of swiftly changing values, perspectives and situations. On the other hand, Clausewitz's account of war deliberately builds on its parallels with art, especially dramatic art – his military jargon reflects this in its terms, exemplified in "the theatre of war" (Clausewitz 1989: x). The *theatrum belli* becomes the focus of the *theatrum mundi*, presenting war essentially as a *mise-en-scene*, a carefully crafted theatrical production. If we recall that the staged strategic plans of battles and lined-up combat of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries fall nothing short of choreography, it is not far-fetched to consider the many striking similarities between the stage and the battlefield. Indeed, the theatre of war – with its protagonists and antagonists staging the strategies of offensive or defensive with a range of possible results – often evoked dramatic, rather than purely historic, genres, as in the case of Waterloo, which became a lasting synonym for tragic defeat.⁹

If theatre and its tropes proved so useful to war theory based on the Napoleonic wars, then the most influential treatise on those wars seems likely to provide an illuminating perspective on Byron's drama, first drafted in the wake of Waterloo.¹⁰ Crucially, we find that in Clausewitz's rendition the logical order of pre-considered strategy is shattered in practice by other forces at large in the theatre of war:

War is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case. As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity – composed of primordial violence, hatred and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone. [...] A theory which ignores any one of them or seeks to fix an arbitrary relationship between them would conflict with reality to such an extent that for this reason alone it would be totally useless. (Clausewitz 1989: 89)

Clausewitz presents a particularly vivid idea of war as organic, flexible, inscrutable, governed by a "paradoxical trinity" of forces – brutal violence and subjective feeling, complemented by a free-play space created by the interaction of chance and probability, all under the guiding instrument of rationality set to restrain and control the other two random forces. Precisely this "paradoxical trinity" of forces is present and plays itself out in *Werner*, and for this reason Clausewitz is an interesting lens through which to bring

⁹ "It may be true that many a petty play of emotions is silenced by the serious duties of war, but that holds only for men in the lower ranks who, rushed from one set of exertions and dangers to the next lose sight of the other things in life [...] The higher a man is placed, the wider his point of view. Different interest and a wide variety of passions, good and bad, will arise on all sides. Envy and generosity, pride and humility, wrath and compassion – all may appear as effective forces in this greater drama" (Clausewitz 1989: 139).

¹⁰ We should also recall Byron's tour de force 'self-Napoleonization' in *Don Juan* (XI, 55–56): he "[w]as reckon'd, for a considerable time / The grand Napoleon of the realms of rhyme." "But Juan was my Moscow, and Faliero / My Leipsic, and my Mont Saint Jean seems Cain."

into focus and better understand Byron's take on war. The interlocked, "grappl[ing]" foes, Werner and Stralenheim, might, for example, stand for the first of Clausewitz's forces – primordial violence – while the second, the element of chance and probability, nicely describes the plot of Byron's tragedy, bringing as it does friend and foe to the same spot on the Silesian border, and bringing Gabor to Prague for the tragic denouement. The third of Clausewitz's forces – the force of rationality – is, perhaps surprisingly and with an acute Byronic twist, manifested in the character of Ulric. But Clausewitz, in fact, enables us to do more than simply map out the conflicts in Byron's drama with useful terms and concepts. He enables us to pinpoint precisely what is wholly original about *Werner*, what it adds to contemporary war theory.

Clausewitz's treatise provides a captivating analysis of the intricate interplay of forces and elements which constitute and nourish the phenomenon of war, and Clausewitz repeatedly refers to them from various vantage points throughout his *opus magnum*: "Four elements make up the climate of war: danger, exertion, uncertainty, and chance" (Clausewitz 1989: 104). But Clausewitz is particularly interested in the element of unpredictability and chance and the extent to which these unaccountable forces influence and shape the phenomenon of war. This is where he throws particular light on Byron's understanding of war, and helps us to better grasp this understanding. He sums up these subversive influences under the principle of "friction":

Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult. The difficulties accumulate and end by producing a kind of *friction* that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war [...] Countless minor incidents – the kind you can never really foresee – combine to lower the general level of performance [...]. Friction is the only concept that more or less corresponds to the factors that distinguish real war from war on paper. [...] it is a force that theory can never quite define. (Clausewitz 1989: 119–121)

In war, we are dealing with uncertain variables – chance, imagination, emotional forces such as hatred, rancour and fear, and primordial violence. Hence there are irrational passions at work, inscrutable games of chance and probability, co-defining and complicating the sphere of influence set by rational forces such as political orders or the aims of military campaigns as defined by the authority of the state. The recurring echo in Clausewitz unequivocally chimes that "war is the realm of chance":

War is dependent on the interplay of possibilities and probabilities, of good and bad luck, conditions in which strictly logical reasoning often plays no part at all and is always apt to be a most unsuitable and awkward intellectual tool. (Clausewitz 1989: 580–1)

Byron's drama captures the very essence of war as defined above, illuminating the crucial importance of what Clausewitz terms "friction" – the unforeseen, the unexpected, which alters or mars strategic plans, however brilliant in theory.

Despite rational theoretical strategy setting itself up as the sole controlling element within the "trinity" of forces that comprise Clausewitz's war phenomenon, the "subjective nature of war – the means by which war has to be fought," Clausewitz tells us, ever mindful of the ubiquity of the unpredictable – "will look more than ever like a gamble," as "the element in which war exists is danger" (Clausewitz 1989: 85) – from "the very start

there is an interplay of possibilities, probabilities, good luck and bad that weaves its way throughout the length and breadth of the tapestry” (Clausewitz 1989: 86). These unpredictable forces render the “subjective nature of war” as the setting for a “gamble” whose untold stakes are life and death. Crucially, Clausewitz points out that the “creative spirit is free to roam” within this fluid space shaped by the “interplay of possibilities and probabilities,” and if we take this line of argument a step further, this intricate “tapestry” of war becomes not only a fretwork featuring intermittent randomness and potential absurdity – a premise which Byron often builds on – but also a free-for-all of unbridled creativity. This unbridled creativity is manifest in the character of Ulric, and we shall see later how Clausewitz’s theory of war helps us specify the intricacies of Ulric’s engagement with war.

Clausewitz’s abstract theories of warfare help us to get to grips with the intricacies of *Werner* – a drama that has not, on the whole, enjoyed wide critical appreciation. The first of Clausewitz’s “paradoxical trinity” of forces in war is “primordial violence, hatred and enmity,” and in Byron’s drama Stralenheim’s and Werner’s contest for the famed Siegendorf inheritance (highlighted in the subtitle of Byron’s drama) is referred to by both contestants as a “hunt” – in Werner’s words, for example: “I have been a soldier, / A hunter, and a traveller” (I.i.33–4); “when the ebb / Of fortune leaves [us] on the shoals of life” (I.i.41–2); “I have been full oft / The chase of Fortune” (I.i.61–2). As we have seen, whereas Stralenheim’s strategy is the offensive, an active pursuit of the inheritance, ruthlessly hunting down Werner and his family, Werner plays the role of the hunted – on the defensive, hiding under a pseudonym, eluding his enemy. From the information provided about his past, this has often been the case. Werner is and always has been “the chase of Fortune.” And the game of Fortune brings both to the self-same nameless spot on the Silesian border, bringing into play the second of Clausewitz’s trinity of forces: “the play of chance and probability.”

Werner repeatedly refers to the aleatory inscrutability of fate at work, as we have also seen. These melodramatic outcries evoke the characteristic features of the state of war in Clausewitz’s early writings on the Thirty Years’ War, specifically his study of Gustavus Adolphus’s martial strategies, which concludes with the following dictum: “[der Krieg] gab so dem launischen Spiel des Schicksals Raum für seine Zufälle” (Clausewitz 1837: 67) – “thus war gave the capricious game of fate space (occasion) for its coincidences.” Clausewitz’s understanding of war allows us to see the extent to which war and its unpredictable climate fills the dramatic space of *Werner* – war is fundamental to Byron’s drama; even the time of peace occupied by the action of the drama is saturated with war, and its atmosphere of ubiquitous fear and suspicion is partly caused by what Clausewitz summarizes under the heading of “Uncertainty of all Information”:

The general unreliability of all information presents a special problem in war: all action takes place, so to speak, in a kind of twilight, which, like fog or moonlight, often tends to make things seem grotesque and larger than they really are. Whatever is hidden from full view in this feeble light has to be guessed at by talent, or simply left to chance. So once again for lack of objective knowledge one has to trust to talent or to luck. (Clausewitz 1989: 140)

This quite perfectly spotlights both the quandaries of anonymity and the heightened Gothic atmosphere we encounter at the beginning of *Werner*, which lends itself to the

grotesque shadow-play of cloak and dagger drama down gothic galleries where “chance” and luck or sheer “talent” are the only decisive forces. As Clausewitz observes, “[d]aring [...] boldness, rashness, trusting in luck are the only variants of courage, and all these traits of character seek their proper element – chance” (Clausewitz 1989: 85).

If Werner is “the chase of Fortune,” bedraggled and on the run, his son Ulric enters the drama as a true hero, having saved Stralenheim from a flooded river. He is “of that mould which throws out heroes” (II.i.157); a “stalwart, active, soldier-looking stripling, / Handsome as young Hercules ere his first labour” (II.i.254–5). Indeed, Ulric stands out as a paragon of heroic prowess, in the Clausewitzian terms of “daring, boldness” and “trusting in luck,” until the very end. Even when the truth about Stralenheim’s murder must out, Gabor’s rendition concentrates on Ulric’s “wonderful endowments” – with “unrivall’d” courage, Ulric is deemed “almost superhuman”: a “man / Of wonderful endowments: – birth and fortune / Youth, strength, and beauty, almost superhuman” (V.i.244–6). Furthermore, the uncertain climate that Werner finds crippling is Ulric’s “proper element” – he exemplifies Clausewitz’s “creative spirit,” “free to roam”¹¹ within the “play of chance and probability.” As Fritz, Stralenheim’s valet, puts it, “there [is] something strange and mystic in him” – his nature is “wild” and “exuberan[t]” (II.i.122–3). Indeed, this “wildness” and “exuberance” are two of the many signals signposting Ulric’s true allegiance to *polemos* – the force of Ur-nature, which, according to Heraclitus, exists, like Ulric, in the realm of eternal change and flux: “*panta chorei*,” “*panta rhei*.”¹² It is Clausewitz’s world of “chance and probability” found in warfare, that Ulric finally retreats back to, having cut all familial ties, and that forever threatens to wreak havoc on the world of order – the feudal order, the order of tragedy but also the interim period of peace, which, as Byron never ceases to remind us, would have, at some point, inevitably dissolved back into the chaos of conflict.

Ulric is, in fact, “the child of war” exactly as this is envisaged by Clausewitz. Ulric is marked by the

fierceness the late long intestine wars
Have given all natures, and most unto those
Who were born in them, and bred upon
The knees of Homicide; sprinkled, as it were
With blood even at their baptism. (IV.i.66–72)

¹¹ Ulric’s self-portrait is telling in this respect, circling around the concept of the superhuman:

Ulric: I’m the true chameleon
And live but on the atmosphere; your feasts
In castle halls, and social banquets, nurse not
My spirit – I’m a forrester and breather
Of the steep mountain-tops where I love all
The eagle loves. (IV.i.219–224)

Ulric stands outside society – feudal “feasts in castle halls” “nurse not his spirit.” He aligns himself with the elemental forces and liminal spaces – forests and mountain tops – again, in a telling signal of his allegiance to the elemental conflict which defines *polemos*. Ulric proclaims his right to freedom with Manfred-like bravado.

¹² The theory of universal flux was attributed to Heraclitus by Plato in the fragmentary *Cratylus*. Plato, *Crat* 402a: “Heraclitus says [...] that all things move and nothing remains still, and he likens the universe to the current of a river, saying that you cannot step twice into the same river” (Sandywell 2011: 322). Heraclitus sees “the world is an interminable activity and process” (*ibid.*).

As doth the bolt, because it stood between us
And our true destination – but not idly.
As stranger I preserved him – and he *owed* me
His *life*: when due, I but resumed the debt. (V.i.452–463)

Ulric's disturbing self-justification hinges on a kind of "economy" of murder – having unwittingly "preserved" Stralenheim at the beginning, Stralenheim "owed [him] his life" – he "but resumed the debt" "when due."¹⁶ Still, this is little more than self-justification. Ulric's superhuman self-awareness is, in fact, made manifest by his simply "cut[ting] through" the "rock in our way" as "doth the bolt" – here Ulric works with the alacrity of lightning – fundamentally driven by the "urge for a decision." Crucially, as Clausewitz instructs us, "any move made in a state of tension will be of more importance, and will have more results, than it would have made in a state of equilibrium. In times of maximum tension this importance will rise to an infinite degree" (Clausewitz 1989: 222). Ulric's murder of Stralenheim is, of course, of crucial importance to the drama, and Clausewitz helps us not only to read Ulric, but also to see how Byron presents this particular historical peace not as "a state of equilibrium," but as "a state of tension," indeed of "maximum tension" – an ongoing state of war, in fact – and, as such, a situation in which Ulric assumes for himself a "heroic" role – that of a soldier, not a murderer.

Thus Clausewitz's war theory allows us a more methodical appraisal of the character of Ulric than we yet have – one that sees him driven not by the vengeful *agonistic* motivations of tragedy, nor working within the constraints of tragic morality, but, instead, driven by the demands, necessities, challenges and impulses of all-out warfare. Ulric is the epitome of a war-like state of being – he has courage, he is blessed with luck and he is able to navigate the confusing climate of war because it is his natural habitat. Moreover, he is also in possession of all information, that invaluable currency in this uncertain time of feeble peace, and he has a rational plan of action based on this information which he executes when chance lends him an opportunity to act. Ulric, then, deploys all three of Clausewitz's "paradoxical trinity of forces" of war to his advantage. From this military perspective, all other strategies in Byron's drama are flawed: Werner is hindered by a lingering sense of ethics, which to Ulric translates as simply lack of courage, while Stralenheim is on a par with Ulric when it comes to everything but the information that makes Ulric's "force of rationality" possible – not knowing that Ulric is Werner's son proves to be fatal for Stralenheim. From a Clausewitzian perspective, Ulric represents the only successful strategy for dealing with conflict, leading to the elimination of the enemy and a rightful restoration of the inheritance. In "the climate of war," made up of "danger, exertion, uncertainty, and chance," the Ulrics of the world rule. But it seems that this is also the case, in *Werner*, when peace is restored. In this way, Clausewitz allows us to also say something larger about Byron's drama – that it is an exploration of the fact that even in peace, the tensions of war still play themselves out, even to the point where "war will claim its own." For Byron, in *Werner* at least, the rules of peace and the rules of war seem to be no different – each is a game of violence, hatred, enmity, chance, probability,

¹⁶ As Pal-Lapinski observes, "if Stralenheim becomes indebted to Ulric for saving his life, by killing him, Ulric creates the perfect symbolic reciprocity between life and death, and cancels the debt, simultaneously extricating himself from a system of capitalistic exchange" (Pal-Lapinski 2011: 192).

In this long and general confusion, all the bonds of social life were broken up; – respect for the rights of their fellow men, the fear of the laws, purity of morals, honour, and religion, were laid aside, where might ruled supreme with iron sceptre. Under the shelter of anarchy and impunity, every vice flourished, and men became as wild as the country.¹⁷

One cannot but surmise that the Peace of Westphalia was one of utter exhaustion. The war machine, having gained momentum, continued by itself – war for war’s sake. As general Isolani remarks in Schiller’s *Wallenstein*: “der Krieg ernährt den Krieg,” war feeds itself, *bellum se ipsum alit* – not only in the original strategic meaning of feeding the armies off the spoils of the currently occupied territory, but also in the larger metaphorical sense of a war machine perpetuating itself *ad absurdum*. Byron’s *Werner* points directly to this universal destruction, degeneration and demoralization – the true inheritance of a protracted, universal war – while, and this is crucial, simultaneously opening up his tragic drama to a world beyond the moral constraints of dramatic justice. Abounding in complex resonances as to the nature of war as a phenomenon, and its effects on society, *Werner* is a step-change not only in Byron’s dramatic project but in his entire mature oeuvre, disclosing an unforgiving universe founded upon ubiquitous conflict. Even within supposed peacetime, Byron presents us with a canny play between states of order and randomness. Their clash fuels the dramatic action. The drama thus represents a historical *inter-bellum*, and by implication, perhaps, all times of peace, as a paradox – the Thirty Years’ War is here suspended only for the duration of a dramatic conflict that is itself inescapably part of that war, part of the violent past and the grounds for the impending violence of the future. Byron’s drama thus unfolds a complex ontology of perpetual, inescapable conflict.

Byron’s Bohemian rhapsody, set during the fragile interim of the Peace of Prague in 1635, recalls but also amplifies *Childe Harold’s* famous reading of the “one page” of history, dramatizing as it does one of the most devastating European relapses into barbarism and chaos – a turbulent era of history acutely relevant to the contemporary post-Napoleonic times of its creation. But in an even wider context, Byron’s drama epitomizes “the disproportionate part assigned to the play of probability and chance in determining the course of events” throughout human history (Clausewitz: 139), as well as laying bare the unsettling implications of a world of being and becoming that is, essentially, anarchy – implications that Nietzsche would so famously, and devastatingly, take up later in the nineteenth century.

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¹⁷ Schiller, <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/fs14w10.txt>. As Peter Limm concludes in his study of the Thirty Years’ War: “Once it was realised that the fighting could not be terminated by a single victory or a brilliant feat of arms, a general cynicism helped to create a depressing war psychology which perceived life as nasty, brutish and short” (Limm 1984: 93).

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"POHLEDĚT DO OHNIVÝCH OČÍ VÁLEČNÝCH"¹⁸: BYRONŮV WERNER

Resumé

Tento článek se zabývá moderní teorií války Byronova současníka Carla von Clausewitz, již rozvinul ve svém rozsáhlém nedokončeném díle *O válce*, ve vztahu k Byronovu německému dramatu *Werner* a nahlíží způsoby, jimiž nám tato teorie pomáhá porozumět nedoceněným finesám tohoto díla. Díky Clausewitzovi se nám vedle tradičních konotací jako gotická literatura, melodrama či *Sturm und Drang* otevírají nové rozměry Byronova dramatu, které lze s těmito tradičními styčnými body propojit v nových souvislostech. Tyto nové souvislosti se zcela zaměřují na fenomén války a jeho klíčovou roli v Byronově dramatu. Válka je zde nahlížena v bezprostředním historickém kontextu (a to jak v kontextu dramatické linie sedmnáctého století, tak Byronovy současnosti), ale také v ontologickém a v estetickém smyslu, což v posledku nastiňuje dopad na tradiční pojetí etiky nejen v rámci Byronova dramatu, ale i v širších souvislostech.

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¹⁸ My translation into Czech.