

Ballad: The Two Majors

In the ballad "The Two Majors" from "The Bab Ballads," an insightful look into military life and the complex relationships between officers and their men is presented with both humor and a touch of irony. Major La Guerre and Major Makredi Preper are depicted as the embodiment of the strict yet respected military officer. Both majors are fervent in their lack of praise and abundant in their rebukes, characteristics that paradoxically endear them to their soldiers. Their shared philosophy is that a soldier, worthy of the name, finds satisfaction not in commendation but in the stern discipline and critical assessment of their superiors.

The narrative unveils a camaraderie and rivalry between La Guerre and Makredi, who, despite their harsh demeanors, share common interests and tastes, particularly in their disdain for empty praise and their love for the rigor of military life. However, the authors cleverly introduce a twist into this tale of military discipline and brotherhood. Both majors find themselves captivated by the charms of Fillette, the vivandiere, or canteen girl. This mutual affection for Fillette introduces a rare discord into their otherwise harmonious existence, transforming their alliance into one of rivalry.

This rivalry over Fillette is portrayed with a blend of witticism and a delicate allusion to the complexities of human emotions and desires, even among the most disciplined of men. "The Two Majors" balances the glorification of martial valor and the stoic, disciplined life of a soldier with the inherently human qualities of desire, rivalry, and the pursuit of happiness. Despite their hardened exteriors and dedication to the austerity of military life, La Guerre and Makredi are, in the end, drawn into the quintessentially human drama of love and competition.

Woven into this ballad are subtle commentaries on military culture—valorizing the harshness of command and the masochistic pleasure found in reprimand, while also hinting at the underlying loneliness and unfulfilled desires that such a life can

engender. Through the tale of La Guerre and Makredi, the ballad explores the theme of unattainable ideals—be it in happiness, love, or the brutal glory of war—with a lighthearted tone that provides both entertainment and insight into the human condition within the military ethos.

