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Man Versus Monster: The Morality of Macbeth in the Contemporary Screen Adaptations by Roman Polanski and Justin Kurzel

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Dorian Świtata (University of Opole)

ORCID: 0009-0007-5236-2539

Abstract. One of William Shakespeare's most famous plays, *Macbeth* is both an adaptation of earlier sources and an inspiration for numerous adaptations. Its contemporary versions often move away from the historical context, instead placing greater emphasis on character psychology. In the original play, Macbeth is portrayed as an ambiguous figure, overwhelmed by fate and his own desires. Many adaptors decided to recontextualize his morality to reflect their own interpretations of Shakespeare's play. This article presents the sources behind Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and analyzes its two adaptations, examining how Macbeth was presented as a villain in Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* and as a victim in Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth*.

Key words: *Macbeth*, adaptation, morality, William Shakespeare, Roman Polanski, Justin Kurzel

1. SHAKESPEARE'S FICTIONALIZATION OF A HISTORICAL FIGURE

Even the greatest stories have a source of their own – they do not simply materialize out of thin air in the minds of their creators. Anja Hartl views historical accounts as both such sources and distinct forms of adaptation. She believes that “any historical representation ... results from a complex process of adaptation” (2023, 92) which attempts to capture what will eventually be lost in time. This process suggests that all of recorded history must be at least partially subjective, since to account for history is to share one's own perspective. Furthermore, a popular saying claims that history is written by the victors, but it does not convey history's nature. To simplify, one might say that history lies in the eyes of the beholder and depends on their morality – it cannot be dismissed as something singular or truly universal (Tutan 2017, 625). Paradoxically, this lack of universal truth in representations of history brings to light the universality of the themes that appear within it. Neither the events nor characters depend on the time and space of their story since their ideal truth simply does not exist anywhere outside their own present.

Although history is a fundamental aspect of *Macbeth*, the historical representation itself is not accurate. Jonathan Goldberg believes that Shakespeare “recombines and

simplifies” his source in order to serve a specific purpose, that is, to “offer a saintly king and his villainous murderer” (Goldberg 2005, 284). Aside from the dramatization of certain traits, Goldberg suggests that Shakespeare’s characters are based on either more or less than their counterparts in *Holinshed’s Chronicles*. The Shakespearean Macbeth bears resemblance to “[b]oth Duff and Donwald,” – another king and advisor turned rebel; while Duncan barely even resembles himself (Goldberg 2005, 285). In the case of Donwald, the parallels are evident – the loyal servant turned against his master (with strong support from his loving wife) (Holinshed 1808, 234). Although the similarities between Shakespeare’s Macbeth and Holinshed’s Duff are rather superficial, they are meant to emphasize the circular motion of the story – a seemingly endless loop (Goldberg 2005, 285). Since those changes drastically affect the actual source story, they might serve as a separation point between the two texts – Shakespeare’s play gains a hint of autonomy.

Another example of Shakespeare’s venture beyond the primary source (the chronicles section focused on king Macbeth) can be found in the story of king Kenneth. The crimes committed by the king were different from those of Macbeth, yet his manifestations of guilt bear a striking resemblance. He begins hearing voices that remind him of his deeds, which he tries to conceal, ultimately becoming consumed by guilt (Holinshed 1808, 247). Goldberg suggests that the similarities between Kenneth and Macbeth do not cease at visions but extend to the circumstances leading up to their deaths – “[t]he king succumbs to the lure and is killed” (Goldberg 2005, 286). However, this example is less apparent than the analogy in the theme. Shakespeare’s Macbeth struggles against manifestations of his conscience throughout the majority of the play – he is haunted by his own actions, just as king Kenneth was. Therefore, one may notice that the play consists of a multitude of sources contained within a singular text – various segments from Holinshed’s *Chronicles*. Shakespeare’s innovative and non-linear approach to Holinshed’s representation of king Macbeth “has attained an influential position in the cultural imaginary through which it has shaped popular perceptions of the historical figures and events, further destabilizing distinctions between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’” (Hartl 2023, 109).

However, *Holinshed’s Chronicles* was unlikely to be the only source of inspiration for the English playwright. William C. Carroll emphasizes that there were numerous chronicles retelling the same tales from Scottish history available at that time (2022, 11). Although the accounts varied, the core of the story stayed the same – Macbeth the thane killing king Duncan and seizing the crown for himself. Carroll notes that most of the known chronicles lack mentions of characters other than the two consecutive kings, which may explain why they are often dismissed in the discussion about the possible sources behind the play (2022, 11). He believes that Holinshed’s narrative was built upon earlier chronicles, and the author expanded them to provide a more complete and detailed account of the past (Carroll 2022, 13). Furthermore, Holinshed’s chronicle was published when Shakespeare was already alive – in 1577 – the predecessors were much older (1527 and earlier). Although several other versions were published afterwards, *Holinshed’s Chronicles* remains the closest to Shakespeare’s narrative. Therefore, it had been attributed the title of “Shakespeare’s main [and] direct source of his play” (Carroll 2022, 14).

As an adaptation, *Macbeth* is shaped by artistic liberty, as it maintains a relatively vague relationship with its sources. Nevertheless, it does succeed at being both a copy and original – retelling history while giving it new life. The adaptation of the historical

figure simultaneously dehumanizes and humanizes the Scottish King by offering insight into his thought processes. However, that insight is a purely imaginative reconstruction of his mindset. Ultimately, the character does not represent his real-life counterpart; rather, he becomes a separate entity who reshapes the broader perception of history. One question remains – why did Shakespeare use those particular texts to create his play? Much like the source material for his play – the inspiration behind Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is intertwined with the historical context. Robert Mighall highlights the connection between the creation of *Macbeth* and King James VI of Scotland, Shakespeare’s royal patron. The king believed himself to be a descendant of Banquo, “an eleventh-century Scottish thane ruled by king called Macbeth” (Mighall 2016, vii). Shakespeare likely built upon this belief, ultimately crafting a version of history in which the royal legacy was foretold by the three witches.

After a careful analysis of various sources, some more historical than others, Carroll concludes that “[t]he *Macbeth* narrative, over a period of time, was thus transformed from a typical Scottish account of secular ambition, rival factions, and weak or strong kings, to a narrative of supernatural intrusion, demonic prophecy, secret murder, and the disruption of lineage” (2022, 19). Since all accounts of history are subjective and inevitably unreliable one might argue that Macbeth’s story does not have an original – neither a historical nor literary one, an argument strengthened by the multiplicity of presumably sincere narratives. However, with Shakespeare the problem lays in the lack of any stable source at all. According to Carroll, the earliest available source of Shakespeare’s play is the Folio, which has most likely been revised multiple times by various people and not necessarily its original author (2022, 1). Carroll believes that the form in which the original play is available – or lack thereof – is in desperate need for adaptation in order to exist at all (2022, 5). Arthur Kinney deems the Folio to be “sufficiently corrupt that it denies total reintegration without the participation of actors, spectators or readers” (2001, 284). Hence, the original play seems to be the skeleton of a story rather than a complete narrative.

2. A THE VILLAIN – POLANSKI’S *MACBETH* AS A STORY OF BRUTAL AND SELFISH AMBITIONS

One of the major ways in which the aspect of mystery is maintained in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is the crimes being left to the imagination. The reader learns of them not by reading their descriptions, but rather from dialogues of the characters and Macbeth’s bloody visions. Polanski’s *Macbeth*, unlike the original play, emphasizes the portrayal of crimes as they are being committed – it shows rather than tells, conforming to the conventions of quality cinema. The themes align but the priorities are different, which may be partially due to the limitations of form mentioned earlier. As a work of literature, the play relies on language, as explained in the previous section, while the film must combine dialogues with visuals. Polanski generally “seeks novels and plays which have significant cinematic potential and in the process of adaptation tries to conceal their literary character” (Mazierska 2007, 141). He enlarges the setting, moving beyond what can be offered by the theater – aiming at immersive properties. The second scene of the original play is set in a camp near Forres, where King Duncan and his attendants are met by a bloodied messenger who recounts Macbeth’s heroic deeds, prompting the king to

grant him yet another title. The battle itself is the first omission of the play – it is described but never shown. Polanski's film sets the scene quite differently – it begins near the end of a battle during a larger rebellion, with fighting still ongoing and the last remaining rebels being killed brutally. The king arrives at the battleground and that is where he meets the bloody man who, now similarly to the play, tells him about the deeds of Macbeth. The dialogue alone is nearly identical, but the setting of the movie has more complexity.

Even the play's most significant crime takes place offstage – Macbeth leaves, the scene ends, and in the following scene he returns to declare that the deed has been done. Although the play does not avoid the portrayal of neither blood nor corpses, it avoids depicting the action. Interestingly, Polanski's adaptation was criticized for being overtly brutal and bloody, both qualities directly replicating the original play. Mazierska states that in each “discipline of art, everything is dependent on everything else” and in consequence even the smallest changes in the process of adapting one work into another inevitably affect the “whole essence” of the source (2007, 141). Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is subtle in its brutality, and it hides the atrocious deeds behind a veil of words, consequently refusing presentation. The film exposes the parts previously left to the imagination of the audience, defining what was originally ambiguous. Polanski strived to achieve a realistic portrayal of events even despite the supernatural elements, and his version was less dramatized, distilled of the theatricality. While the dialogue used in the film was directly taken from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* – it was also reduced for the sake of presenting the story in a more visual manner (Mazierska 2007, 141). Nevertheless, the reduction of the dialogues cannot be considered an omission. Polanski reduced only the parts that could be effectively replaced by action sequences. The elements requiring narration were left almost intact, most notably the soliloquies. The only difference was in the execution: most of the lines were delivered as internal monologues, inaudible to other characters but clear to the audience.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is neither fully objective nor entirely subjective, and the ambiguity regarding how to interpret a character's thought process may cause confusion. Ultimately, the interpretation lies in the hands of the reader, allowing the struggle to be seen as either a futile fight against destiny or a slow moral degradation influenced by a mere suggestion (Mazierska 2007, 149). Polanski decided on the latter, which added another layer of realism to the adaptation and made the narrative more fluid. Charles R. Forker emphasizes that the director had a tendency to combine contrasting visuals “to evoke the liminal spaces between consciousness and unconsciousness, clarity and obscurity, openness and hiddenness, innocence and guilt, future hopes and doom” (2014, 124). They not only assist *Macbeth*'s narrative as he loses his grip on reality slowly descending into madness, but also serve to create the eerie atmosphere that dominates the entire setting. Both in Shakespeare's play as well as in Polanski's film, the title character is introduced as a loyal man with a noble heart who obediently serves his king – at least up until a certain point: as Macbeth and Banquo return from a victorious battle, they encounter three witches who greet them with a prophecy: Macbeth shall become the new thane of Cawdor and “king hereafter,” whilst Banquo will be the father of kings (Shakespeare 2016, 1.3.53). Both initially distrust the mysterious women, but as soon as two messengers approach them with news of Macbeth being granted the foretold title, the witches gain credibility. The new thane of Cawdor realizes that he wants more – he starts to desire the crown.

One of Polanski's most notable divergences from the source material is a shift in character focus. The original work is rather short and offers a ready script, therefore adapting it onto a screen may seem straightforward – it merely requires setting the scenes and reading the lines. However, as stated above, the original is filled with omissions which would deprive the film of the desired fluidity. Thus, Polanski decided to focus mainly on Macbeth and to limit the screen time of other characters. The scenes from Shakespeare's play which focus on others are reduced to the bare minimum required for the story to remain coherent. Nevertheless, the whole aura of the story changes, and a play originally filled with mystery and uncertainty becomes a film that offers some answers and leaves less room for speculation. Macbeth in the movie is responsible for his own demise and the shift of focus offers new insight into both his thoughts and actions. As it is, the whole narrative is limited since it centers around a single character and his subjective vision (Mazierska 2007, 149). Macbeth becomes “the medium through which we see the external events” and everything that happens in the film is related to his perception of it (Mazierska 2007, 149).

Aside from being the narrator of his own story, Macbeth seems to try to direct it as well – partially unbeknownst to him. Here the crucial role is played by the witches who function as the catalyst. In Shakespeare's play, the witches meet at “an open place” amidst “thunder and lightning” and set the scene by announcing their intention to meet Macbeth, then leave, so that the story may begin (Shakespeare 2016, 1.1.1-4). In Polanski's adaptation the ambiguous “open place” becomes a beach slowly getting covered in a thick fog; “a kind of *materia prima* from which emerges and to which it eventually returns” (Mazierska 2007, 88; original emphasis). Here the witches also set the narrative into motion. However, their words are now supplemented with actions – they perform a ritual which seems to foreshadow misdeeds that are yet to happen. Unlike the original play, the film attempts to present the witches as realistic than supernatural “by means of meticulous reconstruction of medieval customs and imagery” (Mazierska 2007, 151). Polanski's witches are “unquestionably human,” and their prophetic words gain meaning only in the minds of the receivers – they persuade Macbeth to believe in his glorious purpose and leave him to his own devices (Goy-Blanquet 2014, 29). Therefore, in the film, Macbeth's downfall is not caused by higher powers, but rather by his own superstitious beliefs and deeply rooted ambition he desperately tries to tame. According to Dominique Goy-Blanquet, “Polanski's Macbeth is an introspective, brooding procrastinator” who succumbed to his inner desires only after being pushed into action by his wife (2014, 29). Similarly, the spirits and visions that appear throughout the story are projections of Macbeth's guilt and anxiety.

The main character falls into a spiral, both internally, through the aforementioned projections, and externally, through his actions (using murder to solve his problems). He circles between contrasting emotions trying to make sense of the prophecy and ultimately chooses to take matters into his own hands. The witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* seem to control the protagonist, they induce and reinforce his “ambitious thoughts” to condemn the flaws which are hidden behind masks of righteousness (Eagleton 1986, 2). Rather than manipulative, Polanski's witches are portrayed as passive informants – Macbeth's ambition drives the interpretation and action. In this version, the tendency for rash decisions and achieving goals through acts of violence is in no way related to fate, and the film offers no duality of interpretation – the character is the victim of his own selfishness. Mazierska believes that “Polanski opts for an absurdist *Macbeth* by

portraying history not as a road towards a better future, but as a vicious cycle of crimes and miseries” through the pairing of positive moments with negative ones and repeating that sequence several times (2007, 149). The most prominent example would be the crowning of the new king after the previous one is murdered – “first Duncan, then Macbeth” (Mazierska 2007, 149). However, it is once again the witches who provide a frame for the cycle of violence and treachery. Warren Chernaik notes that “Polanski begins and ends his film with the witches, first in a dumbshow on a bare windswept beach and, at the end, with Donalbain making another visit to the witches’ cave,” which suggests that the story might repeat itself, at least once more (2014, 39). Ambition seems contagious and the witches help the characters in justifying their brutality with words of prophecy.

3. THE VICTIM – KURZEL’S *MACBETH* AS A STORY OF SLOW MORAL DEGRADATION

Like Polanski, Justin Kurzel emphasizes action over dialogue; however, his overall approach differs significantly. Notably, the screenplay was not written by Kurzel himself. Nevertheless, it does affect both the process and the result of the adaptation at hand. The screenplay was coauthored by actor, director and writer Todd Louiso, as well as Jacob Koskoff and Michael Lesslie two writers and producers. They blended Shakespeare’s original text with new material tailored to align with the filmmakers’ unique vision. According to Maryam Soltan Beyad and Mohammad Reza Hassanzadeh Javanian Kurzel’s adaptation from 2015 “seeks to retain the Shakespearean air while addressing its contemporary issues” (2018, 5). This attempt at a faithful approach is showcased mainly by the script, which contains a variety of direct quotations from the source, while the setting seems to focus on representing the novelties in Kurzel’s vision. Louiso, Koskoff and Lesslie provide an elegant framework for the entirety of the film – the script underlines the adaptation’s relation to the play. In that sense, one might say that Kurzel’s version is a less direct adaptation, considering how significantly it shifts the focus. Ultimately, it is no longer a story about ambition, at least not at its core. Kurzel and the writers’ introduction of certain elements transformed the story to revolve around the idea of succession. Yet, the repetitiveness of themes that lead to inevitable failure – the cycle of violence and treachery – remains.

The first, and probably most relevant, addition to the story is the expansion of its opening scene. In Polanski’s *Macbeth*, in accordance with the original play, everything starts with the three witches and their prophecy. Kurzel’s adaptation begins with a funeral – the Macbeths are mourning the loss of their only child, their son, the successor. Gemma Miller states that this change of the beginning serves to exemplify “the most fundamental ideological difference between the two films” (2016, 53). While the prophecy still fuels the progression of plot, the cycle is now represented by a different set of imagery – the motif of the child. Although it is present to some extent in the original text, as succession is attributed there to Banquo, Miller believes that “the representation of the child in Kurzel’s *Macbeth* is symptomatic of a major cultural shift in attitudes towards childhood” and its amplification allowed the story to gain more relevancy for the contemporary audience (2016, 53).

Originally the witches mention succession in their prophecy, telling Banquo “[t]hou shalt get kings, though thou be none” which gains more significance after a while – when

Fleance is introduced (Shakespeare 2016, 1.3.70). While it is not the main focus of the play, the prophecy impacts Macbeth's mindset, nonetheless. He becomes increasingly obsessed with the possibility of Banquo securing the throne for his descendants, which ultimately drives him to send assassins after those he saw as his greatest threats – Banquo and his son Fleance. Kurzel decides to accentuate this anxiety and elevate it to the status of the leading theme of his adaptation. Victoria Bladen suggests that it is partially the result of building upon the standard established by the preceding cinematic renditions of the story (2017, 129). Similarly, the motif of children reemerges after the killing of Banquo, when Macbeth returns to the witches and is granted another three prophecies. Two of them, the ones concerned with his future, are delivered by visions of a bloody child and a crowned child.

The opening scene of Kurzel's film introduces the idea of a connection between the Macbeths and "the death of children" (Bladen 2017, 130). Although it initially seems far from intentional, eventually the characters begin to embrace this link and use it to their advantage. The scenes that mark these shifts in the Macbeths depict children being set on fire; first their own son at the funeral pyre, then the dead soldiers (including his son-like figure) after the opening battle and finally at the fiery execution of the young Macduffs and their mother – the three defining stages of Macbeth's character degradation and the loss of his humanity. The last of the three scenes "emphasises Macbeth as a killer" since the children were alive when the fire was lit (Bladen 2017, 133). In the play, Macbeth states:

To crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and done: the castle of Macduff I will surprise; seize upon Fife; give to the edge o'th'sword his wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls that trace him in his line. No boasting like a fool; this deed I'll do before this purpose cool. (Shakespeare 2016, 4.1.169-175)

While the excerpt seems to suggest that he will take action himself, he ends up sending assassins instead. Kurzel reiterated that scene making Macbeth both the mastermind and the perpetrator – other characters help him catch Macduff's wife and children, but it is him who lights the fire. The play's underlying child motif becomes a catalyst for this cinematic depiction of Macbeth's cruelty. According to Russ McDonald, Shakespeare's play has a "reiterative poetic texture" which is modified by Kurzel and his visualizations of this texture – adjusted to serve the new medium (2010, 44).

Another significant change in Kurzel's vision lies at the core of the story – the murder of king Duncan. As discussed above, Polanski depicted the non-depicted by having the murder happen on screen rather than off-stage like in the original play, but he also supplemented it with a scene of Duncan waking up and recognizing Macbeth before the deed is done. In Carroll's words "Kurzel follows this tradition," since it accentuates the guilt that will eventually begin consuming Macbeth (2022, 74). However, the situation in the 2015 adaptation is still more complex, as there is another witness at the scene – Malcolm, King Duncan's son, who is next in line for the throne but flees the country when confronted with treason. In the play, as well as in Polanski's adaptation (as this dialogue was not modified), when Macduff tells him "[y]our royal father's murder'd," he seems shocked and reacts with a simple question "[o], by whom?" (Shakespeare 2016, 2.3.117-118). The reaction in the original is ambiguous, leaving the audience to speculate what emotions the character expressed. In contrast, Polanski directs

this response in a very precise and intense way. His Malcolm sound almost pathetic, which emphasizes his fear and vulnerability. The character flees the country soon after, partly to avoid suspicion, but more likely due to sheer terror at the possibility of becoming the next victim of the unidentified traitor. Therefore, Kurzel's adaptive choice to place him at the murder scene recontextualizes both the characters of Malcolm as well as Macbeth. While one may assume that Malcolm had his suspicions in the earlier versions of the story, he had no certainty, and it justified his anxiety. Kurzel eliminates any sense of justification, portraying Malcolm as a coward who makes a fully conscious decision to avoid potential danger.

The change in Macbeth's character, lies within his attitude. Preceding the killing of Duncan in the play, Macbeth recites his famous soliloquy to express his doubts, ambitions and the necessity for murder. However, he does not speak immediately afterward; instead, he reappears only after the deed is done, speaking to his wife. Whatever might have been said during the gap between scenes remains unknown. Kurzel introduces a supplement for that gap to showcase the duality of Macbeth – after the murder he begins the shift from a traumatized man to a monster, which still reflects his past trauma. The montage of flashbacks haunting the character after the murder serves as a visualization of his dissociative state. Once Malcolm enters the scene, Macbeth begins to speak without acknowledging the newly arrived – he speaks through Malcolm, not to him. This scene reminds the audience about Macbeth's emotional fragility; he is a man haunted by grief, and that grief is which pushes him over the edge. In this version, his driving force is no longer ambition, at least not his own. Macbeth attitude towards the prophecy is presented as passive, he takes action only when pushed to it – the fulfilment of the prophecy becomes an inevitable must rather than a want. This interpretation stands in contrast to Polanski's film, where Macbeth actively and quite eagerly participates in attaining what was foretold. Polanski's witches did not directly control the narrative; they planted the seed of ambition and observed the outcome without intervention.

Kurzel combines realism with the supernatural to create a specific atmosphere which permeates the narrative. The witches' presence is marked by more than just their physical manifestations but also by a specific musical theme “in a minor key and slightly discordant” – which once again emphasizes their control over the story (Bladen 2017, 134). The general concept mirrors the original play, where characters seem relatively independent, but the reappearances of the witches suggest an underlying inevitability behind all the events. Their presence taunts the Macbeths and reinforces the words of the prophecy so that they may act accordingly. Kurzel adds fuel to the fire by incorporating mockery into the witches' taunts. Miller notes that already during the opening scene “they are not alone: a baby lies sleeping in the arms of one of them, as though mocking the loss of the mourners” (2016, 62). This depiction of the witches in the presence of young children prevails throughout the entirety of the movie, serving as a reminder of what the Macbeths lost.

Lady Macbeth responds with a longing for power as if it would have the power to overshadow the events of the past and replace grief with glory. She, partially unconsciously, aids the witches in achieving their desired outcome – she pushes Macbeth to take action. While Polanski emphasized ambition as the driving force, Kurzel explores the complexity of the main characters and gives their decisions more context. He manages to simultaneously humanize and dehumanize Macbeth especially (similarly to what Shakespeare did to the historical inspiration for the character), since as monstrous

as his deeds may be, they are direct reflections of his past trauma (Bladen 2017, 132). The factor that differentiates this duality from Shakespeare's rendition is the newly added context of the trauma – the loss and grief.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Shakespeare's original play is based on an incomplete chapter of history. The Scottish King has no personality aside from his ambition and his story seems perfectly linear. Prophecy or not, he gained power through murdering all those who obstructed his path to the throne. Shakespeare introduced the element of fate guiding Macbeth along the way, but nevertheless, the decisions seem to belong to the character. The ambiguity of the play makes it impossible to adapt it faithfully, since there is no certainty as to what would even be considered faithful. It might be considered a curse, but also a blessing – the interpretative potential is almost endless. Especially, if one considers the additional detachment from time and space defined by the opening sequence:

This is not so much a direct introduction to the plot as a way to set an atmospheric mood and introduce a timeless, elemental world beyond ordinary reality. It is also a way for the playwright to appeal to the spectator's internal, poetic eye and propensity to visualize the scene mentality, *de facto* placing the plot under the abstract aegis of his/her imagination by means of an anticipatory, suggestive process. The locale is, moreover, very vaguely defined – a 'blasted heath' (1.3.75), a desolate no man's land, which leaves the filmmaker a world of possibilities. (Anne-Marie Costantini-Cornède 2014, original emphasis, 232)

Shakespeare shifts the focus of the story from relating history to a tale of morality, offering a warning for those who may wish to fly too close to the sun. Macbeth, as a character, represents that core through his actions and reactions. His fate seems sealed, yet he is given free will, which he dismisses at the prospect of power.

Polanski's *Macbeth* builds upon that theme – the prophecy is turned into a suggestion that fuels the main character's vanity and greed. He is a confident man, who believes he deserves all the power that he is able to attain. Kurzel introduces more novelty to the story (mainly with the child imagery) yet still manages to capture its original spirit – the prevailing conflict between free will and fate, the predictability and repetitiveness of human nature, and the descent into madness after violating laws of morality – supplemented with amplified anxieties as a result of past trauma. The changes accentuate relevant themes and adjust the story to the contemporary context (Miller 2016, 52). The setting, however, remains unchanged. The action takes place in Scotland of the 11th century just as it did in the original play. Although Polanski accentuates different themes his approach is generally the same – retelling the story from a just slightly different perspective. Both depictions affected the core conflict between fate and free will, challenging the original duality. Nevertheless, neither adaptation is fully dedicated to the side of Macbeth's struggle it chose to accentuate – he remains conflicted in both renditions. The overall story is more defined yet retains some of the original ambiguity.

As far as the prophecy is concerned, Polanski does ultimately reduce the "high personal tragedy to the level of political fatalism grounded in a cynical contempt for

human aspiration,” with the blame being more on the side of the Macbeths and their ambitions, rather than the prophecy (Forster 2012, 147). Contrastingly, Kurzel aims to showcase both the helplessness of the Macbeths in the face of fate and the slow degradation of their morality in the face of personal tragedies. Bladen believes that this version “opens up new perspectives on the play, inviting us to see new facets of the flawed couple and the pain that lies at the core of their violence” (2016, 137). One might observe that in both adaptations the main characters gain more depth and context, while the story remains faithful to the source. Macbeth as an extremely conflicted king of Scotland – the person he originally was and partially remains in the aforementioned contemporary perspectives. Although the division into the categories of the villain and the victim is superficial, it does underline the shift of focus in the portrayals of Macbeth’s morality.

Furthermore, the possibility for such divisions exemplifies the adaptive tendencies for making more defined choices when it comes to originally ambiguous characters. The source becomes adjustable to the will and reality of the adaptor and thus he or she becomes the co-author of the narrative. The example of *Macbeth* was chosen as one of the most frequently re-adapted and re-contextualized works of literature. It offers a large scope of adaptive possibilities that may be analyzed endlessly from a variety of angles. Furthermore, it serves as a reference point for further, and broader, discussions in regards to notions of authorship, originality, appropriation, and character presentation. Despite the article centering on only two of its reinterpretations, the presented arguments may be applied to a far larger variety of adaptations. Both of the discussed adaptors offer their own perspective on the play and its core themes. Polanski introduces a Macbeth vain and blinded by prophetic visions that ultimately lead him to his demise. Kurzel explores a motif which does not appear in the original text - trauma. Ultimately, his Macbeth seems to follow the prophecy in hopes for a better tomorrow rather than power or glory. Both visions are dissimilar, yet they both explore the idea of the prophecy as the leading corrupter of morality.

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AUTHOR'S BIO: Dorian Świtała holds a degree in English Philology from the University of Opole. His research focuses on contemporary approaches to literary classics, particularly adaptation techniques and interpretative choices in modern retellings. In his work, he explores how new readings of canonical texts reflect shifting cultural and critical perspectives.

E-MAIL: dorianswitala@gmail.com