

## Christian Images in Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth* (2015)

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### Abstract

Justin Kurzel's film, *Macbeth* (2015) demonstrates a large number of Christian symbols and images. This comparative study seeks to explore the relation between the Protestantism discourse of the Elizabethan era, and the religious visualizations and images used in Kurzel's movie including the Cross, paintings, costumes and mise-en-scene. By applying Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation to exploring the film, the meaning of these images can be found through contextualization. How Kurzel creates a new way to visualize the main socio-historical ideas of the original text will be examined. Stam's model of intertextual dialogism helps a better understanding of how these images relate to the original setting. While Kurzel features an authentic medieval Scottish setting, he employs new visual ways to convey the socio-cultural context of the Shakespearean *Macbeth*. Concerning *Macbeth* (2015), it could be argued that there are still similar examples of the justification of violence and war in our contemporary era. By voicing the marginalized Macbeths, Justin Kurzel relates to similar unjust conditions in the contemporary time and place.

### Keywords

Socio-cultural Context; Protestantism; Dominant Discourse; Subversion, Intertextual Dialogism.

### 1. Introduction

Adaptation is a branch of comparative literature due to the point that it is based on a primary source. In a digital and screen era, images are used to decode and show a message by giving a new form to a source story, which is understandable to the modern audience. In the time of postmodernism, focusing on the cracks in ideological façade that a text offers, allows us to hear the socially marginalized and expose cultural machinery responsible for their marginalization and

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exclusion. Deconstruction reveals the ideology hidden in a performance or work of art. The political goals within a text may refer to the context of time and place.

Justin Kurzel is an Australian director and screenwriter, with films such as *Blue Tongue* (2004), *Snowtown* (2011), and *Macbeth* (2015), to name a few. His movie, *Snowtown* won the AACTA Award in Best Direction and his *Macbeth* was selected to compete for the Palm d'Or at Cannes Film Festival. His *Macbeth* is an authentic expression of the Scottish history. In an interview with online magazine *The List*, Kurzel reveals that in his filmmaking, the film crew looked for the truth behind the story of Macbeth (Clement 55). Kurzel grounds his film in dirt, inadequate housing and in the form of Skye to create a sense of Macbeth's medieval homeland. In the heritage industry, place and history shapes culture, and certain authors and artists are understood in relation to a particular landscape at a particular time. Kurzel's attempt to stay close to the context of the source text is evident in his use of historical buildings such as castles, as well as sword fighting, horse riding, abiding in tents and medieval costumes. Justin Kurzel's creative interpretation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* stays true to the essence of the original story, in order to feel both contemporary and original.

Filmic works of art incorporate materials from other artistic works and artists. This process of assemblage and collage is intertextual. These films draw from an assortment of antecedents and combining images, plot points, characters, motifs, and tropes from multiple books, stories, plays, poems, films, other works of art and historical events (Meikle 4). As a composite language in virtue, cinema is open to all cultural forms such as painting, poetry, music, sculpture and architecture. It uses these forms symbolically and as signifiers, or it is influenced by their procedures. When reading a text, a director has to fill in the gaps created by the virtual and symbolic meaning of the words called '*paradigmatic indeterminacies*' by the power of imagination. In a film, an imaginative reconstruction is conducted through images and sound, and there are '*inevitable supplements*' not necessarily found in the original text (Stam 56-61).

The objective of this paper is to find and analyse the transformations applied to the source text through the filmic production according to intertextual dialogism. By contextualizing *Macbeth* (2015), the social, cultural, and historical forces which have shaped the movie adaptation are examined. The present research is based on Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation and Robert Stam's model of intertextual dialogism. Since Justin Kurzel has remained faithful to the Shakespearean context of time, his film will be read according to the original text's cultural, social, historical and political context. In addition, the medium

specificity of Kurzel's cinematic adaptation will be examined in terms of visualization, camera angle, costumes, mise-en-scene, etc.

Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* explores adaptations in various media. She argues that in examining a film adaptation, the social and cultural context is important to better understand the film. The dominant discourses within a society designate how meaning is created and understood, and how it conditions the interpretation. Robert Stam's model of intertextual dialogism refers to infinite and open-ended possibilities generated by all discursive practices of culture and the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which an artistic text is situated. An adaptation can thus insert its source text into a broader intertextual dialogism. Robert Stam regards film adaptations as '*readings*' and as part of a continuing dialogical process. As a result, all texts are tissues of conscious or unconscious quotations, confluences and inversions of other texts (Stam 60).

One of the earliest religious writings in history, *Demonology*, was written by King James I. King James. Written in the language of its day, it was published in 1597. This book sought to prove the existence and condemnation of witchcraft to other Christians, through biblical teachings; with the citation of biblical scripture throughout the text. Since Shakespeare had studied this book, there are many intertextual traces in his works in relation to King James' book. Furthermore, Marion Gibson and Jo Ann Ezra have written a critical reference work called *Shakespeare's Demonology: A Dictionary*, which examines all aspects of magic; good and evil across Shakespeare's works. It is a representation of fairies, witches, ghosts, devils and spirits. More recently, Jennifer Perez Lopez has made a comprehensive research on the Elizabethan ideas and their Christian implications in relation to the Shakespearean play *Macbeth*.

The significance of this research paper is relating the sense of alienation by the Macbeths and the Elizabethan dominant discourses of eligibility in a political hierarchical system of monarchy. In addition, the relation between Justin Kurzel's interpretations of the Shakespearean play and the justified discriminations against the contemporary human beings, is added to the many interpretations depicted in *Macbeth* film. We have added that the contemporary human beings, who still suffer from war and physical violence, experience unfulfilled goals in life, despite their best efforts, due to religiously justified discriminations.

## **2. Literature Review**

In *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Linda Hutcheon views that an adaptation is a derivation without being secondary or inferior which has its own palimpsestic (14-23). She addresses major questions such as who, why, what, when, where and

how (91). Deborah Cartmell examines three categories of cinematic adaptations. Transposition relocates source texts in cultural, geographical and temporal terms. By commentary, an adaptation comments on politics of source texts. An analogue is a type of adaptation not necessarily related to the '*original*' (Cartmell and Whelehan 24). Sarah Hatchuel observes the four angles of editing techniques used by film directors: editing as a producer of meaning, editing as an ordering process of the story and narrative, editing as a producer of different narrative rhythms and finally editing as process of facilitating alternate points of view (38).

In *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2006), Julie Sanders asserts that an adaptation of the classics for television or cinema may be an attempt to make texts '*relevant*' or easily comprehensible to new audience and readership by means of proximation and updating and she mentions Shakespeare in particular (19-20). She contends that appropriation affects a journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain. While adaptations signal a relationship with the informing source text or original, appropriated texts are not always as clearly signalled or acknowledged (26). Maurice Hindle suggests that the appetites of the popular cinema audience have persuaded filmmakers to adapt the story of Shakespeare play for the big screen (52). Laura Mulvey's observes that there are signs and signifiers of auteur identity and of a director's signature on each of his films. By the twenty-first century, adaptation studies began to expand and move beyond the tendency to applaud the author's superior literary knowledge to that of the filmmaker (Cartmell 7).

Since the early 1990s, adaptations have negotiated the past/present divide by re-creating the source text, its author, the historical context and a series of intertexts have provided a '*dialogue*' between the literary text and its interpreters (Aragay 23). Robert Stam regards film adaptations as '*readings*' and as part of a continuing dialogical process. This opinion is similar to Gerard Genett's '*hyper-textuality*', for instance the numerous versions of Hamlet are hyper-textual elaborations, prompted by the same hypo-text i.e. Shakespeare's play (Cartmell and Whelehan 3). Gary Bortolotti and Hutcheon assert that rematerializing adaptation theory would recast Murray's adaptation industry in an attempt to reach a '*homology between biological and cultural adaptation*' (Meikle 175). Kyle Meikle states that by expanding the category of source texts, an inter-material model of adaptation complements the intertextual and inter-medial models already at play in the field of adaptation study (179).

A. C. Bradley contends that Shakespearean tragedy is a conflict within the hero, who is a man divided against himself. Tragedies of Shakespeare's and his contemporaries have been read in the light of Marx's Hegelianism as embodying

contradictions and collapse of feudalism and bourgeois revolution of the seventeenth century (McEachern 3). Diane E. Henderson asserts that in the aftermath of many recent horrors, tragedy has compensated by giving shape and meaning to suffering. For instance, new stories have been created for commercial broadcast so that they ended with rays of hope. Also in troubling invocations of competing religions, tragedy has been utilized to justify 'others' death (2).

Stephen M. Buhler asserts that the cultural significance invested in Shakespeare has lent authorization for transgression allowing not to follow cultural norms, especially in speaking nonsense and plain truth to his social better. Shakespeare's plays themselves permit such '*misbehaviour*' with complicating the same generic boundaries such as tragedy with comedy (126). In his critical writings of Hamlet, Cedric Watts does not offer solutions for problems elaborated within the play. Instead he contends the Shakespearean plays tended to "solicit and frustrate explanations." However, he talks about the pleasures of seeking the never-surrendering answers, as it is a simultaneous search of life (10).

Adaptation scholars such as Robert B. Ray, Robert Stam and Thomas Leitch assert that adaptation studies have been seeking similarities and contrasts in book-film pairings. This comparative case-study of print and screen versions has resulted in a marginalized discipline (Murray 4). Simone Murray claims that the reformulation of adaptation theory to account for industrial dimensions of adaptation in contemporary media cultures would reconnect the field to cognate areas in cultural analysis, hybridizing its methodology and adding theoretical nuance to its governing models (14). Kamilla Elliott suggests that hybrid methodologies can help us gradually move beyond current impasses and test and challenge our theoretical beliefs in order to develop new concepts, ideas, theories and methodologies through which to study adaptations (Elliott 576-93).

Thomas Leitch talks about fallacies that have kept adaptation theory from fulfilling its analytical promise. To name one is that "differences between literary and cinematic texts are rooted in essential properties of their respective media" (147-69). Leitch further argues that adaptation studies will get out of marginalization by Textual Studies, a discipline incorporating adaptation studies, cinema studies and literary studies at the centre of inter-textuality (170-71). Critics like Alan Sinfield, Jonathan Dollimore and Catherine Belsey are alert to the possibilities of making Shakespeare meaningful in the context of contemporary politics and culture. Cultural materialists have privileged power relations within contemporary society for interpreting texts (Brannigan 9).

William Elton claims that Shakespeare's drama provided an "appropriate conflict structure: a dialectic of ironies and ambivalences, avoiding in its complex



movement and multi-voiced dialogue the simplifications of direct statement and reductive resolutions" (Platt 3). In her examination of Shakespeare's dark comedy *Measure for Measure*, Barbara Everett asserts that this play has moral and metaphysical explanations for the stated problems and seems strange and bewildering to the readers and audiences (1). Philip Brockbank consents that theatrical autobiographies form an enjoyable sub-section of literature. The performers' private lives, the reason why they take a role and how they prepare themselves for it, offer enlightenment about the interpretive process from those who perform the plays (Wells 191).

### **3. Elizabethan Dominant Discourses**

Justin Kurzel's film adaptation contains abundant imagery innovations and creative changes. Nevertheless, the director has remained close to the original play's context of time and place. It is thus necessary to familiarize oneself with the discourses, which were dominant at the Shakespearean time and place. This clarifies the reason behind the existence of many visual changes employed in the film. The portrayal of the Elizabethan cultural and religious practices helps a better understanding of the omnipresent Christian symbols in the movie. During the Elizabethan era, the mind-set of people was controlled by certain dominant discourses. A brief historical account of the religious ideology of that time is necessary for the explanation of why Justin Kurzel has employed so many symbolic religious images. These ideologies have influenced and shaped the source text, its audience; and consequently the recent film adaptation.

#### **3.1. The Religious and Political History of the Elizabethan Era**

Christianity in the Elizabethan period was emerging out of a violent upheaval caused mostly by two influential figures: Martin Luther and Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII. Protesting Church practices, Luther nailed his famed Ninety-five Theses to a Chapel Door in Wittenberg, Germany, beginning a movement that eventually gave rise to Protestantism. Henry VIII initially denounced Luther and wrote a tract against him. In 1521, the pope named Henry, the Defender of the Faith. However, in 1527, Henry VIII began to suspect that the reason he was unable to achieve a male heir was that his wife was a widow to his brother. As a result, Henry petitioned the pope to annul the marriage. When the pope refused, Henry took matters into his own hands. In 1532, English churchmen were required to '*cede legislative and administrative control to the king*' (Perez Lopez 28). Two years later, Henry VIII was named the head of what has been since known as the Church of England and the state began to dissolve English monasteries and acquire their lands and properties.

In 1538, English churches were required to replace their Latin Bibles with English Bibles. Until 1549, most of the upheaval had been primarily political. Later, Edward the Sixth, son and successor to Henry VIII, decreed a Protestant liturgy which was laid out in *The Book of Common Prayer*. The private conscience was a major change that had risen out of Henry's notable transformations. "The new faith encouraged everyone to take responsibility for his or her own spiritual health, without mediation" by priests, bishops, or the pope (Perez Lopez 29). Because the Bibles were published in English, the Word of God was more accessible to everyone. It was also important that everyone took personal responsibility in understanding and following it. In the following years, monarchy changed from Edward's Protestantism to Mary's Catholicism, and back to Elizabeth's Protestantism.

Another important change which arose as a result of this political and religious upheaval was the tendency to interpret Biblical stories according to political lines of thought. The church and state were one, hence "the monarch was depicted as God's deputy on earth" (Perez Lopez 10). The new approved doctrines of the Church of England were called *Homilie*, which emphasized social order and political authority as much as religion. Foundational Biblical narratives like the fall of Lucifer were interpreted to convey the consequences of defying God as well as God's deputy. In *Macbeth*, the protagonist's first sin and crime is murdering God's appointed king and Macbeth is driven from power by God's next chosen king, Malcolm.

A Christian world-view entails the belief that God created the world and wrote the truth of His existence and His law on the hearts of all human persons: "For when the Gentiles which have not the Law, do by nature the thing contained in the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts accusing one another, or excusing" (Romans 2:14). All humanity thus spring from the mind and love of God, and all humans are gifted with an innate Godly conscience. Because of free will, the gifts of God's mercy and love must be willingly accepted by the individual, and they cannot be forced upon him. Using the ability to choose, some choose to reject God and therefore bring about their own damnation. This choice in Christian drama is the site of tragic action (Perez Lopez 12).

### **3.2. Discourse of Protestantism in *Macbeth***

Shakespeare's works still speak to our lives today, and the foundational theology through which he wrote remains pertinent: "More needs she the divine than the physician" (Act 5, Scene 1, Line 73). Shakespeare's works are known to contain "the Bible references and tropes, and possibly even didactic morals" (Perez Lopez 1). Just as any reader today, Shakespeare's audience struggled through

the heights and depths of the human condition. The answers they sought to the problems facing them came from Christian doctrines and theology.

A powerful force driving the actions of the film, *Macbeth* (2015), is the discourse of Christianity, or Protestantism to be more precise. Religious cause has justified acts of violence throughout the history of mankind. There are many dominant Christian symbols in the film such as the presence of a church, the cross and the appearance of Lady Macbeth in the chapel in distress, as if saying her prayers. In such discourse, violence and war is legitimized by the claim to religious righteousness.

In Kurzel's movie, the image of the cross is seen everywhere, on the scarf and the people's clothing in the King's court, engraved on his crown, and in the decoration of the walls and doors in many scenes. When Duncan promotes Macbeth to Thane of Cawdor, a scarf around his neck bears the image of a cross. Authorized Duncan stands tall and looks down upon Macbeth (scene 17:29). In a scene, we see buried soldiers from the war, and over each grave, a cross is located (scene 18:25). In this scene, Kurzel shows justification of war by powerful people. The dominant discourse shows up everywhere. The abundance of images of the cross signifies King Duncan's authorization in an Elizabethan era and religious justification and righteousness for his political position. It also conveys that an escape from this framework of power is difficult, or even impossible. Even if one proves his braveness and eligibility, a warrior may never be King, according to the political framework (Kurzel 2015).

The attempt of the Macbeths to cross the political boundaries of the hierarchical system is doomed to failure, even if they succeed temporarily. Therefore, the Macbeths who attempt to break the hierarchical system by subverting the law of God, will be pushed back to their place, where they belong. The dominant discourse turns the events back and in agreement with itself. On one side of the chapel where Lady Macbeth summons dark forces, we see a large cross carved in the wall so that sunlight enters the space inside (scene 18:35). Lady Macbeth calls "the evil spirits" in the chapel, which is a place for prayers to God. This indicates that she attempts to subvert and reverse the dominant religious discourse, which limits her ambitions. She wills to go against the dominant system by reversing the path to God and by trafficking with the demons and her dark side. Her gesture is an objection to the system of kingdom which only allows for the son of the King to substitute his position (scene 20:14).

Again, in the celebration scene for Macbeth's promotion to Thane of Cawdor, King Duncan wears the scarf with an image of the cross on it and there are many powerless priests who confirm King Duncan's decrees. When Macbeth is killed in his final battle, there is an image of his sword half way into the ground and



even the handle of the sword resembles the sign of a cross. This signifies his final sentence and punishment for attempting to subvert the powerful system of kingdom. Afterwards we see Malcom's sword, and its handle resembles the sign of the cross as well, signifying a justification for him succeeding the Kingdom. There is a cross engraved on the crown which he wears on his head, and the chamber in which he resides has gates decorated with cross sculptures (scene 1:45:49).

During the Elizabethan era, the dominant discourse necessitated and rationalized the eligibility of the King by God's authorization and this was accepted by everyone. Hence they participated in the construction and persistence of such discourse. Crossing the boundaries of the monarch hierarchy was considered impossible even if there were more eligible volunteers available for sovereignty. The otherness of the Macbeths, and their feeling of alienation and not belonging to the political hierarchy and the system of monarchy, is boosted by the acting of French actress, Marion Cotillard as Lady Macbeth and the Irish actor, Michael Fassbender as Macbeth. They both speak with foreign accents (Sheppard 2).

#### **4. Christian Ideology**

The context, within which the play of *Macbeth* was created, reveals the Christian belief and practices of the people of that time. This Christian ideology is enriched with biblical stories, such as temptation and fall, and dark forces of Satan. The tale of the original sin helps a better understanding of the tale of *Macbeth* and the use of Christian cinematic images by Justin Kurzel. By referring to the biblical motif of temptation and fall, Kurzel portrays the fall of humanity. Justin Kurzel's symbolic use of children, especially at the ending sequence, relates to the contemporary time and the future to come. Kurzel hints that the fall of humanity, which has occurred in every historical era, is also evident in the recent century and the present world.

##### **4.1. Temptation and the Fall**

Before disobeying, Adam and Eve lived in peace with nature and experienced a perfect existence without disease, death, or suffering. They disobeyed God's commandment to leave the forbidden fruit alone. God does not force people to do his will and cannot protect people from the inevitable consequences of their choice. If they disobeyed and ate the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would die a spiritual death. As a consequence, they lived a life in which they would be responsible for setting their own rules and face the consequences, that is a life of suffering. Mortal actions are very important because of their immortal consequences. "What hands are there? Ha! They pluck

out mine eyes!/will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood/clean from my hand? No; this my hand with rather/the multitudinous seas incarnadine/making the green one red" (scene 41:12).

Shakespeare's plays "were not written to illustrate Christian doctrine" (Perez Lopez 66). As a playwright, Shakespeare was responding "to centuries of Christianity in which he had been born, to certain forms and concepts regarding human experience such as love and goodness as held and proclaimed by Christian faith" (67). Shakespeare takes for granted a particular moral universe in which the rules of life are those defined by the most basic tenets of Christian doctrine. The greatest tragedy for the Christian hero is not only the loss of his life, but also the loss of his eternal soul. Since the destination of the afterlife – an eternal paradise of peace and happiness in the presence of God or an eternal, hopeless damnation of fire and suffering – is determined by the choices of the mortal life, all actions have potentially eternal consequences. *Macbeth* as a tragic Christian hero suffers the loss of his life and his soul.

The metaphor of the Fall of Man, in specific Christian imagery, is *Macbeth's* main feature. Therefore, while the play contains no lesson plans on Christian doctrines, the main theme of the play is the "trope of humanity's propensity to choose sin, or the recurring theme of the archetype of the fall" (Perez Lopez 16). The archetypal image of the fall occurs in Genesis with the Fall of Adam and Eve. Biblically, the same fall is echoed in the "story of Cain, the story of the Flood, and in the story of Samson"; it is the eternal story of the tendency of man's sinful nature. It is a central theme of the Judeo-Christian mythos and it seems to have been interesting to Shakespeare, who used the concept of the fall in many of his plays; *King Lear*, *King Henry the Eighth*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*, to name a few (17).

According to Christian worldview, Macbeth's commerce with witches is condemned by the word of God. In the Porter's scene, Macbeth's castle has become a hell on earth, due to the summoning of the demons by Lady Macbeth. Macbeth frequently hints that he is aware of the eternal consequences of his choice, both before the deed when he wishes to "jump the life to come" and after that, when he laments about his "eternal jewel/given to the common enemy of man". His "eternal jewel and his soul" is given to the Devil by trafficking with witches and murdering the king. To the Christian understanding of the world, there is a freedom to choose either salvation or damnation. Macbeth is the man, who by "vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself", willingly commits sins. He

willingly turns away from salvation, and experiences an immediate mortal punishment with a hint of the punishment to come (scene 28:00).

#### **4.2. The Fall of Humanity**

Shakespeare's Macbeth displays a character of far more human complexity. "Sleep shall neither night nor day/hang upon his pent-house lid;/he shall live a man forbid:/weary se'nnights nine times nine/shall he dwindle, peak and pine"(act 1, scene 3). He is a man of military prowess, and a standard of justice who yet has dark and sinister ambitions toward the crown. The great tension in the first part of the play is the struggle between his awareness of God's law on his heart – his conscience or capacity for moral virtue – and his self-serving ambition, abiding in the darker tendency toward sin common to all people. Macbeth's complex humanity presents itself also in his fears. Macbeth fears to violate his own moral code by murdering the king. After the witches' prophecy about his achievement of the thanage of Cawdor and of the kingship – one of which comes true – Macbeth's aside reveals both his moral character and his secret plan: "why do I yield to that suggestion/whose horrid image doth unfix my hair/and make my seated heart knock at my ribs,/against the use of nature? Present fears/are less than horrible imaginings:...my thought, whos murther yet is but fantastical,/shakes so my single state of man, that function/is smother'd in surmise" (scene 16:16).

The witches never suggested that murder was the means by which Macbeth would achieve the kingship. However murder appears to be his only inclination. He claims the murder of Duncan was yet "but fantastical", indicating that he had already contemplated it before even meeting with the witches. Lady Macbeth reveals that the two of them had already considered the means by which Macbeth should attain the throne – it always led to the murder of Duncan. She worried, upon receiving his letter about the witches, that her husband was "too full o' the milk of human kindness,/to catch the nearest way" to the throne (scene 22:53). None of them considers anything other than murder as the nearest way.

During their argument in scene 26:12, she reprimands him in this way: "was the hope drunk, / wherein you dress'd yourself? Hath it slept since? ... / when you durst do it, then you were a man; / and, to be more than what you were, you would / be so much more the man. Nor time, no place, / did then adhere, and yet you would make both" (Kurzelt 2015). They had long ago first began to whisper to themselves. They had long plotted that Macbeth should wait for a convenient time and place, to secretly murder his king, so that he would be crowned in Duncan's place. They have thought about this at least since Macbeth met the Witches. Macbeth's humanity can be found in the fear he expresses. He went

through with a deed against the 'natural law of God' (Perez Lopez 27). Macbeth's fear infects the audience with the moral horror he expresses in his speech of scene 27:23:

He's here in double trust:/first, as I am his kinsman and his subject,/strong both against the deed; then, as his host,/who should against his murderer shut the door,/nor bear knife myself. Besides, this Duncan/hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been/so clear in his great office, that his virtues/will plead like angel, trumpet-tongued, against/the deep damnation of his taking-off/and pity, like a naked newborn babe,/striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed/upon the sightless couriers of the air,/shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,/that tears shall drown the wind. (Kurzel 2015)

Macbeth recognizes good reasons for restraining his desires. He is a man of moral character who understands fully the moral, immoral, and social consequences of his choice. In fact, if not for his wife, he most likely would have convinced himself to repent. He knew murder to be wrong. Lady Macbeth's character lacks any humanity – at least for the first half of the drama. She seems even more destructive than the Witches, who by comparison are almost comical. Lady Macbeth calls upon demonic spirits to bless the murder of Duncan and hide it from the “eyes of God” (Perez Lopez 70). She feels the need to ask the demons to unsex her and remove her conscience.

#### **4.3. Macbeth and Satan**

In the tale of Macbeth, there are parallels between the protagonist and Satan. Many critics contend that Macbeth and Satan share a common feature in their high peaks and low drops. Throughout the play, Macbeth is the shadow of Satan in his eminence, ambitions and consequences of actions. Macbeth mirrors Satan in being the right hand man for his King and the second in power (Sheppard 10). In the beginning of the play, Macbeth is portrayed as the “valiant cousin! Worthy gentleman!” (Act 1, Scene 2, Line 24). Many of his fellow peers feel that Macbeth is honest and true: “for brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name” (Act 1, scene 2, line 16). In *The Bible*, Lucifer has a transcendental position before his fall. In Isaiah 14:12-15, God calls him “son of the morning!” and he is the angel of light. He is summoned in such manner as “thou hast been in Eden, The Garden of God, every precious stone [was] thy covering’ (Ezekiel 28:13) or ‘thou wast upon the holy mountain of God?’” (Ezekiel 28:14).

Macbeth also realizes that as a consequence for betraying the King and an innocent man, he will be judged harshly. However, even with all these oppositions in front of him, Macbeth deliberately continues his actions knowing he can no longer turn. This ambition, similar to Satan, leads to his downfall, as Malcolm points out that “angels are bright still, though the brightest fell” (*The*

*Bible* 4:3:22). The once great flower slowly starts to wither, since the ambitions of Macbeth drive him mad for power. The shadow of Satan being representative of Macbeth is best illustrated by A. C. Bradley. He infers that like Satan, who fell from his power, Macbeth has also lost his golden years and pure soul to his ambitions and must now endure the punishments for his sins in both present and afterlife (Mabillard 12). The imagery of Macbeth's downfall is illustrated in scene 1:34:01, after Macbeth is informed by his attendant, Seyton, about the death of Lady Macbeth. Kurzel captures this image from a long shot, high above, giving the impression of the fall from Heaven.

In *The Bible*, verses Isaiah 14:12, we read "how art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! [how] art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!". Macbeth's actions have condemned him to eternal damnation as it did with Satan. Macbeth realizes his deeds and admits his defeat in reality. He knows he has "lived long enough" and his "way of life is fall'n into sear, the yellow leaf, and that which should accompany old age, as honour, love, obedience, troop of friend" (Act 5, Scene 3). In his soliloquy about why he has to kill Banquo, Macbeth complains about the unfairness of the witches' prophecy. If it all comes true, then Macbeth will have done all the work, and Banquo's descendants will get all the rewards. Because they will be the future kings, and Macbeth would have given his eternal soul to Satan for Banquo's children and grandchildren: "mine eternal jewel/given to the common enemy of man/to make them Kings, the seed of Banquo kings!" (Scene 53:46).

## **5. Tragedy**

As a tragedy, the tale of *Macbeth* presents a conflict within the hero, who is divided against himself. In the aftermath of many horrors, tragedy has compensated by giving shape and meaning to suffering. Also in troubling invocations of competing religions, tragedy has been utilized to justify 'others' death. Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth*, relates to the horror and suffering of the twenty-first century troubled man, who is still struggling due to his lost sense of direction. As a result, there are still internal conflicts between goodness and evil, which ends in the committing of violence and crime.

### **5.1. Purpose of Tragedy**

D. Douglas Waters' analysis of the cathartic effect of tragedy on the audience exemplifies the kind of moral lesson that Sir Philip Sydney supports as the main purpose of tragedy. Waters demonstrates that religion is merely a set of moral ideas. For many Elizabethans, all matters of life are coloured with the particular sensibility of Christian teaching. From the meaning of relationships, to the purpose of a king, to the code of honour: all are "understood through the laws of



the *Old Testament* and the perfect example of Jesus Christ" (Perez Lopez 20). As historian Nick Aitchison points out, Elizabethan and Stuart dramatists worked under strict censorship laws which prevented them from referring to religious issues. The underlying Christian theology of *Macbeth* is all "subtext and metaphor to conform to the laws of the day" (21).

Shakespeare employs theology that his intended audience already took for granted in order to produce a specific effect: a fear of "our understanding and emotional participation" in the crimes and resulting effects of Macbeth's sin (Perez Lopez 22). For English Renaissance theorists George Puttenham and Sir Philip Sidney, the purpose of tragedy was to exhibit the earthy effects of crime to discourage the audience from committing similar crimes. Miguel Bernard claims "the greatest tragedy" for *Macbeth* is that "having gained the world, he has lost his soul" (23). A thorough reading of *Macbeth* cannot be achieved without understanding that free will is at the heart of Macbeth's downfall. A Christian tragedy is the story of a person struggling to win his or her own desires over the morality of the laws of God, choosing self-interest over righteousness, and suffering the consequences of those choices.

## 5.2. Christian Tragedy

Barbara Hunt argues that the religious practices of Christianity place emphasis on an individual's daily life and the consequences of the choices. Christianity has suffused and fundamentally shaped Western thought. Salvation is offered but not always chosen. Thus, the Christian dimension of the tragedy of *Macbeth* is that any man can fall victim to his own desires, despite the warnings of his conscience and even against his own reason. *Macbeth* exemplifies the epitome of personal Christian tragedy. "Individuals can willingly choose their own damnation and the devastating social fallout which arises from the poisonous effects of sin working in the world" (Perez Lopez 1). Aristotle's *Poetics*, proposed that the purpose for viewing tragedy was the achievement of catharsis – a purging of the emotions of pity and fear. In order to achieve a successful purging, the central tragic figure had to be believably human. While he may be "highly renowned and prosperous", it was necessary that he displays some fatal human flaw (4).

A. C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904) acknowledges that Shakespeare's tragedy was not a tragedy in the Aristotelian sense of the term. Bradley's theory of the tragic trait – that the tragic figure's predisposition towards a course of action acts as both his greatness and his downfall – is consistent with this Christian teaching. Bradley contends that Shakespearean tragedy is a struggle within the hero, who is a man divided against himself (McEachern 3). Rebecca Lemon explains that for an English Renaissance theorist

like Sir Philip Sidney, the purpose of tragedy was “cautioning its audience members against crime and tyranny” (Perez Lopez 13).

The Shakespearean tragic character features both his greatness and his downfall – the preference toward a particular direction. In Christian theology, all humanity possesses such a tragic trait: the deflection of our natures towards these things that work against the goodness and the will of Lord. Tragedy calls for a distinctly human quality that can first empathize with others, recognize the possibility of similar calamity, and then to share pain. The purpose of sharing pain is to offer a small degree of human comfort in a world of misery (Perez Lopez 5). Kurzel’s ending suggests a continuing loop of violence for power. It ends with Fleance and Malcolm picking their swords and heading to an unknown destination, at least for the audience. While Malcolm moves towards the shining light, since he is God’s chosen one and his action is justified, Fleance heads for a space filled with the colour blood-red and mist. Both are intending to engage in war.

#### **6. The Signification of Christian Imagery and Symbols in *Macbeth* (2015)**

“Here’s a knocking indeed if a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have old turning the key” (Act 2, Scene 3, Lines 1-3). These are the ironic words of the Porter of Macbeth’s haunted castle, after Lady Macbeth has filled her battlements with all manners of “murd’ring ministers” (Act 1, Scene, 5, Line 49) and evil spirits, “turning her home into Hell on Earth” (Perez Lopez 1-2). In Kurzel’s film, after Macbeth has been promoted to Thane of Cawdor, just as the Weird Sisters prophesized, we are shown that Lady Macbeth is in a chapel holding the Cawdor ribbon. That her trafficking with the “Spirits/That tend on mortal thoughts” (Scene 19:52) happens in the chapel feels blasphemous. She asks it before a panel with a cross flanked by two trees, the “iconography of the trees of life and knowledge” (Bladen 2).

In her appeal to the dark spirits, Lady Macbeth is linked with Eve, the mother who brings death to her offspring through the original sin. The panels in the room depict biblical sceneries. A shot of an angel on a panel is covered with the shadow of the flickering flame – part of the vein of fire imagery through the film that is tied to burning dead and live children, associated with the Macbeths. It is appropriate that Lady Macbeth’s performance of anti-nature – “Come to my woman’s breast and take my milk for gall” is placed in the context of the tree imagery on the panels (Scenes 20:00 and 20:03). It links her with sin, death and sterility of the tree of knowledge side of the paradigm. Her voice coincides with a shot of a panel depicting souls toppling down to Hell alongside a demon. Her appeal to dark forces to steel her resolve is thus expressly linked with the casting of the sinful into Hell in the Last Judgement. Burning candles at left which light

up the panels convey the performance as blasphemous and presents it as a deliberate decision to sin.

Kurzel has paralleled the Fall of Adam and Eve with the fall of the Macbeths, since they too broke boundaries. The result of the Macbeths disobedience to the dominant discourse and law is degradation from their position. At the same time Lady Macbeth reads the letter, we hear Macbeth's voice over, about his internal and mental struggle. According to his conscious, he knows that trafficking with witches is wrong, but wonders otherwise, since they predict his success. He also talks about his wrong intentions as going "against the use of nature." Before moving to Lady Macbeth's scene in the chapel, we see the image of a cross at the entrance (Scenes 14:57, 20:52).

## 7. Conclusion

The dominant discourse in the Elizabethan era dictated that only a God chosen King and a succession of his sons to come were eligible for the position of Kingdom. Kurzel's attempt to stay close to the context of the Shakespearean play, warns a similar contemporary cause and justification of violence and discrimination against human rights. The Christian images of the Cross, are added to the source text, creating an intertextual dialogism between the film and Shakespeare's play. Kurzel's cinematic adaptation of *Macbeth* is an additional ideological gesture, questioning the religious justifications of violence and war. *Macbeth* (2015) relates to our contemporary time, since there are still religious justification of war and violence, committed by some people such as the Taleban and Da'esh.

In his dialogue with other literary texts, Kurzel adds a blood-red setting to the film as it reaches the end. The red-coloured space, in which Macbeth engages in his battle with Macduff, reminds us of the suffering and torture in Dante's Hell. It signifies the brutality of discrimination, violence and war, which has ever-since been troubling men, specially our contemporary era and the future to come. The symbolic returning child, Fleance, warns a future of more violence and wars to come. Macbeth's tale and Kurzel's film adaptation share Biblical motifs like temptation and the original sin, the Fall of Adam and Eve, the Fall of Lucifer, Hell, the death and toppling down of Adam and Eve's offspring, evil and demons, the tree of life and knowledge, and secular and spiritual damnation.

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