

# Representing Females from A Different Perspective: Justin Kurzel's Film Appropriation of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Nasaybah W. Awajan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, English Language Department, Middle East University, Amman, Jordan

Correspondence: Nasaybah W. Awajan, Assistant Professor, English Language Department, Middle East University, Amman, Jordan.

Received: July 27, 2023

Accepted: August 21, 2023

Online Published: September 4, 2023

doi:10.5430/wjel.v13n8p92

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v13n8p92>

## Abstract

The study explores the differences in the representation of females, specifically Lady Macbeth and the witches, in both Shakespeare's play, *Macbeth* (1623) and in Justin Kurzel's film appropriation, *Macbeth* (2015). The paper attempts to prove that Kurzel's film appropriation of Shakespeare's play represents the female characters, specifically Lady Macbeth and the witches, from a different perspective than Shakespeare's original play. The paper shows how Kurzel changes the old ideas about how the witches and Lady Macbeth are the motivation and inspiration behind Macbeth's downfall, defeat, and death. Instead, the study shows that Kurzel's film appropriation posits that Macbeth's greed and lust for power and authority make Macbeth himself the impetus behind his downfall, defeat, and death. As a result, Macbeth's evil is natural rather than nurtured by the play's main female characters as shown in Shakespeare's original text. For this reason, Kurzel's witches and Lady Macbeth are analyzed in relation to how they are portrayed in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Very few studies tackle Kurzel's film appropriation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, which mainly focus on the lighting and visual effects of the movie. The contribution of the study is to fill the shortage of literature conducted on the current appropriation by Kurzel.

**Keywords:** Kurzel, Shakespeare, Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, appropriation, film, nature, nurture

## 1. Introduction

Even up to the present day, many of Shakespeare's plays are still being appropriated as film productions. Most of these works do not make any major plot changes to Shakespeare's plays, but even if they do, it is only for the sake of adapting a modern context to attract a wider audience. The current study explores the differences in the representation of Lady Macbeth and the witches in both Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* (1623) and in the Justin Kurzel's 2015 film appropriation of the same name. The study shows how Lady Macbeth and the witches are represented from a different perspective in Kurzel's appropriation to show that they are not the reason behind Macbeth's tragic fall, but instead it is his own evil nature that makes Macbeth, himself, responsible for his own downfall. The study also attempts to prove that through his representation of Shakespeare's females from *Macbeth*, Kurzel wants to show that it is Macbeth's natural evil that leads to his defeat rather than some evil nurtured through Lady Macbeth and the witches as portrayed in Shakespeare's original play *Macbeth*. Few studies have tackled Justin Kurzel's film appropriation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and those mostly focus on only on the lighting and visual effects of the movie, and what they added to the original text. Thus, the contribution of the current study is to fill in the gap in the shortage of literature conducted on the current appropriation by Justin Kurzel.

In Shakespeare's original *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth and the witches are accused of seducing and motivating Macbeth to commit crimes and are, therefore, presented as the reason behind his tragic fall. Kurzel's representation of females, on the other hand, aims to point a finger not at Lady Macbeth and the witches, but rather at Macbeth himself as the reason for his own downfall and his own defeat. As a result, Kurzel's version shows that Macbeth's tragic end is the result of him being naturally evil, and not the result of evil being nurtured within him by the females in his life.

The study is conducted through the use of the theory of appropriation. There has been a long debate on defining the word appropriation and whether it can or cannot be replaced by other synonyms such as adaptation, intertextuality, rewriting, and other compatible words. As an example, Sanders (2006) declares these words could be used as synonyms, rather than defining each one differently (p. 3). Barthes (1981) also states that appropriation and adaptation have both been used with different terms such as intertextuality and rewriting (p. 39). Likewise, Said (1983) adds that in rewriting a text, it somehow loses its identity and becomes a new text or a new product. This is because the writer thinks about changing the original rather than creating something new. For Derrida (1985), rewriting is linked to "flashback and memories" and is the "desire to launch things that come back to you as much as possible" (p. 157). This means that the original text itself is kept in the mind of the new author who keeps revisiting the original while writing his new text. Poole (2004) present different words that could be synonyms for appropriation including "borrowing, stealing, appropriating, inheriting, assimilating, being influenced, inspired, allusion, and intertextuality" (p. 2).

Returning to Sanders (2006) (who, by the way, is also an appropriation theorist), she distinguishes between the two terms "appropriation" and "adaptation" and states that, though both can be linked to the term of intertextuality, they differ in their purpose. That is, they both

engage with the source text; however, appropriation “adopts a posture of critique, even assault” (p. 4). Sanders (2006) continues by defining each word. For instance, she defines adaptations of canonical works of literature as declaring “themselves as an interpretation or re-reading of a canonical precursor” which may sometimes include “the movement into a new generic mode or context” (p. 2). At the same time, she defines appropriations as “a political or ethical commitment [which] shapes a writer’s, director’s or performer’s decision to re-interpret a source text.” Furthermore, she claims that such theories would add “multiple and sometimes conflicting production of meaning” (p. 2). Conversely, Hutcheon (2006), as another theorist of appropriation and adaptation, states that both terms can be used interchangeably (p.25).

Many scholars have discussed the word “adaptation” in relation to filmmaking and film adaptation. Welsh and Peter (2007) relates the concept of adaptation to filmmaking and its process. Shepherd (2009) adds that adaptation is the idea which the written text tries to reflect. From the start, any literary work which is intended to be written into a film is treated as if it will be woven into a movie script. According to Mohsin and Takseen (2015), in contemporary film adaptation, it is hard to determine how much the plot of a text has to be changed in order to still keep its main idea (though there are changes that contribute to the plot and may integrate elements that resemble modernity). Mohsin and Takseen also add the challenge of the plot’s length when it has to be modified in relation to the length of the movie.

Chakraborty (2001) uses the term “appropriation” in his study, and states that film appropriation is “an aesthetic transportation of a 'literary text' or 'theatrical text' in the form of a 'motion text' or film” (p. 19). He also adds that it could be considered an interdisciplinary process. Film appropriation starts by de-constructing, pre-establishing “contextual affinity of the text”, and then re-contextualizing the same text in a different scenario (p. 19). According to Chakraborty (2001), many of Shakespeare’s plays have gone through the aforementioned process all around the world in order to be presented as films. He also differentiates between “appropriation” and “adaptation”, saying that the former “concentrates more on the audience than on the author of the 'source-text' or 'reference text’”, while the latter, “deals with change in terms of the original point of enunciation; whereas in an adaptation, the original point of enunciation remains the same” (p. 19).

## 2. Literature Review

The works of William Shakespeare (1564-1616) have always been appropriated in other texts and in films. Even today his plays and other writings are still being revisited as a source of inspiration for new works that may represent the characters, the plot or even the setting differently. This is due to the fact that his works are so linked to real life and the psychological, cultural, traditional issues and personal outlooks that people in real life are exposed to.

Ahlam and Hakima (2018) state that Shakespeare’s plays are still rewritten and reused, only now they are linked to contemporary life and its issues. Indeed, Shakespeare’s plays are the reason he has become such an immortalized and popular figure (Ahlam and Hakima, 2018). Radovanovic (2010) states there have been numerous authors who have continuously adopted the plays of Shakespeare or have referred to them. According to Thanky (2017), the reason behind the continuous adaptation and appropriation of Shakespeare’s works is because they reflect the real nature of humans in their struggles and in their achievements. Thanky (2017) adds that the plays contain a certain morality in which they teach people how to behave and act in certain circumstances. Gonzalez (2012) adds that “...appropriating and rewriting Shakespeare is not a passive phenomenon” (p. 35). In fact, Gonzalez considers it spiritless to not changing in the work. Camati (2005) adds that Shakespeare’s plays are considered significant sources for rewriting and appropriation because they enclose “political dimensions devised to idealize and/or demystify specific forms of power” (341). This is why they are considered easy to rewrite and put into different contexts. Additionally, Marowitz (1991) considers Shakespeare’s plays “as ‘material’ to be refashioned” (p. 5).

Shakespeare’s plays have even been translated into different languages and appropriated by the people who speak them. For example, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* has been adapted and acculturated into Chinese culture and even rewritten by Kuwaiti Sulayman al-Bassam in his 2007 play *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy* (Ahlam and Hakima, 2018). Radovanovic (2010) also provides an example of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* being appropriated when it was written in in Urban Slang.

Camati (1995) states that *Macbeth* is a “dramatization of the successful overthrow of the usurper or tyrant”. This is why it is considered as “one of the best examples of a tragedy with topical references and political implications” (p. 341). Camati (1995) goes on to say that since *Macbeth* is a tragedy, it needs to be used as “a potent, politically subversive weapon” for “denouncing corrupt and decedent tyrannies” (p. 341). He also (1995) provides some examples of appropriations of *Macbeth*, such as Barbara Garson’s *MacBird* (1965) and Charles Marowitz’s *A Macbeth* (1971) (p. 341).

Many writers have changed the elements of *Macbeth*. Some have focused on the role of the witches, some on the role of Lady Macbeth, and some on adding more to the play. The focus of the current study lies in the film appropriation of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.

Mohan and Arora (2013) tackle Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* in film. They think that, as a play, *Macbeth* Shakespeare’s most often performed play and one that has influenced and enhanced many playwrights and screenwriters. This is because it tackles many issues that could be applied to any context and any time. To them, most of the film appropriations of *Macbeth* have the same “degree of consensus” in the way that they all show the same relationship between Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, the witches and Banquo (p. 179). They also discuss some film appropriations of *Macbeth*, one of which is *Shakespeare Must Die* (2012) directed by Thai film director Ing Kanjanavanit which was censored and banned by Thailand’s government because, they claimed, it “could inflame political passions in a country where it is taboo to criticize the monarchy” (p. 184).

The other appropriation, which they discuss is 2012's *Macbeth* (The Caribbean *Macbeth*), produced and directed by Aleta Chappelle. The plot in the movie is not that different from the plot of the play itself. After his victory over the rebels, General Macbeth meets the Weird Sisters who plot against King Duncan. The general becomes motivated by what the witches tell him about being a king. His thirst for power and authority drives him mad which, in the end, becomes the reason for his defeat.

Mohan and Arora (2013) also tackle other appropriations, such as *Shakespeare Re-Told: Macbeth* (2005), *Macbeth 3000: This Time, It's Personal* (2005), and other past appropriations (Mohan and Arora 2013, pp. 180-187). They conclude by stating that Shakespeare's plays are thought of as "undisputed literary classics" and *Macbeth*, as a play, has been exposed to "exhaustive interpretative and bibliographic explication" (Mohan and Arora 2013, p. 187).

Chakraborty (2001) approaches two of the film appropriations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth - Scotland, PA* (2001) and *Maqbool* (2003) from the lens of "de/re-contextualization" (p. 19). Noopur Jha and Arunabh Banerjee (2016) conducted a case study on adaptations in contemporary Indian cinema, and specifically Vishal Bharadwaj's *Maqbool*. Rasmus (2018) tackles the appropriation of *Macbeth* by Kurzel, but focuses only on his use of colorful lights, using special light effects throughout the movie, saying that "Kurzel's work is visually striking due to its colour pattern which alternates between cold blue and grey and saturated red and orange. The contrast is powerful and the film hardly ever offers anything in-between" (p. 117). This can be seen in the scene of the battle where the soldiers emerge as if "from a mist which entombs them", therefore giving them the qualities of ghosts. He also mentions the fog and how it "turns the location of the action into a place lacking concrete and tangible substance" (p. 118). Rasmus (2018) compares the children in the movie appropriation with the children of Syria who have killed as a result of the civil war there (p. 123). Ue (2016)'s review of Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth* focuses on the number of kids *Macbeth* has, commenting on the question of L. C. Knights (2015), "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" (p. 467; cited in p. 5). Ue (2016) states that *Macbeth* is "an adaptation that effectively foregrounds the play's concerns about children, legacy and legitimacy" (p. 468).

### 3. Discussion

William Shakespeare's play, *Macbeth*, revolves around a noble man called Macbeth who follows the prophecies of three witches about him being the Thane of Cawdor, i.e., a king. After their first prophecy about Macbeth gaining the trust of his cousin, King Duncan, comes true, Macbeth really starts believing that the other prophecies will come true as well, and that one day he will, indeed, be king. Along with the motivation provided by the witches, he is also helped and encouraged by his wife, Lady Macbeth. It is then that Macbeth, following his greed and thirst for power and authority, starts killing off every person who he believes stands in his way on his path to the throne. In this case, Macbeth's evil is nurtured by the people around him, especially, the witches and Lady Macbeth. Most of the scholars have agreed on the fact that the witches and their prophecies, along with the encouragement of Lady Macbeth, are the reasons behind Macbeth's murderous crime spree that started with killing Duncan. Pershina (2018) as an example, states that it only because of Lady Macbeth's interference that Macbeth decides to kill Duncan. However, she adds that the witches' prophecies are the reasons behind Macbeth's crimes (p. 203).

Still, quite a few scholars have shifted the blame away from the females in *Macbeth* as the reason behind Macbeth's fall and death. Jha and Banerjee (2016) declare, for example, that there is a school of literary scholars who claim that Macbeth's defeat is the result of "his own doing". They continue by saying that Macbeth has many people around him that influence him, but it is he "took the final call" in every murder he committed or plotted (p. 306). That is, everything that happened was a result of his own ambitions and desires.

The paper attempts to prove that *Macbeth*, Justin Kurzel's 2015 film appropriation of Shakespeare's play of the same name, presents the females, namely the witches and Lady Macbeth, in a different light. The paper tries to show how Kurzel changes the old ideas about how the witches and Lady Macbeth are the motivation and inspiration behind Macbeth's tragic end. Instead, the current study shows that Kurzel's film appropriation posits that Macbeth's greed and lust for power and authority make Macbeth himself the impetus behind his downfall, defeat, and demise. This leads to the fact that Macbeth's evil is natural rather than nurtured by the play's main female as shown in the original text. For this reason, Kurzel's witches and Lady Macbeth are analyzed in relation to how they are portrayed in Shakespeare's original *Macbeth*. Following what this school of thought suggests, the paper tries to prove that the witches and Lady Macbeth are in a different light in Kurzel's appropriation. The number of witches and their role are different in Kurzel's film; unlike in the original play, they are only observers in the appropriation. The paper also tries to prove that Lady Macbeth is presented in a different light in the appropriation as well. She is not as evil as she is shown to be in the original play. This may lead to the point that Macbeth's evil is natural, rather than nurtured.

#### The Representation of the Witches in Kurzel's Film Appropriation

Starting with the representation of Lady Macbeth, in Kurzel's film appropriation, she is presented as a woman who has lost two children, and thus, her motherhood. The beginning of the film opens with her first loss – a dead toddler is seen being cremated by the Macbeths. As their teenage son stands with them, the witches prophecy his death on a battlefield – a prophecy that later comes true when the younger Macbeth dies on the battlefield. From these two losses, the appropriation sets a mood of sympathy toward Lady Macbeth, especially when she is presented as inconsolable after the cremation of her first child. Thus, right from the start she is presented as a grieving mother who has lost her both of her children. Rasmus (2018) states that Kurzel's film opens with a funeral of Macbeths' toddler on a heath and that helps in picturing its overall atmosphere and thematic preoccupations. It shows the grieving couple together with just a handful of mourners. This sets the mood for accepting anything that a helpless mother would do. It even gives justification to any thoughts she may

have of helping her husband with his later crimes (Ue 2016). The relationship between Macbeth and the people around him is the main reason for his own insecurities. According to Mohan and Arora (2013), the relationship between Macbeth and those around him including Lady Macbeth, King Duncan and his princely sons, the witches, and Banquo reveals “the changes in Macbeth’s psychological mind as he strived increasingly and more recklessly to attain power” (p. 179). McClelland (2017) adds that Kurzel depicts Lady Macbeth in this way to draw the sympathy of the audience for her right from the beginning of the film. Instead of considering Lady Macbeth a powerful woman, the film leads the audience to view her as a mother, broken due to her loss of children and yearning to make her husband happy.

The loss of her children and motherhood enables Lady Macbeth to be justified for any behavior she shows, be it good or bad. According to McClelland (2017), Kurzel tries to “humanize” Lady Macbeth. He shows that she cannot have the power granted by giving birth to children since she has lost the only two she’s given birth to, so the only way for her to gain power now would be through her devotion to her husband by helping Macbeth commit regicide and gain the crown.

Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth does not have children. This appears in the words of Macduff when Malcolm tells him that they are to seek revenge for what Macbeth has done to Duncan and Macduff’s family. Macduff answers, “He has no children” (Shakespeare, Act 4, Scene 3, line 217). Rutter (2007) declares that the words of Macduff confirm the fact that the Macbeths do not have children. Likewise, Freud (2010) states that the reason for Lady Macbeth’s “illness” is her “reaction to her childlessness” (p. 222). Whether the Macbeths have children or not is debatable. Critics such as Sigmund Freud, Tom Clayton, and Thomas Campbell declare that the Macbeths do not have children. On the other hand, Marvin Rosenberg argues that they do have children (Ghosh NA)

Another way Kurzel shows his Lady Macbeth different from the one in the original play is her relation to the chapel where she is seen many times in his version of Act 1, Scene 2. She receives a letter from Macbeth telling her about the visit of King Duncan and his plan to kill him which she reads while in the chapel. Lady Macbeth’s intentions to help Macbeth are presented as a kind of worship to God - or a kind of a religious experience for her - as if her obedience and devotion to her husband will be rewarded with her giving birth to new babies. Rasmus (2018) posits that the chapel is the setting for Lady Macbeth (and where she is seen in most of her scenes in the film) which shows her spirituality.

On the other hand, in Shakespeare’s play, Lady Macbeth is known for her wickedness and relationship with the witches. For example, Dolan (1994) states that the relationship between Lady Macbeth and the witches is as “catalytic agents who incite Macbeth’s ambition” (p. 227). Dolan (1994) adds that Shakespeare uses female characters in Macbeth, the witches and Lady Macbeth “to instill ambition, translate that ambition into violent action, and thus cast doubt on ambition and agency as associated with violence” (p. 227).

Nabhan (2020) likewise adds that Lady Macbeth’s only ambition in the play is to become the Queen of Scotland. This has been enhanced by the letter of her husband after hearing the predictions of the witches. Nabhan’s words are notable in that Lady Macbeth already has the ambition and the desire to become the queen.

This is clear in Shakespeare’s play when one of the witches tell Macbeth about the prophecy that is to become the king, “All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter!” (I.III.50). Upon hearing the witches’ prophecies, Lady Macbeth’s response resembles the witches and their evil when, in her soliloquy, she says, “Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be What thou art promised: yet do I fear thy nature It is too full o’ the milk of human kindness ... Hie thee hither, That I may pour my spirits in thine ear...” (I.V.14-25).

Mohammed (2016) adds that Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth immediately echoes “their destructive evil spirits”, referring to the witches (p. 480). Lady Macbeth, in addressing the witches says, “unsex me” and “fill me from the crown to the toe, top full of direst cruelty” (I.V.40). This is how the audience can feel her influence over Macbeth. Commenting on this, Levin (2013) states that, in this scene, Lady Macbeth shows her “serious and potential threat to the natural order because she invites devil spirits”, and “offers her reproductive capabilities for demonic ends” (p. 41).

Her words reflect her objection to patriarchal order, and are seen in the “sexual potency and fertility” she shares with the witches (Laoutaris 2008, p. 178). The witches and Lady Macbeth are represented with masculine characteristics. Macbeth addressing the witches, “You should be women / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so” and in the same time Lady Macbeth’s efforts “to unsex herself also provides a similar situation because she cannot escape from her biologically constructed body” (Marcus 1988, p. 105; I.III.45). Lady Macbeth’s power and sexuality is connected to “the demonic and mirror the obscure gender identifications of the bearded witches” (Marcus 1988, p. 105). She shows her desire to be controlled by her body’s substances, “substances associated with the dangerously permeable female reproductive body” (Laoutaris 2008, p. 185). Mohammed (2016) adds that Lady Macbeth’s evil is presented through “her yearn for demonic powers to transform her into a witch that is associated with destruction” (p. 481). Paffen (2017) states that, after the motivation of the witches’ prophecies, Macbeth needs another motivator, who is Lady Macbeth, who has “power and influence over Macbeth and the course of the play” (p. 41).

However, after Macbeth kills Banquo and decides to kill Macduff’s sons and wife later in the movie, we see Lady Macbeth start to grieve the violence and fierceness of her husband. Lady Macbeth herself starts to fear her husband (Rasmus 2018). Commenting on the same point, McClelland (2017) says that Kurzel’s Lady Macbeth discovers a monster in her husband, starts to turn against him and his crimes, and begins pining for her husband of yore. That being said, Kurzel’s image of Lady Macbeth differs from the image of Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth who, in the latter’s play, is the main reason and inspiration for what Macbeth does to Banquo and to Macduff’s family (Chamberlain 2005).

At the end of the Kurzel's movie, instead of showing devotion and loyalty as a wife, Lady Macbeth is seen as a woman who regrets her husband's heinous deeds and is ashamed of him for that. Rasmus (2018) states that instead of her famous "sleepwalking scene" at the end of Shakespeare's play, in Kurzel's film, Lady Macbeth is portrayed as talking to her dead child (who appears to have died from smallpox) to emphasize her growing mental distress, saying "Wash your hands. Put on your nightgown. Look not so pale. To bed" As can be read in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 1, these are supposed to be the words of Lady Macbeth to Macbeth in the Bard's original play (p.124). Rasmus (2018) also adds that, unlike Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, Kurzel's Lady Macbeth tries to stop Macbeth's plans to murder Macduff's wife and children, saying "What's done cannot be undone" (Shakespeare, Act 5, scene 1) - a line taken from her "sleepwalking scene" in Shakespeare's play. Still, she is then forced to watch Macduff's wife and children being burnt alive by Macbeth himself (p. 124). Butler (2009) declares that Lady Macbeth, upon seeing the deaths of other children, begins to regard all lives as "grievable" and hence "valuable" (p. 25). Kurzel represents a different Lady Macbeth from Shakespeare's. She is a wife who rejects Macbeth's decrees, grows afraid of this man, and mourns the loss of her husband" (McClelland 2017, p.29).

The death of Lady Macbeth in Kurzel's film appropriation differs from Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth in that Kurzel's Lady Macbeth goes back to a church in her village, alone. There she sees and directly addresses the ghost of her dead child. She also meets the witches outside of the church and then dies shortly thereafter. Kurzel, in portraying Lady Macbeth's seeing her son in the church, shows how she is really traumatized by the death of both of her sons (Ue 2016). Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, suffers from mental illness and hallucinations which cause her to suffer from sleepwalking and she ends up committing suicide. Her hallucination is because of Macbeth's first crime, murdering Duncan, in which she sees spots of blood on her hands. It is the only crime that she encouraged her husband to commit because of her guilt of losing her both sons, as discussed earlier. The definition of "spot" that is apparently most relevant to the sleepwalking scene is "an eruptive or other disfiguring mark on the skin" (Weis 2007, p. 354) such as "those caused by pestilence. Typhus and particularly typhoid fever cover the human body with spots; typhoid fever was rife in the Midlands around the time of Shakespeare's death and may have been so earlier, too" (Weis 2007, p. 354).

### **The Representation of the Witches in Kurzel's Audio-Visual Appropriation**

Moving to the representation of the witches in Kurzel's appropriation, the first point to discuss is the number of the witches. There are three witches in Shakespeare's play with the addition of Hecate who is said to have been added later by the editors. On the other hand, there are five witches in Kurzel's appropriation - three witches with a small girl and an infant. The witches in Shakespeare's play are presented as evil and wicked in their manipulation of Macbeth. They give him the prophecies to encourage and motivate him for the deeds and crimes he commits. Shakespeare's witches are the ones, who manipulate not only Macbeth, but also the whole plot. Paffen (2017) states that Shakespeare intends to give the witches a vital role in his *Macbeth*. They, and their prophecies have a great impact on both the plot and Macbeth's actions.

In Kurzel's appropriation, instead of the play opening with the witches and their gathering, it opens with the funeral of the Macbeths' toddler. The witches are just observers here. They watch the cremation of the child without any interference. They also provide Macbeth with prophecies, but not in the same way Shakespeare's witches do. This difference in the way they reveal their prophecies shows how Kurzel's witches are less frightening and lead to less manipulation of the plot and the character of Macbeth.

Nonetheless, the witches in the appropriation are seen as helpful. For example, when Banquo is killed, his child runs away and is helped by the little girl witch. They are also presented as being full of sympathy, seen when Macbeth's toddler child is cremated. According to Rasmus (2018), the witches are mostly observers in Kurzel's appropriation. They are observers when the toddler is cremated, when the battle starts at the beginning of the film, and in the battle between Macduff and Malcolm and Macbeth at the film's end. McClelland (2017) declares that the witches' gaze reflects "fear and sympathy" (p. 69), sympathizing with what happens and fearing the future. Instead of the lines that are said by Shakespeare's witches when deciding where they will meet with Macbeth (Shakespeare, Act 1, Scene 1, line 7), Kurzel's witches announce, "Upon the battlefield". This directly sets the mood of the play; this indicates the battles that have happened and will happen.

Likewise, Rasmus (2018) also posits that the witches are also helpers and supporters in the Kurzel's appropriation such as when the little girl witch helps Banquo's son, Fleance, escape, the only time where they act. Kurzel's witches are portrayed observing the scenes from a safe distance, "serving more as the film's moral compass than its source of evil" (Rasmus 2018, p. 126). Kurzel explains adapting Shakespeare's his portrayal of witches presents them as wiser and more human observers and travelers who only exist in the imagination of Macbeth as if they are war shadows. This is why they mostly appear observing the battles (Lambie 2018).

According to McClelland (2017), Shakespeare's witches are represented differently. He first adds a fourth witch. They act in Kurzel's appropriation as "bystanders, mostly present without much substance" (p. 67). McClelland (2017) adds that they specifically appear after anyone undergoes trauma, and only the traumatized or affected ones see them. They appear at Macbeth's infant's funeral, in the battle scene when Macbeth's son dies, when Lady Macbeth sees the apparition of her late baby, and when Fleance witnesses men murdering his father.

Kurzel's witches are not associated with magic or supernatural powers. They do not perform chants and spells like Shakespeare's witches. This can be proved in Kurzel appropriation where they never chant or cast spells, such as Shakespeare's swine killing, and their revenge on the chestnut-eating sailor's wife (Shakespeare Act 1, Scene 3, Lines 1-37). McClelland (2017) states that in Kurzel's appropriation, they act as "omens of escape for the character or characters before whom they have appeared" (p. 69). When the witches hail Macbeth, he

imagines his coronation, while one of the witches hold his cheeks.

The witches are seen as offering help and support to Lady Macbeth when she leaves the chapel at the end of the play. They are their observing her wondering under the rain, whispering, "To bed, to bed, / to bed!" (5.1.67-68). The next time Lady Macbeth is featured, she sleeps, lifeless in her bed. The witches here are seen as providing her sanctuary.

#### **Nurture vs. Nature**

From the previous representation of Lady Macbeth and the witches in Kurzel's appropriation which differs from how Lady Macbeth and the witches are represented in Shakespeare's original play, it is notable that they do not have much effect on Macbeth and the murders he has committed. This is quite the opposite of how they are presented in Shakespeare's original play. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth plays a major role in Macbeth's crimes, from killing King Duncan and Banquo to even killing Macduff's family. The witches in Shakespeare's play also carry a lot of influence over Macbeth by telling him their prophecies. This shows how Macbeth's evilness is might be considered nurtured rather than natural in Shakespeare's play because of the way in which he is affected by the people and the circumstances around him, as Mohammed (2016), Levin (2013) and (Laoutaris 2008) state. On the other hand, the representation of Lady Macbeth and the witches by Kurzel lead to the idea that Macbeth's evilness is natural since they do not have the same effect on him as seen in Shakespeare's original play.

Starting with the killing of King Duncan, Lady Macbeth's motivation towards killing the king is part of her guilt of losing both her children and loyalty to her husband. This is enhanced by Lady Macbeth reading her husband's letter in the chapel which can be viewed as a religious act of sorts. Macbeth hearing the prophecies of the witches decides he will, indeed, be king. Before even meeting with Lady Macbeth, he has his sights on the killing - an act that is included in both Shakespeare's and Kurzel's scripts. However, in Kurzel's appropriation, Macbeth is led by his dead teenage son who, holding a dagger, leads his father to the king's room. Rasmus (2018) says that the ghost of his dead son urges him "to take action" (p. 117). So here, it is the dagger and his hallucination of his son which guide him to go further and kill his cousin-king, Duncan. The lines that are said by Macbeth to the ghost of his dead son in Kurzel's appropriation are said by Macbeth to the dagger alone in the original text. As Macbeth says, "Is this a dagger which I see before me?" In lines, 2.1.34-40, 43-46, 48-52, 53 and 57, he is speaking to and about his son, whereas in the play, he says these words addressing the dagger itself. Kurzel extracts "I see thee yet, in form as palpable / As this which I now draw. [He draws a dagger]" from their original placement (2.1.40- 41). By doing this, Kurzel enhances the idea that Macbeth's hallucination is part of his evil, not the effect of the females who surround him (McClelland 2017). It could also be related to Lady Macbeth's feeling that being a king will compensate losing his children.

In another scene, where Macbeth orders the murderers to kill Banquo, one of the witches helps Banquo's son, Fleance, escape. Here, evil is seen as an opponent to good with the witch's good action towards Fleance being the opposite of Macbeth's murderous bad deed. This scene is added by Kurzel; it does not originally happen in Shakespeare's play. According to McClelland (2017), "Making the witches an apparition in the film gives Macbeth sole power for his fate" (p. 71). Having the witches giving him the prophecies, Macbeth follows his own decisions which leads himself to personally reach his own fate.

Another evil Macbeth vs. good female scene is presented in the attitude of Lady Macbeth towards Macbeth's order to kill Macduff's children and burning his wife. Rasmus (2018) states that the cruelty of Macbeth increases and is seen in his insistence in killing Macduff's children and burning his wife. Adding that "Lady Macbeth's remorse and grief grow proportionately to his violence" (p. 118). Her health, and especially her mental health, decreases after what Macbeth has done. After this scene, she is seen in the chamber talking to her baby toddler and then is last seen dead in her bed.

#### **4. Conclusion**

From the discussion presented above, Lady Macbeth and the witches in Kurzel's 2015 film appropriation are clearly presented in a different way than they are in Shakespeare's original 1623 play *Macbeth*. The discussion shows that the way in which Kurzel presents Lady Macbeth and the witches shifts the blame from these females in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* where they are presented as the reason behind Macbeth's fall and death, and places the blame solely on Macbeth himself for his own tragic end. Thus it can be posited that, in Kurzel's appropriation, Macbeth is naturally evil rather than evil having been nurtured within him by the women in his life as presented in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

#### **Acknowledgment**

I would like to thank Middle East University in Amman, Jordan, for their financial support granted to cover the publication fee of this research article.

#### **References**

- Ahlam, B., & Hakima, L. (2018). *Shakespeare in Today's Literary World; Influences and Re-readings*. University of Echahid Hamma Lakhdar.
- Barthes, R. (1981). *The Theory of the Text. Untying the text: A Poststructural Reader*. Ed. Robert Young. Routledge & Kegan Paul. 31-47.
- Butler, J. (2009). *Frames of War*. London & New York: Verso.
- Camati, S. A. (2005). Textual Appropriation: Totalitarian Violence in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*." *Ilha do Desterro*, 49, 339-367.
- Chakraborty, S. (2001). (Trans) porting Play-texts into Films: Dynamics of De/Recontextualization in Select Appropriations of

- Shakespeare's Macbeth. *Anudhyan: An International Journal of Social Sciences (AIJSS)*.
- Chamberlain, S. (2005). Fantasizing Infanticide: Lady Macbeth and the Murdering Mother in Early Modern England. *College Literature*, 32(3), 72-91. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lit.2005.0038>
- Derrida, J. (1985). *The Ear of the other: Autobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Dolan, F. E. (1994). *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1100*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501707285>
- Freud, S. F. (2010). *Remarks on Macbeth. Blooms Modern Critical Interpretations, New Edition*. New York: Macbeth Bloom's Literary Criticism.
- Ghosh, J. *Lady Macbeth and Her Imaginary Child.doc* - Academia.edu.
- González, J. M. (2012). Nothing like the Sun: Shakespeare in Spain Today. *Multicultural Shakespeare: Translation, Appropriation and Performance*, 9(24), 34-52. <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10224-011-0014-5>
- Hutcheon, L. (2006). *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203957721>
- Jha, N., & Banerjee, A. (2016). William Shakespeare's Macbeth to Vishal Bharadwaj's Maqbool: A case study on adaptations in contemporary Indian Cinema. *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities, IV(VII)*, 303-312.
- Knights, L. C. (2015) *How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth? An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism. Explorations: Essays in Criticism Mainly on the Literature of the Seventeenth Century*. New York: George W. Stewart, 1947. 1554. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315709277-10>
- Lambie, R. (2018). *Justin Kurzel Interview: Macbeth, Breaking Bad and Snowtown*. Den of Geek! 28 September 2015. 10 January 2018.
- Lane, A. (2018) "Toil and Trouble. 'Macbeth' and 'Youth.'" *The New Yorker*. 7 December 2015. 10 January 2018.
- Laoutaris, C. (2008). *Shakespearean Maternities: Crises on Conception in Early Modern England*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, Print. <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9780748624362.001.0001>
- Levin, J. (2013). Lady MacBeth and the Daemonologie of Hysteria. *ELH*, 69(1), 21-55. <https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.2002.0009>
- Marcus, L. S. (1988). *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and its Discontents*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press.
- Marina A. P. (2007). *Metaphors of Crime and Punishment in Shakespeare's "Macbeth"*. 10th International RAIS Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities (RAIS 2018). *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 211, 202-207.
- Marowitz, C. (1991). *Recycling Shakespeare*. Basingstoke: Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-21418-1>
- McClelland, K. S. (2017). *Macbeth in Film: Directorial Choices and Their Impact on The Audience*. A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.
- Mohammed, S. A. (2016). "Unsex me here" Lady Macbeth as a Disruptive Force in Macbeth. *Majalet Jame'at Altanmeyah albashareyah*, 2(1), 479-489. <https://doi.org/10.21928/juhd.v2n1y2016.pp479-489>
- Mohan, R., & Arora, M. K. (2013). Macbeth In World Cinema: Selected Film and TV Adaptations. *International Journal of English and Literature (IJEL)*, 3(1), 179-188. © TJPRC Pvt. Ltd.
- Mohsin, S. W., & Taskeen, S. (2015). Cinematizing Shakespeare: A Study of Shakespearean Presence in Indian Cinema. *International Journal of English Language Literature and Humanities*, 2(10), 308-315. Retrieved from <http://ijellh.com/cinematizing-shakespeare-study-shakespearean-presence-indian-cinema/>
- Nabhan, F. (2020). Lady Macbeth between Ambition and Femininity in William Shakespeare's Macbeth. *Bull. adv. Engl. stud.*, 4(2), 27-31. <https://doi.org/10.31559/BAES2020.4.2.1>
- Paffen, C. (2017). *Wicked Witches and Powerful Plots: The influence of the supernatural in the ancient world as a guide to the supernatural in Macbeth*. Retrieved from [https://theses.uhn.nl/bitstream/handle/123456789/5245/Paffen%20\\_C.C.\\_1.pdf?sequence=1](https://theses.uhn.nl/bitstream/handle/123456789/5245/Paffen%20_C.C._1.pdf?sequence=1)
- Poole, A. (2004). *Shakespeare and the Victorians*. London: Thomson Learning/Arden Shakespeare.
- Radovanovic, R. (2010). *Terry Pratchett's Wyrld Sisters: Shakespeare's Adapted*. University of Belgrade.
- Rasmus, A. (2018). What bloody film is this? Macbeth for our time. *Multicultural Shakespeare: Translation, Appropriation and Performance*, 18(33), 115-128. <https://doi.org/10.18778/2083-8530.18.08>
- Rutter, C. C. (2007). *Remind Me: How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?* Cambridge University. Retrieved from <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/shakespeare-survey/remind-me-how-many-children-had-lady-macbeth/C8F4E23A2052263F33A46EF7631859B2>
- Said, E. (1983). *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Harvard University Press.
- Sanders, J. (2006). *Adaptation and Appropriation*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203087633>

- Shakespeare, W. (1995). *Macbeth*. York Press.
- Shepherd, B. J. (2009). *Adaptation from Novels into Films: A Study of Six Examples, with an Accompanying Screenplay and Self-analysis*. (Master's Thesis, University of Waikato, New Zealand). Retrieved July 18, 2016, from <http://waikato.researchgateway.ac.nz/>
- Thanky, P. (2017). Relevance of Shakespeare in Contemporary World. *International Journal of Engineering Technology Science and Research*, 4(5), 359-360.
- Ue, T. (2016) Review of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (directed by Justin Kurzel) at Vue Cinema, 10 November 2015, *Shakespeare*, 12:4, 468-469. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2016.1178167>
- Weis, R. (2007). *Shakespeare Revealed: A Biography*. London: John Murray, 2007. Print.
- Welsh, J. M., & Peter, L. (eds) (2007). *The Literature/Film Reader: Issues of Adaptation*. Scarecrow: Lanham (MD).

### Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).