

**A study of 3 film versions of Macbeth: Orson Welles 1948, Akira Kurosawa 1957, Roman Polanski 1971  
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|           | Welles   | Kurosawa  | Polanski   |
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| Treatment | Orson Welles treats the story in a subjective way, centering it completely on Macbeth. He uses light and dark to symbolize good and evil, often having light or shadow falling across faces in key moments to symbolize inner mood.    | Akira Kurosawa makes Macbeth an epic story of corruption and power. In this version Kurosawa makes it a parable in a sense by making Tsuzuki (Duncan) a traitor as well, showing that it will happen again. The witch's wheel also suggests this. | Polanski's version is the most realistically middle ages of the three but is not so good at showing the delirium. His movie shows you more of the violence, but also makes you feel more horrified at Macbeth.       |
| Setting   | Orson Welles's movie's setting resembles not so much Scotland as Macbeth's soul. It is harsh and rugged to start with, and after he becomes king it becomes even worse. It is full of unlikely stone monoliths and murky, secret fogs. | Akira Kurosawa's movie is set in 16 <sup>th</sup> century Japan, (200 years after the original Macbeth) and he fills Washizu's world with mist, tangled forest, and bare stretches of grass.  | Polanski's movie is the one most unmistakably set in Scotland. A clever touch was to put the witches on a rank, evil-smelling mudflat. It also makes use of the constant rain of Scotland, which was a clever touch. |

| Characterization  |   |   |   |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Macbeth</li> </ul>             | <p>Macbeth in Orson Welles's version is possibly the most foreboding of the Macbeths. He is huge, fierce, and brave. He is also the most vicious and bloodthirsty, personally killing his victims. He's the most irrevocably doomed, everything points to him not living long</p> | <p>Washizu is the least ambitious of the Macbeths, being manipulated by his wife into the killing more so than the others. He is a brave warrior, and becomes the most cruel towards the end, eventually being killed by his own troops.</p>  | <p>Polanski's Macbeth is the most evil, and the most helpless. He is crueler and more heartlessly evil, but does not have the imposing presence, of Welles's Macbeth.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lady Macbeth</li> </ul>        | <p>Orson Welles's Lady Macbeth is the most reckless of them. She is middle aged and savage, and fits the description of "fiend-like" best.</p>  | <p>Asaji is like a little super-computer, sitting on the floor and quietly talking of theories that drive Washizu to the brink of madness...and over.</p>   | <p>Polanski's Lady Macbeth is the most fragile of them all. She is young and delicate, and, under the stress of the murder, her mind simply snaps.</p>                    |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One other character</li> </ul> | <p>Macduff deserves a mention in this because near the end he takes on a strange glint in the eye and such unholy pleasure in killing you wonder if he will be the next Macbeth...</p>  | <p>The witch (or spirit) in Kurosawa's movie is an embodiment of cobweb castle. The forest traps him first, then her words bind him, then the castle traps him, and then he is sucked dry. Lastly he is killed. I bet that the ghostly warriors are people that were caught before, by the same castle.</p> | <p>Donaldbain is bitter with Malcolm, feeling shadowed by him. Donaldbain is often in shadow, reflecting this. At the end he decides to continue the vendetta.</p>        |

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| Camera              | Orson Welles has few shots that do not have Macbeth in it. Of the ones that do, in all of them Macbeth is in the center of the screen. Most shots are simply of Macbeth's face. This makes the whole universe revolve around him.               | In Throne of Blood, Washizu is slowly put into more confined and confined settings until he dies in a tight corner, trapped.  | Polanski's version often has medium long shots, showing a dramatic skyscape or burning flames in the background.  |
| Sound               | Orson Welles often has loud dramatic music during the scenes, or deep, eerie silences. Both have great effect.  | Throne of Blood has sharp staccato music that seems to tear at the ears, and also prepare your mind for horror and evil. He also uses the power of voice to fill your ears. | Polanski's version has mostly mediaeval music and background sounds to affect your state of mind. He also uses night noises (owls, crickets, wolves etc) to chill your blood. |
| Colour and lighting | Orson Welles's version is in black and white but he uses this to good effect, using black and white to show evil and good, often having good and evil lying across a character's face.  | Throne of Blood has very little lighting effects, giving it a much realer effect than The Orson Welles' version.  | Polanski's version is the only movie with color, and uses this to good effect, with twisted, vivid colors to show Macbeth's fear.   |
| Costume             | The people in Orson Welles's version are dressed like archetypal "barbarians" with horned hats and studded leather armor. Macbeth is always dressed in bearskin that makes him look huge and forbidding. The spikes that cover him add to this. | In Throne of Blood everybody is dressed in armor or traditional Japanese dress such as a kimono.  | Polanski's version has its people dressed in traditional medieval dress or full metal armor and chainmail.  |

| Scenes   |   |  |   |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opening scene</li> </ul>      | <p>In the Orson Welles' version, the opening scene consists of the witches making their potion and lifting out a voodoo doll with which they control Macbeth's destiny.</p> | <p>In the Throne of Blood the first scene is of voices chanting about the fate of Washizu, and showing you a pillar that marks the remains of Cobweb castle. From this you know from the start that Washizu is done for.</p> | <p>In Polanski's Macbeth the first scene shows the witches discussing their plans, and planting a dagger in the ground where later there is a battle, showing their power over destiny.</p>                                       |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Witches' scenes</li> </ul>    | <p>The witches take the effigy of Macbeth, and place a thaneship necklace on him, and a crown, showing Macbeth his future or, possibly, controlling it.</p>                 | <p>In the Throne of Blood the spirit is sitting on the ground with a prayer wheel, badmouthing humanity. When Washizu encounters her she tells the prophecies and disappears, leaving behind a hill of corpses.</p>          | <p>The Polanski witch scene has Banquo and Macbeth being tempted over by music. Then the witches tell them the prophecies and disappear into a hole in the castle wall.</p>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Murder scene</li> </ul>       | <p>In the Orson Welles' version Macbeth contemplates the murder, and sees the ghostly dagger. The way the camera moves and the sounds are suggestive of delirium.</p>       | <p>In Throne of Blood, you see Asaji, waiting and convulsing and even panicking; alarming behavior for one so composed. Perhaps this shows how she is the one that organized the murder, even more than the spirit.</p>      | <p>In Polanski's version you follow Macbeth all the way into Duncan's chamber. You see the violence of the murder of Duncan, perhaps helping you understand Macbeth's insanity and comprehend the magnitude of what he's done</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Banquo ghost scene</li> </ul> | <p>In Orson Welles' version Macbeth absolutely flips at the sight of Banquo, smashing tables and screaming insanely trying to drive him away.</p>                           | <p>In Throne of Blood Washizu tries in vain to destroy the ghost with his sword. He is afraid, but not so much as to stop him attacking it.</p>  | <p>In Polanski's version Macbeth is terrified trying to escape from the ghost, to get as far away from it as possible and to keep it away with anything he can.</p>   |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sleepwalking scene</li> </ul> | <p>In Orson Welles' version Lady Macbeth is dreaming, and seems to be suffering more from a nightmare than from insanity. She screams in panic and seems to be frantic.</p>   | <p>In Throne of Blood Asji completely loses control half screaming, half weeping, she scrapes at her hands, trying to wash them in spite of the fact that she has no water. This is terrifying when you contrast this with her collected earlier self.</p> | <p>In Polanski's version Lady Macbeth is naked, and seems to be in a stage of madness beyond franticness. She simply talks to herself and weeps inconsolably.</p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Final battle</li> </ul>       | <p>In Orson Welles' version the battle is mainly of words. From the moment Macbeth is told of Macduff's birth he is a doomed man, and the fighting doesn't last long.</p>   | <p>In Throne of Blood the battle is completely one-sided. Washizu is completely trapped; paralleling his greater entrapment by Cobweb castle.</p>  | <p>In Polanski's version Macbeth and Macduff are evenly matched, and it seems as if everything rests on this last battle between good and evil. Good however, triumphs temporarily.</p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Closing scene</li> </ul>      | <p>In Orson Welles' version the last scene is of the witches reminding you that they are still around, and ready to wreak havoc again.</p>  | <p>In the Throne of Blood the last scene is of the army marching on cobweb castle waving branches and preparing to do a job that has already been done.</p>  | <p>In the Polanski version the last scene is of Donaldbain hearing the same music as Macbeth and seeing the witches. The scene fades out to the credits, but you know that the whole thing is about to begin again.</p>  |
| <p>Personal reflections</p>  | <p>I did not like the Orson Welles' version at first, but when I thought it through I realized that many parts were very cleverly done and fascinatingly symbolic. The truest to the original feeling of Macbeth.</p> | <p>Throne of Blood I thought was the most interesting. I find the acting brilliant, Washizu's face being supremely convincing. The atmosphere was good too, with mists and fog rolling round the castle like webs.</p>                                     | <p>Polanski's version did not impress me at first, because it was too real. The vivid hallucination that was characteristic of the play is not present. However the witches apparitions and mirrors are fantastically done. It also has the best portrayal of Scotland I have seen in a movie.</p> |