

Macbeth – 1948 Orson Welles  
Throne of Blood – 1957 Akira Kurosawa  
Macbeth – 1971 Roman Polanski

**Question:** *“Whereas Welles transforms Shakespeare’s ‘Macbeth’ into an Expressionistic morality play and Kurosawa transmutes it into a Japanese parable, Roman Polanski’s Macbeth presents us with a world which is concretely real. From the outset we are privy to the secret thoughts and desires of the young couple and to the cruel and absurd nightmare that drives them to madness and self-destruction.”*

*What is each director’s vision of the tragedy of Macbeth? Explain some of the ways in which each director projects this vision in his film making. You must refer to specific details from each film to support your answer.*

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Where Polanski takes us straight into the minds of the young characters, Kurosawa always maintains a distance between the audience and the protagonists in the film with his medium shots and does not let us get emotionally involved with the characters. Welles takes us close to the characters in a more expressionistic way. All three films are very different from each other, each director presenting the story with a different approach.

Welles turns the story of Macbeth into an expressionistic play. We see this in the close-ups of the characters in the film and in the dark and menacing scenes which have some eerie glows in them. We also see the touch of expressionism in his stark black and white, and in lighting effects. In fact the colour and lighting is very impractical. At the time, the film had to be made indoors with enormous stage sets, and a lot of artificial lighting. The film is also more theatrical because of this and seems to be shaped for effect. The costumes which Welles used are also quite antique looking. One of the main points which make Welles’ Macbeth different from the others is that he keeps Macbeth the centre of attention. Orson Welles has a larger than life dominance. He stands out as an individual, a dictator. The other characters are not revealed to us as individuals, maybe because Welles wishes our attention to be specifically on Macbeth.

Kurosawa’s Throne of Blood gives us a more moralistic view of Macbeth’s tragedy. The story is presented as a parable, which is one transmitting the message of a man’s ambition becoming either his good fortune or his destruction. The movie has been treated in a theoretical way showing the idea of truth-seeking. The movie sets, with their low ceilings, are a lot like the ones of the Noh Theatre. The character make-up and mask-like facial expressions resemble the ones of the Noh Theatre too. Kurosawa has given this film more of a Japanese cultural view, rather than a Scottish one. The costumes too, are traditional Japanese costumes, which do not match the Shakespearian time period and setting of Scotland. We can tell that Kurosawa sees the film more as a superficial story, close to a parable. One reason explaining why I say this is how we identify the character Washizu. Washizu is seen as a myth like character, a not very realistic one. Kurosawa keeps the element of ambition a very

prominent part of Washizu's character. He is a limited character and the overwhelming desire for power is shown within him.

We can say that Polanski is the director who kept with the original way the story of Macbeth was presented. The language is entirely Shakespearian and the style and costumes are too. The costumes are in fact, very traditional and relate to the actual time period in which the story was set. They are very colorful and rich like the costumes were at the time. The film is also a more psychological version or a version that gives us more of the human characteristics of Macbeth (as in the play), because Polanski takes us into the minds of the characters. It was easier for me to understand the film because the characters relate to our time period and us more than the other films. Polanski chose young actors for these roles. As a result we can identify with them more and they are very convincing. This also means that the horror of what they do becomes more horrifying precisely because they seem so normal to us.

In the beginning of my essay I said that the three films are very distinguished one from another. This is true, although there are always some identifiable factors which each director has inserted in his film. One of these is the theme of unlimited desire which is exactly what each protagonist falls victim to. This is what leads Macbeth to his own destruction and death.

**Shyla 8T**