

Lost in Translation: Reconsidering Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*



When *Throne of Blood* appeared on American screens in 1961, the film's first reviewers were largely critical and even dismissive of director Akira Kurosawa's apparent appropriation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Most viewed the film as a quaint, if somewhat flawed, version of the original text, as film critics from the *New York Times*, *New Yorker*, and *Films in Review* measured Kurosawa's film against the Shakespearean original and found the result "amusing" yet ultimately lacking.¹ However, an enthusiastic review from the 1 December 1961 issue of *Time* magazine sounded a note that would be taken up by the later critics who would canonize the film as a "masterpiece" and "the finest of Shakespeare movies"²:

Kurosawa's Shakespeare inevitably—and fortunately—involves more Kurosawa than Shakespeare. With blunt and vital irreverence the director has translated Shakespeare's words into Japanese images, Shakespeare's lords into Japanese barons [...] the spectator scarcely has time to realize, as the images deafen and the noises decorate his imagination, that he is experiencing effects of cinema seldom matched in their headlong masculine power of imagination. (76)

This translation of "Shakespeare's words into Japanese images" is a theme that was taken up several years later by film critic Jerry Blumenthal, who argues that Kurosawa's powerful manipulation of visual cues proved that *Throne of Blood* was no pale imitation of the Shakespearean tragedy but instead a serious, dynamic, and most of all an "autonomous work of art" (123). Where Shakespeare comes into the film at all, Blumenthal suggests his presence is only that of "a scenarist whose vision is consonant with [Kurosawa's] own" (127) as the original's poetic language is replaced by the rich visual imagery so central to the experience of cinema.

While Blumenthal uses *Throne of Blood* as a case study for the successful transformation of a literary text into filmed image, his argument largely elides the specifically Japanese elements of the play that struck the film's first Western viewers as oddly disconcerting. Often described in terms of the exotic or the uncanny, these elements—the whiteface makeup and ritualized gesture of the Noh theater, the static frame, and the "queer, irrelevant commentary of abstruse instruments that bip and pok and squitter on the sound track"³—initially proved indigestible to a viewing public used to the realist conventions of mainstream American film. In *Films in Review*, Carlos Clarens complained that the film's excessive "stylization" has "refined [life] out of it" (622), while *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther found the action "grotesquely brutish and barbaric," and notes, "to our western eyes, it looks fantastic and funny—that is all one can say" (50). Yet Kurosawa's cross-cultural and cross-medium adaptation of *Macbeth* is neither merely a "grotesque" Japanified version of Shakespeare's tragedy nor a straight transposition of the play's essence into universal

visual images; rather, it stages a historically specific negotiation between traditional Japanese and imported Western culture. Situated between the Japanese stage and the American screen, the Japanese image and the English drama, *Throne of Blood* allows Kurosawa to interrogate both Japanese and Western cultural traditions through his manipulation of *Macbeth*, Japanese theater, and contemporary film conventions.

In the context of Kurosawa's position as a filmmaker in postwar, post-occupation Japan, *Macbeth*—with its portrayal of a weakened society open to infection by the forces of chaos and change—had a distinct resonance with the historical moment. While Kurosawa's use of *Macbeth* as a source for *Throne of Blood* appears to stage a critique of Japan's militaristic past and Hirohito's imperial ambitions as so much sound and fury, by the time of the film's release in 1957—twelve years after the war—this would have seemed a curiously dated concern. Furthermore, John Collick points out that Kurosawa had already taken a critical stance toward Japanese militaristic nationalism in his earlier film *Rashomon* (1952), and returning to old ground would seem a highly uncharacteristic move for an artist of Kurosawa's caliber.⁴ What would be a fresh concern, however, was the growing disillusionment not only with the immediate political fallout from the American occupation and reconstruction, but also with the ideals underlying Western liberalism and democracy.

Following its defeat in World War II, Japan was occupied by American forces from 1945-1952, and the Japanese, exhausted by many years of war and the strictures of the militaristic regime, initially welcomed the American forces led by General Douglas MacArthur. For many Japanese intellectuals, the idea of Western culture had long been synonymous with the idea of radical liberalism, and a way of breaking from the tradition-bound dictates of Japanese culture. Western writers—including Shakespeare—were first introduced and popularized among the Japanese during the Meiji Era (1868-1912). During this period, known in Japanese history as a time of great enlightenment, there were two distinct yet related approaches toward the influx of Western culture: the first was one of both awe and acquisitiveness, in which the Japanese were eager to copy and adapt that knowledge to become a powerful and respected presence among Western nations; while the second attitude found the Western perspective to be a useful tool for addressing domestic concerns, such as reforming feudal hierarchies and an out-of-date, corrupted government. As Dennis Kennedy and J. Thomas Rimer have observed, the common thread uniting these schools of thought was the revolutionary concept of the "individual self," yet in a culture so strongly structured around the importance of group affiliation and the Confucian tenets regarding filial piety, duty, and submission to the emperor, it was difficult to decide how and where to apply this new knowledge.

As Japanese society suddenly found itself coming to terms with these new ideas of the self and the radical potential of individualism, the young intellectuals of the Meiji Era felt a particular affinity with the early Renaissance writings of Shakespeare, which were written during and in response to an era faced with a similar conflict between a traditional past based upon hierarchal group identification and potentially dangerous new ideas about the individual self that threatened to destabilize and undermine the existing social structure. Early Japanese stagings of Western plays attempted to negotiate this ambiguous territory, particularly as the productions of Western drama required some adjustment to fit into Japanese theatrical conventions. The idea of dramatic realism, as opposed to the intentionally formal artifice of traditional Japanese theater, was from the first closely aligned with the idea of Western art and the cult of the individual. While some productions attempted to stage Shakespeare in a purely Western style, others attempted to accommodate conventions from both Japanese and Western traditions. An early production of *Hamlet* by the Tsuboichi group adapted elements from both Japanese and Western theater: Brian Powell writes that this performance was particularly noted for introducing a "modicum of realism, not least by allowing actresses on the stage" (39) yet otherwise maintained the stylized gestures typical of Noh and Kabuki drama.

As the country moved away from the openness that characterized the Meiji Era toward an era of increasing militarization, this liberatory aspect of Western thought grew more and more occluded before being banned outright. During World War II, the Interior Ministry deemed all Western materials effete, decadent, and a corrupting influence, so wartime censors were deployed to excise all "British-American-looking" (Kurosawa 118) material from books, newspapers, television, and films. Many artists and filmmakers—Kurosawa among them—chafed under these restrictions, as

film censors became more and more arbitrary in their judgment of what was and was not fit for public consumption.⁵ With the collapse of the wartime regime and the installation of the US Army General Headquarters as the temporary governing power in Japan, the censorship was lifted, though not entirely eradicated. John Dower notes that Supreme Command of the Allied Powers (SCAP) required that all films with seditious themes be strictly banned from the movie houses, specifically films that were suspected to have communist leanings, as well as those that celebrated Japan's "feudal and militaristic" past (426). Furthermore, until 1949, "two copies of every screenplay had to be submitted *in English* in advance to SCAP's 'advisers,' and on numerous occasions a great deal of give-and-take took place before a script emerged that was satisfactory to the Americans" (426). Following the repressive restrictions of the imperial censors, SCAP's conditions were relatively light; however, those conditions (particularly the strict ban of Communist materials) still pointed to the fact that the freedoms experienced under the aegis of the GHQ were still ultimately limited to the extent that they complied with the political goals and ambitions of the United States.

During these postwar years, Kurosawa seems to have quickly intuited the difference between the rhetoric and practice of democracy. In his autobiography, he admits, "the freedom and democracy of the post-war era were not things I had fought for and won; they were granted to me by powers beyond my control" (145). Kurosawa did not consider "freedom and democracy" natural human rights, but rather as a set of beliefs introduced to him from an outside source. In order to thrive in this new era, he chose to approach the concept of Western democracy not with a sense of natural entitlement but instead with "an earnest and humble desire to learn" (145). He contrasted this attitude toward those who "swallowed the concepts of freedom and democracy whole, waving slogans around without really knowing what they meant" (145); such people would inevitably face disappointment. Indeed, the inevitable clash of cultures created by the sudden influx of American wealth into a defeated, impoverished society created a great deal of tension that, by the end of the occupation, had created a "thirty-eighth parallel" running through the "heart of the Japanese people" (Dower 553). This divided sentiment was voiced most stridently by liberals and left-wing artists and intellectuals, who were unhappy with the way that the results of the American reconstruction left much of the conservative old guard in control of the bureaucracy and infrastructure of the government. Moreover, the abrupt introduction of a political democracy into Japanese society did little to change its hierarchical social structure. Many Japanese were disappointed that the old power structures had not essentially changed, despite the rhetoric of "demilitarization and democratization" (Dower 553) that the American forces had proposed to bring to the destroyed nation.

In this context, Kurosawa uses *Macbeth* to illustrate not only the fruitlessness of worldly ambition, but more importantly, the limitations of free will. In *Throne of Blood*, as in *Macbeth*, the protagonist's tragic flaw is not his blind lust for power, but rather his error in imagining himself a free agent in a world where his actions are ultimately circumscribed. Shakespeare's play follows the trajectory of Macbeth's downfall, tracking his degeneration from a thoughtful poet-warrior into a merciless, power-hungry tyrant. Ironically, the more Macbeth becomes convinced of his own potency and ability to act, the less he is able to resist his tragic fate. Macbeth's self-professed "vaulting ambition" (1.7.27) spurs him to take an active role in achieving the fortune predicted for him by the witches, rather than waiting to see if chance alone "will have me king" (1.4.143); yet the haste and precipitation of his actions only work to speed on, rather than subvert, his own helplessness in the face of his destiny. Yet "destiny" reveals itself in *Macbeth* as something that is less connected to the mysterious workings of a supernatural power, and more concerned with the idea of re-establishing order to human society. Karin S. Coddon suggests that by performing his initial act of treason, Macbeth evacuates his own subjectivity, becoming simply a social signifier—a "traitor" rather than "a man." As "traitor," he performs the function of a scapegoat, "not the victim so much as the *effect* of a disorder that manifestly precedes and [...] produces him" (490); and by so following a social script that has been planned out for him in advance, Macbeth participates in the very discourses of power that he attempts to subvert.



By relocating *Macbeth* to feudal Japan, Kurosawa replaces the play's medieval Scottish setting with incidents from the Japanese civil war period, thus appropriating the narrative of fate versus free will from the context of the politics of the Jacobean Era and applying it to the politics of postwar Japan. In *Throne of Blood*, there is less of a sense that the Macbeth figure, Washizu, is actively transgressing through his treachery. Unlike Macbeth, Washizu is not a scapegoat who must be killed in order to restore the balance of society; rather, there is the sense that through his willful act of treachery he is actually conforming to fill a prescribed role in a society that ultimately does not change for either better or worse. In the film, the murder of the samurai Lord Tsuzuki is contextualized by Lady Asaji's observation that Tsuzuki himself—unlike the guileless King Duncan, whose “virtues / Will plead like angels” (1.7.18-19) on his behalf—rose to his position by a similar act of treachery. When Washizu protests that Tsuzuki killed his lord in self-defense, Asaji argues that Washizu, too, must act in order to preserve his life; she suggests that Tsuzuki plans to send him out to battle in order to secure his death. Given these circumstances, Washizu is only participating in a naturalized chain of events, rather than transgressing in any spectacular or singular sense. While Macbeth's most fateful decision is his choice to murder Duncan, in *Throne of Blood* Washizu is robbed of even that form of agency, and the furious impotence that he exhibits as he falls into the role of a mere functionary character in the drama highlights the overdetermined theatricality that is inherent in both Kurosawa's film and Shakespeare's tragedy.

Kurosawa depicts this struggle against and descent into an already theatrical universe by setting the ritualized gesture of traditional Japanese Noh theater and the static frame—popular in early Japanese cinema—in tension with the realistic cinematic conventions popular in Western film, which he uses to represent the idea of transparent free will and human agency. Throughout the film, Kurosawa mixes these realist and formalist styles in order to stage Washizu's resistance and acquiescence as he struggles to keep from transforming into the villain whose fate has already been “foretold in ancient legend.”⁶ The role that Washizu is destined to play is a deeply inglorious one, something of which both he and the audience are already well aware. To emphasize the prescribed nature of this role and the alienating tension that lies between Washizu and his assumed character,

Kurosawa sets up a metatheatrical staging of a Noh performance at the banquet shortly before the appearance of Miki's (Banquo) ghost. In this scene, Washizu, Asaji, and their guests watch a performance of a Noh drama, in which a performer moves in ceremonial manner and chants an invocation:

Oh terrible gods
 Attend our story well
 The very same tale
 Foretold in ancient legend
 The warrior Chikata
 Whose devilish men
 Served his traitorous schemes
 Yet when his demon henchmen
 Murder him in betrayal,
 Their debt of royal treachery
 Swiftly brings their own ruin
 And thus it came to pass—

Like Claudius confronted with the Mousetrap play in *Hamlet*, Washizu demands at this point that the performance be halted; however, he appears to act not out of a sense of guilt or fear of being discovered but as if he no longer wants to watch his own fate played out before him. The play that is being performed in front of him recapitulates the same script through which he has been destined to play. This narrative invocation points simultaneously to both the future and the past; it is a story of a recurring cycle, a relentlessly repeating play acted out by different characters through the ages. Just as it accurately represents what had happened to Tsuzuki at the hands of Washizu, so the story condemns (and accurately predicts) Washizu's swift ruin, brought by his "debt of royal treachery," at the hands of his own men.

Kurosawa visually reinforces this sense of the inherently theatrical, pre-scripted nature of both film and the life that it attempts to represent realistically by employing several of the costumes and gestures of Noh theater in his film. Noh theater differs from most Western theater in that its artistic purpose is not to find new and novel ways of representing or recreating human experience, but rather to show how fully the players can be absorbed by, or "channel," their given role.⁷ The three primary actors in the film—Washizu, the forest spirit, and Asaji—are made up to resemble the masks that would be given to their Noh counterparts: Heida, the warrior; Yamanba, the demon; and Shakumi, an aging beauty on the brink of madness. A consummate actress, Asaji is completely absorbed by her role; her expression does not change at all until the final scene where, even when overcome by guilt, she simply replaces one masked expression with another. Donald Richie argues that Asaji's strict adherence to Noh conventions has made her "the most limited, the most confined, the most driven" (117) character in the film; however, I argue that it is Washizu's initial reluctance to assume his mask and character that eventually turns him into the "most driven" and most self-consciously "confined" character in the play once he does so. For rather than being a mere victim "trapped in a vast pattern which he but dimly perceives" (Jorgens 156), Washizu knows the part that he is fated to play all too well. He appears to be familiar with the conventions of the story, while Asaji—whom we never see outside of her "mask"—is not. Peter Donaldson observes that in the scene where Lady Asaji thrusts the pike which is to be the murder weapon at Washizu, his face "appears contorted with suffering and



a sense of entrapment" (81). This moment of tension is held as both husband and wife grab the weapon, yet as Washizu acquiesces to take it, his "reversal of the weapon, so that it is again parallel to the screen plane [...] marks his decision" (81). The hesitation, conflict, and grudging acquiescence exhibited by Washizu in this scene cinematically stages the sense of Kierkegaardian "dread" that King-Kok Cheung has identified as the primary atmospheric force of *Macbeth*: while Cheung initially defines this dread as the "psychological state which precedes the leap into evil" (430), it is also a profoundly "*alien power*" (431, italics mine) that "lays hold of an individual, and yet one cannot tear oneself away, nor has the will to do so; for one fears, but what one fears one desires" (431). Kurosawa focuses attention to this alienating power of dread by emphasizing the way that Washizu's desires, whatever they may be, are in this scene subordinated to the overwhelming demands of the film and the script: he cannot hold this moment in tension forever, but is compelled into completing the frame, symbolically represented by his return of the pike to the horizontal at the conclusion of his decision. Washizu's fall into his prescribed role is further emphasized when, following his return from the off-screen murder of Tsuzuki, he returns to the room where his wife is waiting and sinks down onto the floor. Asaji wrests the pike from Washizu's hands and exits, but



the camera remains centered on Washizu sitting absolutely still, his face frozen into the grimacing expression of the warrior-mask, Heida. From this moment, Washizu has become "possessed"—though not yet completely—by the spirit of his role.

The overdetermined plot of the play frames a paradox of motion and narrative development within a static, unchanging narrative; this apparent contradiction is paralleled by the inherent contradictions of the cinematic medium itself. The very mechanics of the "motion pictures," which spool thousands of individual still frames to create the illusion of movement, reflect this contradiction between stillness and motion. Mary Ann Doane notes that several film theorists—specifically, Henri Bergson, Jean Epstein and Giles Deleuze—have identified a relationship between the cinematic apparatus and Zeno's paradox, a philosophical problem that denies the existence of movement.

Zeno's paradox argues that an arrow which appears to be in motion is actually not moving at all, for its mass always occupies a space equal to its volume and, therefore, is always at rest. But if the arrow is at rest at each point in the course of its arc or travel, it then follows that the arrow never actually moves. Bergson claimed that cinema reproduces this counterintuitive paradox, and faulted the medium for "attempting to reconstitute movement from static states or instants" (123); while Epstein (and later, Deleuze) argued that film technology actually defies the paradox, since what the audience ends up seeing is neither "pure" movement nor a series of stills, but rather an "intermediate image" that accomplishes the "transmutation of the discontinuous into the continuous" (127). In both sets of arguments, films effectively reverse (or attempt to reverse) the paradox of movement. Rather than creating stillness out of motion, film creates motion out of stillness; yet even as the film is spooled from reel to reel, that motion is ultimately confined to the circular, cyclical rotation of the movie camera or projector.

Jack Jorgens has observed that the two spinning wheels of yarn that the forest witch in *Throne of Blood* operates as she chants her prophecies closely resemble the two reels of a film projector⁸:



this image links the witch's supernatural powers with the director's cinematic ones, as both possess the ability to create and see through illusion. Furthermore, the witch also becomes uneasily allied with the film's audience, as the content of her chant indicates that she exists outside the realm of the human struggles exhibited within the film. From this vantage point, she can watch events unfold with the pleasure of a voyeur: the witch finds the perverse and ultimately meaningless struggles of mankind to be "*omoshiroi*," a Japanese word that loosely translates to "fascinating," "interesting," or "amusing." It is through this perverse pleasure that both witch and audience become implicated in the cycle of narrative repetition that is responsible for producing the film's radically overdetermined plot; for even while the witch appears to be set free once she is released from the thin frame of her forest hut, she is nevertheless contained within the frame of the film and must play a part that is just as predetermined as Washizu's own. Peter Donaldson observes that the most important moment of this scene comes when Washizu and Miki break through the forest spirit's hut, then turn and find to their astonishment that the frame of the hut has disappeared. Donaldson notes, "the effect of the shot is to suggest that they have crossed a critical but now invisible boundary [...] they now move in an unbounded dimension of depth, in an unmediated space that had seemed to belong to *us*" (77, italics mine)—that is, to the audience.

Additionally, Donaldson argues that by destroying the witch's hut, the two characters have eliminated the metacinematic frame and thereby "entered fully into her world" (77). He goes on to interpret the famous scene in which Washizu and Miki ride in and out of the mist, away from the camera and back toward it again, as an example of the way that both characters are still trapped and contained within the story, even as they appear to be freed by the more "unmediated," realist conventions that Kurosawa applies to this scene. Donaldson posits that the audience's awareness of the riders' confusion serves to further connect the audience with the voyeuristic power of the spirit, who "not only knows and sees more than the protagonists but partly controls their actions" (78); however, the extreme length and repetition (with minor differences) of this sequence in the



film, in addition to the obstruction of the mist, creates a kind of visual frustration that links the audience's confusion to the confusion experienced by the riders themselves. At the end of the sequence, neither the audience nor the riders know how long they have been lost and wandering. In this sense, the audience is placed not only in the position of an omnipotent observer to whom all movement seems to be so overdetermined as to be almost completely static, but it also becomes aligned with the riders' frustrated desire to continue moving even when movement itself appears to be pointless.

The entrance into a relatively "unmediated" filmed space illustrates the transition to a more realist cinematic mode, one that is aligned with Western cinema, storytelling, and the idea of the free will. The use of the long shot, deep focus, panning and tracking shots emphasizes the realistic "style" championed by Kurosawa's Western contemporaries, such as film critic André Bazin and director John Huston,⁹ while the use of the static frame and hard-edge wipe comes from a more specifically Japanese cinematic practice. John Collick notes that the use of the hard-edge wipe in particular speaks to the Japanese practice of drawing attention to the artificiality of the medium, and argues that it purposely "draw(s) attention to the physical construction of the frame through the brief juxtaposition of two incompatible images," and may possibly "derive from the use of sliding screens in [Japanese] architecture to manipulate, conceal and reveal space. It is also reminiscent of the long curtain pulled across the Kabuki stage at the beginning and end of each performance" (170).

In the beginning of the film, Kurosawa separates the Japanese formalist and Western realist styles into two different scenes. Following the choral prologue, the first scene of the film—which shows Tsuzuki sitting in state and receiving the messages of war—is shot in a typically “Japanese” style; it is presented in a series of drastic cuts between a series of still shots, and uses hard-edge wipes to illustrate the lapses in time. By contrast, when Washizu first appears in the next scene, his movements are tracked in a style more consistent with realist cinema: the camera tracks his movements and registers his expressions in close-up as his emotion warrants. In the beginning, then, Tsuzuki is aligned with stillness and ritual while Washizu is connected to movement and will. However, as the film continues, Kurosawa begins to blend these two styles, and the encroachment of the still frame into the realist camera-work parallels Washizu’s fall into the role formerly filled by the samurai Lord Tsuzuki. Shortly after Washizu learns that the first part of the prophecy has come true, and has inherited the castle abandoned by the traitor Fujimaki (who has, ominously, left his bloodstains on the walls), the camera begins to fix him into a still frame. As Asaji begins to goad him toward the act of murder, Washizu stops, and the camera films him as he stands, framed by the interior of the palace room and the sliding doors behind him. Although Asaji continues to speak, she remains off-screen; meanwhile, behind Washizu, just visible behind a partially-open screen door, a horse runs wild in the courtyard outside. This contrast between framed stillness and unconstrained motion cinematically illustrates Washizu’s internal conflict, a conflict that does not exactly conform to the concept of Western psychological realism, but nevertheless represents a type of internal struggle similar to the struggle that Macbeth experiences as he questions his own susceptibility to “that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair / And make my seated heart knock at my ribs / Against the use of nature” (1.3.134-37). Like Macbeth, Washizu is aware of an outside force—here a “suggestion” rather than an altogether interior compulsion—that has the potential to trap him into a course of action that will lead him out of control, “unfixing” his “seated heart.” Just as Macbeth intuits, to some extent, the lengths of bloody rage that he must go to in order to “trammel up the consequence” (1.7.3) of his first murderous act, so does Washizu’s uneasy hesitation, still different from Asaji’s unearthly steadiness, represent a vague foreknowledge of and rebellion against the ultimate end of his initial act of “free” will.

Peter Donaldson suggests that the juxtaposition of Western realist and Japanese formalist techniques in *Throne of Blood* represent Kurosawa’s temptation by, but ultimate disavowal of “Western modes of representation and Western values” (89); however, I would argue that rather than privileging one over the other, the film actually stages a successful synthesis of the two. While the vision of liberal humanism that Kurosawa presents in *Throne of Blood* is extraordinarily bleak, and quite possibly representative of the perceived emptiness or limitations of the radical potential offered by Western politics, culture, and filming techniques of the time, he does not champion or advocate a complete return to the static traditionalism represented by the Noh figures in the film. Noh plays were traditionally used to celebrate the feudal period as an “idealised and mythical age of bravery” (Collick 168); however, by using *Macbeth* as a source in the place of a traditional Noh cycle, Kurosawa’s film presents the period as far more bloody, unjust, and Machiavellian than those who cherished the myth of ancient chivalry and honor would care to believe. Instead, rather than simply juxtaposing one against the other, Japanese against Western form, written text against filmed image, stillness against motion, *Throne of Blood* unites them all in a new form of movement that is not represented simply as the clash of two opposites, but rather as the transition or motion between the two states. Neither an attempt to represent transparent truths about the universality of Shakespeare and the triumph of the will nor a turn away from the West to a celebration of the Japanese past, the nihilistic vision of *Throne of Blood* represents a particular stage of liberal disillusionment in a Japan caught between the hard-learned lessons of its militaristic past and the unfulfilled promise of a democratic future.

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NOTES

¹ From the 23 Nov. 1961 issue of the *New York Times*. Film reviewer Bosley Crowther writes, "If you think it would be amusing to see *Macbeth* done in Japanese, then pop around to the Fifth Avenue Cinema and see Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*." Crowther goes on to describe the film as a "free Oriental translation" of the tragedy, an "amusing" conceit whose "odd amalgamation of cultural contrasts hits the occidental funnybone." In an equally jocular vein, the *New Yorker* notes, "if *Macbeth* is your cup of tea," one should enjoy this "Japanese version of the original work by Maurice Evans" (whose more strictly Shakespearean interpretation of the play had won an Emmy earlier that year). Carlos Clarens, writing for the Dec. 1961 issue of *Films in Review*, traces out the direct parallels between the Shakespearean original and Kurosawa's film, and finds the latter clearly wanting: "Dunsinane becomes the Castle of the Spider's Web, the thanes are warlords, and so forth [... but] for US audiences the dark poetry of Shakespeare is gone [...] life has been refined out of it" (622).

² Said of the film by Peter Brook and Grigori Kozintsev, respectively. The quotes are taken from Jorgens 153.

³ From a review in the 1 Dec. 1961 issue of *Time* 76.

⁴ See Collick 175.

⁵ Kurosawa formed a lifetime grudge against these wartime censors, noting in an autobiography written decades later, "I am doing my best right now to suppress the anger that makes my writing about them become violent, but just thinking about them and remembering it all makes me shudder with rage. That is how deep my hatred for them remains" (Kurosawa 119).

⁶ This quote, and the quote following, are taken from the subtitles (trans. Linda Hoaglund) used in the Criterion Collection version of *Throne of Blood*.

⁷ In an interview, Kurosawa delineates this difference between Noh and Western drama: "Drama in the West takes its character from the psychology of men or circumstances; the Noh is different. First of all, the Noh has the mask, and while staring at it, the actor becomes the man whom the mask represents. The performance also has a defined style, and in devoting himself to it faithfully, the actor becomes possessed" (qtd. in Manvell, *Shakespeare and the Film*).

⁸ Jorgens notes, "the endless winding of thread from one spool to another by the forest spirit [...] is an analogue of the Greek Fate Clotho's spinning the thread of life, and of Kurosawa's act of creation—film too winds from spool to spool, and the director, like the spirit, has god-like power and detachment" (156).

⁹ See Giannetti 181.

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