

A Comparison of Scenes from *Macbeth* and *Throne of Blood*

Throne of Blood is an adaptation, not an interpretation, of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: Kurosawa takes Shakespeare's play as his point of departure, but creates a new autonomous work with a new text.

Though Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is based on events reported to have occurred in 11th-century Scotland, his play reflects thematic concerns of early 17th-century England. Like Shakespeare, Kurosawa creates a story that is set in the historical past, but is completely symptomatic of the contemporary context. Kurosawa mythologizes the past to make points about the present.

Use the following comparison table to help you determine how Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* draws on and transforms source material from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. How are the narratives similar? How does Kurosawa's script depart from Shakespeare's play? Note that this comparison does not include framing shots in *Throne of Blood* that contain no dialogue (e.g., exterior shots of the castle, courtyard, etc.). These shots may also be important to our understanding of the action of the film, and may function to replace equivalent descriptions in *Macbeth*.

<i>Macbeth</i>	<i>Throne of Blood</i>
[1.1] Three witches	[1] Ruins of Cobweb Castle; Chorus
[1.2] Battle at Forres reported to Duncan	[2-3] Battle reported to Kuniharu
[1.3] Macbeth and Banquo meet the three witches; the prophecies; Two lords inform Macbeth and Banquo about their promotion	[4-9] Washizu and Miki meet the demon hag; the prophecy [10] Washizu and Miki get lost in the Cobweb Forest [11] Kuniharu promotes Washizu and Miki
[1.4] Duncan, Macbeth, etc., are talking	
[1.5] 1 st scene of the Macbeths—"Look like the innocent flower, / But be the serpent under't"; message of Duncan's arrival	[12-18] 1 st scene of Washizu and Asaji; arrival of Kuniharu
[1.6] Meeting with Duncan	[19] Meeting with Kuniharu
[1.7] 2 nd scene of the Macbeths—"But screw your courage to the sticking-place, / And we'll not fail"; Plan of Duncan's murder	[23-24] 2 nd scene of Washizu and Asaji; Plan of Kuniharu's murder

[2.1] Macbeth sets out to murder Duncan	
[2.2] Lady Macbeth waits; The Macbeths after the murder—"Macbeth shall sleep no more!"	[25-33] Kuniharu's murder; Washizu and Asaji wake up everybody
[2.3] The Porter's scene; Macduff appears and finds out about the murder	
[2.4] Macbeth becomes king; Macduff and Duncan's two son's escape	[34-61] Noriyasu and Hunimaru escape, Washizu chases them; Washizu enters the Cobweb Castle with Kuniharu's coffin
	[62] Washizu's soldiers talk
[3.1] Macbeth commissions the murderers to kill Banquo and his son	
[3.2] 3 rd scene of the Macbeths—"Oh, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!"	[63] 3 rd scene of Washizu and Asaji; they decide on the murder of Miki and his son
	[64-66] Miki and his son talk
[3.3] Banquo's murder; his son escapes	[67] Return of Miki's horse alone
[3.4] Banquet; Murderer reports Banquo's death and his son's escape; Banquo's ghost appears	[68] Banquet; Miki's ghost appears; Later a soldier brings Miki's head; Washizu kills the soldier because Miki's son was not killed
[3.5] Three witches, Hecate	X
[3.6] Talk of the Scottish lords	[69-70] Washizu's soldiers talk
X	[71-75] Asaji's child is still-born

[4.1] Macbeth meets the three witches; the three prophecies	[76-77] Washizu meets the demon hag; the prophecy
[4.2] Murder of Macduff's family	X
[4.3] Report of the murder to Macduff	X
[5.1] Lady Macbeth sleepwalks	
[5.2] England's army appears	[78-79] Noriyasu's army appears
[5.3] Macbeth prepares for the battle—"I will not be afraid of death and bane, / Till Birnam Forest come to Dunsinane."	[80-92] Washizu prepares for the battle
[5.4] England's army; Malcolm orders the army to cut branches	[93-96] Cutting of branches heard; Invasion of the birds
[5.5] Macbeth waits for the battle; Death of Lady Macbeth—"Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow"; Birnam Forest begins to move	[96-98] Asaji goes mad
[5.6] England's army with branches; battle	[99-104] Cobweb Forest begins to move; Washizu killed by his own soldiers
[5.7] Macduff kills Macbeth; Malcolm is the new king	[105] Noriyasu's army approaches Cobweb Castle
X	[106] Ruins of Cobweb Castle; Choir

Character Correlations

Taketoki Washizu = Macbeth
 Asaji = Lady Macbeth
 Yoshiaki Miki = Banquo
 Yoshiteru = Fleance

Kunimaru Tsuzuki = Duncan
 Kunimaru = Malcolm
 Noriyasu Ogagura = Macduff
 Forest Spirit = Three Witches

Lyrics to Songs from *Throne of Blood*

Opening Chorus

(sung over images of the ruins of Cobweb Castle)

Look upon the ruins
Of the castle of delusion
Haunted only now
By the spirits
Of those who perished
A scene of carnage
Born of consuming desire
Never changing
Now and throughout eternity



The Demon Hag's Song¹

Strange is the world
Why should men
Receive life in this world?
Men's lives are as meaningless
As the lives of insects
The terrible folly
Of such suffering
A man lives but
As briefly as a flower
Destined all too soon
To decay into the stink of flesh
Humanity strives
All its days
To sear its own flesh
In the flames of base desire
Exposing itself
To Fate's Five Calamities²
Heaping karma upon karma³
All that awaits Man
At the end
Of his travails
Is the stench of rotting flesh
That will yet blossom into flower
Its foul odor rendered
Into sweet perfume
Oh, fascinating
The life of Man
Oh, fascinating

¹ Kurosawa's hag certainly draws on the three witches of *Macbeth*, but her character also draws on Japanese and East Asian mythological and folk traditions. Some critics interpret her as a forest spirit or a *kami*.

² It is unclear what Fate's Five Calamities are. It has been suggested that they are related to Buddhism's Five Precepts.

³ Karma in Buddhism (as well as Hinduism) is the sum of a person's actions in this and previous states of existence, viewed as deciding their fate in future existences.