



The transformation of the war body on screen in Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth*

A transformação do corpo bélico na tela em Macbeth de Justin Kurzel



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Abstract: this article discusses how the 2015 filmic adaptation of *Macbeth* by Justin Kurzel is embedded in the social and political context of the 21st century in which the wars of Afghanistan and Iraq reverberate in the physical and psychological state of the soldier. In the film, the war body is scarred by multiple violent experiences of battle and emerges as a damaged individual, one that carries the viscerally traumatic past into the present. I analyze how Macbeth's military body undergoes a downward spiraling journey from collective leader to lone tyrant that takes roots in his past violent experiences of immersion into a context of corporeal mutilation and death.

Keywords: war body; cinema; Shakespeare; *Macbeth*; violence.

Resumo: este artigo discute como a adaptação de *Macbeth* (2015), do diretor Justin Kurzel está imersa no contexto social e político do século XXI em que as guerras do Afeganistão e Iraque reverberam no estado físico e psicológico do soldado. No filme, o corpo bélico carrega cicatrizes das múltiplas experiências violentas de batalha e emerge como um indivíduo danificado, aquele que visceralmente carrega o passado traumático para seu presente. Eu analiso como o corpo bélico de Macbeth passa por uma jornada de ruína, transformando-se de líder das massas em um tirano solitário preso em suas raízes de violentas experiências do passado em um contexto de mutilação do corpo e morte.

Palavras-chave: corpo bélico; cinema; Shakespeare; *Macbeth*; violência.

Introduction

One of the most celebrated plays written by William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* is distinguished by its violence and significant emphasis on the themes of ambition and tyranny. In the “Introduction” of the Arden Shakespeare edition of *Macbeth*, Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason observe that “*Macbeth* is a play which attracts superlatives: it is Shakespeare’s shortest tragedy and the fastest moving, [...] it has the most pronounced atmosphere of evil of any of his plays” (2018, p. 1). The presence of witchcraft and the expression of hallucinatory behavior are among the elements that characterize the play’s “power of fantasy”, as Harold Bloom comments in *Shakespeare: the invention of the human* (1998, p. 516). The author explains that “no other drama by Shakespeare [...] engulfs us in a phantasmagoria” (BLOOM, 1998, p. 516) so intense as *Macbeth*. The potential of the mind in the play, exemplified by the central character’s rather ruinous and gory imaginative tendency, places the work, in Bloom’s opinion, as “‘a tragedy of blood,’ not just in its murders but in the ultimate implications of Macbeth’s imagination itself being bloody” (1998, p. 520). Mind and body forces are intertwined in a complex way in the play, resulting in a tragic struggle for sanity in which the concepts of morality and humanity are challenged.

Themes such as the ones perceived in *Macbeth* and others have drawn attention of filmmakers for centuries, inspiring adaptations of the most varied formats. Russell Jackson, in the “Introduction” of *The Cambridge companion to Shakespeare on film*, highlights that “it has been estimated that during the ‘silent era’—before synchronized dialogue complicated the business of adapting poetic drama for the screen—there were more than 400 films on Shakespearean subjects” (2000, p. 2). The popularity of Shakespeare’s plays continues to be visible in the consistent number of filmic adaptations released in 1990s and in the 21st century, translating diverse themes into contexts that cross temporal and geographical borders. Bloom credits such recognition to Shakespeare’s “universalism, global and multicultural,” acknowledging the playwright’s “pervasive presence in the most unlike contexts: here, there, and everywhere” (1998, p. 3). A similar perception is shown by Mark T. Burnett and Romona Wray in the “Introduction” of *Screening Shakespeare in the twenty-first century*, as the authors observe that Shakespeare’s “plays are enabled to broach a spectrum of local and global twenty-first-century concerns, from the dangers of terrorism to the workings of a ‘McDonaldized’ world” (2006, p. 8). This notion becomes uniquely significant in this article as the 2015 filmic adaptation of *Macbeth*

by Justin Kurzel can be read in connection to the mental and physical trials of contemporary warfare.

One of the possible interpretations of Kurzel's adaptation is the play's treatment as embedded in the social and political context of the 21st century in which the wars of Afghanistan and Iraq reverberate in the physical and psychological state of the figure of the soldier. In the film, the war body is scarred by multiple violent experiences of battle and emerges as a damaged individual, one that carries the viscerally traumatic past into the present. The war body is experienced on the screen through a performance that allows the body of the leader to be constructed in "the linkages between material corporeality, praxis, and perception" (WAGNER, 2008, p. 52). In this article, I analyze how *Macbeth*'s military body is depicted as undergoing a downward spiraling journey from collective leader to lone tyrant that takes his past violent experiences of immersion into a context of corporeal mutilation and death, reverberating in phantasmagorical incidents. The film portrays the war body engulfed in an abstract landscape of vibrant colors that reflect psychological states in a momentarily transportation of the body into a parallel space of contemplation of the phenomenon of death. This sensorial exploration takes place particularly in the battle scenes that bookend the film, which are the focus of the cinematic investigation of this article. I carry out a thorough stylistic analysis of selected scenes, by describing them in terms of cinematic elements such as *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, editing, and sound. Such detailed examination will allow the making of connections to the themes of mental and physical decadence present in the film to understand the transformation of the main character in the narrative and its reverberations to a contemporary historical context.

In terms of adapting Shakespeare's works, even though the time gap between the writing of the plays and the translation of the texts into a different medium, namely cinema, is extensive, adaptations rely on the universality of the themes and the specificity of the media in order to attempt to add layers of nuances to such well-known poetry and prose. Burnett and Wray point out that Shakespeare's "works continue to reverberate, and the plays persist as repositories of lore and tradition even as they are reworked as salient signifiers of meaning and knowledge" (2006, p. 1). The historical context in which the filmic adaptations are produced, the geographical location, and political scenario are among some decisive factors for the meaning attributed to the symbolic representations in the transposition from play to film. As it will be seen in this article, the realization of Kurzel's *Macbeth* in a late post 9/11 context, in which the wars of Afghanistan and Iraq still bear consequences to the countries involved

can be considered as a factor behind choices of themes, plot, and acting. Burnett and Wray expand their discussion on adaptation by highlighting that “Shakespeare, in the post-2000 period, moves among and between a range of screen incarnations, which encompass adaptations, documentaries, cinema advertisements, post-colonial reinventions and mass-media citations, and which test the boundaries of conventional idioms and mediums” (2006, p. 2). Each different language carries its own attributes and features distinct ways of portraying issues either through verbal or visual elements.

When comparing theater and film, one of the major divergences pointed out by Anthony Davies in *Filming Shakespeare's plays* is related to the different kinds of space portrayed in each medium. The author claims that “the action on the theater stage is encapsulated within an ‘aesthetic microcosm,’ [and that] even where the décor and the set aim to bring spatial illusions close to reality the stage can never strive for verisimilitude on its own” (DAVIES, 1990, p. 5). Davies brings the perspective of space in film as he states that “the cinema frame does not encapsulate action within a microcosm. It isolates a central element in the action, but the full extent of that action—and of the spatial and social contexts of that action—must be credible beyond the constraints of the frame” (1990, p. 6). Such characteristics do not limit each one of the mediums, on the contrary, they foreground the possibility of creativity employed in each language within its material and imaginative constraints. In Kurzel's *Macbeth*, for instance, space gains wide and varied layers of visual representation, from the cold and unforgiving mountains of Scotland to the open and deadly battlefields, and the stifling interiors that illustrate the personal agony of the characters. Hence, the adaptations of Shakespeare into film rely on these notions of space, making use of the possibilities that cinema offers, but encompassed in what Jack J. Jorgens in *Shakespeare on film* observes: “in a sense *all* Shakespeare films are translations” (1977, p. 14). The specificity of cinema's tools, such as close-ups, traveling shots, and editing, contribute to a re-appropriation of Shakespeare's works into new forms of storytelling. Re-imagining celebrated Shakespearean narratives and characters for contemporary audiences seems to be a challenge attempted by filmmakers to expand and question the signification and relevance of the plays.

In terms of character development, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* presents the main character as someone who is trapped in his own imagination of violence by portraying his body as at times masculine and ravaged. Bloom describes Macbeth as “a great killing machine,” whose brutal behavior is exemplified by the graphic detailing of a lethal strike on the enemy: “a death wound from the navel all the way up to his jaw, a mode of unseaming that introduces us to Macbeth's quite astonishing

ferocity” (1998, p. 516). His masculine side is highlighted in certain moments in the play, particularly when mentioning his battle accomplishments, but the deteriorating mental process due to the enacting of murders and overwhelming pursuit of power weaken his stealth figure. Clark and Mason observe “he cannot sleep and is shaken nightly by ‘terrible dreams,’ his mind is ‘full of scorpions,’ his looks are ‘rugged,’ he has fits, flaws and starts, and his heart throbs. His intense self-consciousness and his ability to draw the audience into his own perceptual system are largely responsible for the fact he comes across not just as a villain but also as a suffering hero” (2018, p. 4). The physical toll of the mental complications is present in the play, as his body is associated to impotence and childlessness, leaving Macbeth in a “perpetual state of fear” (BLOOM, 1998, p. 530) regarding succession and the quest for greatness.

As I will analyze the transformation of Macbeth’s war body in Kurzel’s filmic adaptation, a brief understanding of the history of representation of the war body on screen becomes a significant point of discussion. The war body in cinema has been depicted in a variety of ways, ranging from heroic portrayals of victory to depictions of chaotic waste and vulnerability. Karen Randell and Sean Redmond observe the war body in cinema can be “employed to make sense of terror, conflict, and warfare” (2008, p. 1) and they are significantly “subject to cultural, historical, and political ascription” (2008, p. 4). To represent the body immersed in the context of war is to assign a symbolic meaning to its attitudes and outward image. The war film genre supplies examples of ideological connotations associated with the corporeal figure of the soldier, for instance, in *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), directed by Allan Dwan, John Wayne plays Sergeant Stryker in a portrayal of the “screen image of a conquering war body” (RANDELL; REDMOND, 2008, p. 4) through his hypermasculine behavior of confidence and bravery. A contrasting scenario is seen in *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), directed by Steven Spielberg, in which the corporeal damage inflicted to the bodies of the soldiers “creates a different iconography, which views male bodies as a site of vulnerability” (HAGELIN, 2008, p. 106). Such representations of the war body differ due to the social and political context in which they are immersed, the former film as a product of a post-war patriotic propaganda and the latter as a reminiscence of the Vietnam War’s iconography. In relation to the portrayal of the war body in filmic Shakespearean adaptations, Kenneth Branagh’s *Henry V* (1989) brings the body of a leader who, in the aftermath of the battle of Agincourt, “takes into itself and onto itself the things of war, ingests them, and redisplayes them as a different kind of living image” (WAGNER, 2008, p. 57). As Henry (Kenneth Branagh) carries the body of a dead boy, the wastefulness of war and the consequences of violence are

highlighted through the performance of the leader's weary body and the tactile nature of his attitude. In a post-Falklands War context, the film highlights the importance of survival and homecoming as opposed to the fruitless deaths on the battlefield.

Kurzel's *Macbeth* can be read as inserted in a post-9/11 environment that brings to the forefront issues related to the soldiers who have experienced combat in the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A condition that has been in the past called "shell-shock" or "battle fatigue," PTSD "refers to distress that follows a major stressful life event" (PARIS, 2016, p. 1). This condition is not only related to the trauma itself, but the incapability of overcoming the traumatic event, leading to effects such as flashbacks of stressful situations, hallucinations, irritability, sleep deprivation, among others (PARIS, 2016). During the conference at the premiere of Kurzel's *Macbeth* in the 68th Cannes Film Festival in 2015, actor Michael Fassbender, who plays the title role, comments on the possibility of the contemporary facet of the film regarding Macbeth's condition in the narrative. In the online *Macbeth* conference, he says "this character is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. It was Justin [Kurzel] that said that to me in one of our first conversations and that changed everything for me" (MACBETH..., 2015). The construction of Macbeth's body as a seasoned warrior who feels the toll of horrifying battle experiences is linked to the contextual viewpoint of information retrieved from veterans of the post-9/11 wars. Fassbender explains "we know from soldiers coming back from Iraq or Afghanistan that describe post-traumatic stress disorder and the fact that they have these hallucinations. They can be walking down the Croisette here and it's Basra. All of a sudden it's Basra" (MACBETH..., 2015). In the film, Macbeth is haunted by past experiences from the battlefield and, in particular, the loss of youth in the figure of a fallen young soldier who consistently reappears in Macbeth's visions. Ari Mattes (2015), in an online article *The Conversation*, points out "the film seems to judge Macbeth's warriorship by oddly contemporary standards of heroism, in which war is seen as a process of self-annihilation rather than hero-formation." The flashbacks of combat, the reappearance of ghosts killed in extremely violent circumstances, and Macbeth's constant immersion in bloody affairs locate his body in a constant psychological state in association with death and gore.

The analysis of the war body in film can be connected to the perception of its performativity. Matthew Wagner (2008) observes it is possible to experience the war body on the screen through "a framework of performance" in which the embodiment of a warrior-leader essence relies on being publicly shared and examined. The author comments on the fact that performance can be seen as "the link between

the materiality of the performing body and phenomenal perception of the viewer” (WAGNER, 2008, p. 52). One of the elements brought by Kurzel's *Macbeth* is the placing of the performative body of war, a body that effectively executes violent acts, in a space of sensorial enlargement and detachment from the world outside combat through the use of overwhelmingly saturated colors in the battle scenes. Wagner mentions the performing war body is created in “a process of disclosure,” that is, “a body will be a body of a warrior-king when it chooses to show itself as such” (2008, p. 53). In the film, Macbeth's body is initially constructed as a warrior through the graphic emphasis of his brutal actions on the battlefield, but gradually loses its strength as his corporeal portrayal is highly impacted by his unstable mental state and violent attitude outside combat. These conditions lead to the final battle in which the depiction of his lone war body is stripped away from the collective support that once marked his performance as suitable for the combat context.

The performativity of the war body on the screen also has a connection with “metaperformative processes” that link the characters with the actors and their filmography (WAGNER, 2008, p. 53). Macbeth has been played in film by a variety of actors, ranging from Orson Welles in 1948, who also directed the movie, Toshiro Mifune in Akira Kurosawa's version of the play in 1957, and Jon Finch in Roman Polanski's adaptation in 1971. A significant element in Kurzel's *Macbeth* is the casting of Michael Fassbender who displays a filmography with an intense focus on the performance of the body. In *Hunger* (2008), directed by Steve McQueen, Fassbender plays Bobby Sands, an Irish nationalist, who goes on a hunger strike while imprisoned in the 1980s. The film focuses on the protest through the weariness and thinness of the body, accentuating Fassbender's corporeal transformation to connect to the ideological messages of the narrative about politics and resistance. Another film starred by Fassbender that focuses on the performance of the body is *Shame*, also directed by Steve McQueen, in 2011. The actor plays a sex addict who lives in New York immersed in a dysfunctional relationship with family and friends. The film foregrounds the body in the numerous explicit sex scenes, constructing it as a site of compulsive yearnings and desires. Fassbender's performance of the character builds a complex depiction of the boundaries between corporeal pleasure and emotional involvement. The process of metaperformativity of the war body for Wagner is connected to “the ability to have—and display—a body that resonates with corporeal attributes of other bodies from across historical divides” (2008, p. 55). In this case, Fassbender's filmography demonstrates an intricate relationship with the potential of the body to convey ideologies and criticisms on the screen, whether they are linked to

the physical resistance of the body or its indulgence in pleasures, adding to his layered performance of a warrior turned lone tyrant in Kurzel's *Macbeth*.

The war body as a leader

The film opens with the image of the body of Macbeth's dead child, establishing one of the main themes of the narrative: the contemplation of death. The wind rustles the vegetation around the child's still body and the fringes of the cloth that envelop his head. Contemplation is directly linked to the act of witnessing as the next shot shows the mourners, Macbeth, Lady Macbeth (Marion Cotillard), Banquo (Paddy Considine), and Fleance (Lochlann Harris) desolately looking at the body lying on the ground. Macbeth's figure is firstly introduced shrouded by a tunic that only reveals his forlorn face while enacting his last parental duty in the burial of his child. His body is not of a warrior or a leader, but a gloomy father and husband who beholds the loss of youth and the shortening of his lineage. As part of the burial ceremony, the child's body is burned, and the fire is established as a significant motif in the film that resonates with the idea of being a propeller of death that slowly disintegrates the body into ashes, making it unrecognizable.

Landscape then becomes a focal point of the visual depiction of the surrounding territory in which the narrative takes place, and particularly the upcoming battle sequence, to situate the characters in the grandeur of the Scottish mountain chains. The predominance of blue and gray filters in the portrayal of these images, accompanied by the dramatic score, add to the somber tone of the events. The stillness of the snowy mountain tops in contrast with the quick pace in which the fog moves across the screen point to the harshness and vivacity of the environment. These images lead to the atmosphere of unforgiveness regarding the cycle of life and death experienced by Macbeth's family in the previous scene and the gruesome events in the impending battle. David Melbye explains that in cinema "setting can also have a psychological dimension functioning beyond the supportive role of backdrop [that] reflect[s] inner subjective states" of the characters (2010, p. 1). In the online *Macbeth* conference at Cannes, Kurzel observes the significance of landscape to the characters is related to "how the landscape informs their tragedy, how it makes them feel very small amongst this extraordinary story, how it intimidates them" (MACBETH..., 2015). The surroundings are not only scenery where the narrative unfolds, but function as a powerful reminder of characters' inner psychological conditions.

The battle sequence starts with the idea of collectivity and bonding as Macbeth's soldiers arrive through a thick fog in a panning shot. Macbeth himself is surrounded by his fellow soldiers, who move in unison and display similar war-related corporeal features, such as battle weaponry and war-painted faces. With three straight black lines roughly painted across their faces, the seasoned warriors exhibit a battle readiness that contrasts with the group of young soldiers across the field. Sent by King Duncan (David Thewlis) as an effort to reinforce the Scottish lines against Macdonwald (Hilton McRae), the child-looking soldiers are presented with clean faces. The film depicts their immaculate bodies in a series of close-ups of their young facial features, highlighting a sense of unsuitability to the brutal task to be accomplished in the upcoming moments. The experienced soldiers proceed to prepare the young ones for battle by fastening the swords to their hands and wrists and painting their faces. Transformation of the body of youth into the war body is not a complete metamorphosis, on the contrary, as it only emphasizes the vulnerability and inexperience of those about to enter a lethal confrontation. Macbeth assists one young soldier in particular by binding the sword to his hand and carefully painting three lines across his face, preparing the young body to become a weapon mirrored in his own image, perpetuating his war legacy. Macbeth finishes the preparation of the body for battle by affectionately caressing the boy's face, similarly to how he would do to a loved one, in an attempt to comfort the young soldier who is visually petrified by the thought of combat and his apparent unfitness for the harshness of the situation. Although the preparations for war can be linked to the way the soldiers bond by praying together and helping each other, this scene symbolizes the arrangements for death, a previous contemplation of the act of dying, and a last interaction among the characters whose uncertain fate in battle is about to unfold.

The battle itself is depicted as a plunge into the microcosm of combat since there is no overall visual understanding of the geographical and tactical positions of the armies. The immersion into the action of the battlefield initiates as Macbeth and his soldiers appear in combat-ready posture, facing the opposing army stationed in the right off-screen area. The soldiers' bodies rock back and forth in a demonstration of restlessness and anxiety for the upcoming clash. Macbeth leads the attack by raising his sword and screaming, actions that are readily followed by the rest of the soldiers, depicting a corporeal and ideological synchronicity among them. His leadership status is confirmed in a tracking shot ahead of the mass of soldiers as they charge towards the camera. Macbeth is framed in the center, his armored war-painted body

displays a fearless posture surrounded by the soldiers who are unified by the same violent purpose.

Changes in image speed, from a portrayal of regular motion to slow motion, are used to foreground the acts of violence and the effects on the body. As David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson observe, slow motion is “used for emphasis, becoming a way of dwelling on a moment” (2008, p. 168). The first slow motion shows the mass of soldiers approaching the enemy in an extreme long shot. This image highlights the immensity of people on the battlefield and builds an expectation of the clash between the two parties. During the slow-motion scenes, audio becomes a sound similar to a muffled vibration that stands as a stark contrast to the normal speed scenes in which the shouts of the soldiers fill the aural space of the film. An abrupt cut thrusts the audience back to experiencing normal speed, and this time the camera is positioned among Macbeth's men, tracking right behind the leader. The sounds of armor clanking and cheering voices inundate the screen only as the camera is unceremoniously plucked out of the battleground and placed in the gap that separates the two armies. Slow motion and the humming sound accentuate the anticipation for the physical encounter of the opposing bodies. A long shot in slow motion of Macbeth shows him jumping with his sword, ready to strike the enemy down. When Macbeth's sword touches his enemy's weapon, the speed returns to normal and the chaotic sounds and images of battle take the forefront. Macbeth's combat posture becomes increasingly brutal as he swings his sword and strikes down as many men as possible. He not only uses his sword but also resorts to a more corporeal involvement by using his fists. These images construct the culmination of his war body in action, that is, the depiction of a determined and unflinching leader who embodies and performs the role of a warrior. He shows himself as a sanguinary killer, altering the space around him and constituting it as a site of communal violence. Wagner comments that “the war body stretches its skin, projects its interior onto the exterior, and creates, transforms, becomes a new environment, a war space” (2008, p. 61). In the film, Macbeth's corporeal behavior is portrayed as an essential element for the perception of the performance of violence on the battlefield.

The transposition of the characters' inner emotional states into filmic color is foregrounded as the presence of the three witches and the young boy is more emphasized in the combat. As battle progresses, its lack of chronological attachment is accentuated as a way of sensorially representing the chaotic state of events. Some images depict an unusual behavior on the battlefield, such as Macbeth standing still in a daze, looking at something that inhabits the off-screen space.

The slow-motion medium long shot of the motionless warrior, a contrast to his previous active behavior, denotes the creation of a different war space, a parallel place of sensorial contemplation. The fog essentially blurs the surroundings and temporarily transports the body of the leader to an undetermined geographical position, one that brings to the surface the emotional state of the character through its performativity, change in film speed, and color emphasis. Macbeth's point-of-view shot reveals the three witches standing just outside the battlefield. The shot that depicts the witches demonstrates a profound change in the color scheme of the film as yellow hues are predominant in the image. In an interview for the online *VFX Magazine*, Adam Glasman (2015), the film's colorist, explains:

the opening battle has a cool blueish feel, and then for occasional shots we'd jump around so that we see the witches in the battle and everything becomes yellow. That's intentional; it's not supposed to match. The fact that Macbeth's hallucinating or certainly seeing something mystical meant that they could look different, because those shots are his point of view (POV), you see him in the battle and his POV is the witches and that's where the color jumps.

The blue and grey tones of the battle sequence that convey the harshness of the situation and emphasize the coldness of metal are disrupted by the yellow prominence of the witches' image, a reflection of Macbeth's psychological state.

It is when the battle representation completely loses its chronological linearity that a montage of the horrors of combat becomes the focal point of the film. The tactile nature of the depiction of violence is foregrounded in the images that portray the bodies of the soldiers in close combat. Their corporeal intimacy alongside the almost stillness of their movements, due to the slow-motion effect, create instances of contemplation of the moment of death and violation of the body, resembling a series of paintings. This representation of the carnage of combat evokes, for instance, the works of Goya in terms of the focus on the brutal consequences of warfare to the body. In Kurzel's *Macbeth*, these canvasses explore the particularities of the penetration of flesh by swords and the act of disembowelment of the enemy with the purpose of solidifying the ruthless context in which Macbeth is inserted. The battlefield is depicted as a nightmarish spectacle of atrocities, culminating in the death of the young soldier who was shown earlier in the narrative making arrangements for battle. In a slow-motion medium close-up, the boy has his throat cut while screaming, a shot that is both disturbing and detailed due to the scrutinizing

focus on the line of blood created by the cut of the knife on his neck. The body of the young soldier slowly descends out of frame, losing vitality as it falls.

The combination of the horrors of combat with the wasteland of bodies in the aftermath of battle becomes a somatic point of connection to Macbeth's psychological damage caused by warfare. As in an echo of the initial burial scene of the child, the young boy's body is depicted lying on the ground with the wind rustling the dry vegetation around him while Macbeth watches mournfully, contemplating once again the death of youth. Banquo and Macbeth drag the young soldier to a pile of bodies and as the latter carries another body on his shoulders, he sadly declares "so foul and fair a day I have not seen." There is an emphasis on the complexity between feelings of satisfaction for the victory and discontent for the wastefulness of war. The two seasoned warriors stare at the pile of bodies that demonstrates the singular universe in which they inhabit, the space of war. Battlefield signifies a zone of exception, where the infliction of violence and death becomes a way of survival, but also a source of psychological scarring that runs deep into the psyche of the warrior and accompanies him in the life outside combat.

Macbeth's performance as a military body is foregrounded in the scene in which he assists in the amputation of a soldier's hand. Macbeth holds the soldier against his own body, affectionally enveloping the man into his arms. The soldier's body covers Macbeth's, in a corporeal depiction that markedly "clothe[s] the leader's body in the things of war" (WAGNER, 2008, p. 58). Besides the weapons and armor, Macbeth's body is visually represented in a warlike manner through the extreme tactile connection with his own soldiers, gestures that demonstrate an intense level of comradeship and engagement with the context of warfare. The confirmation of one of the witches' prophecies is given during this scene when Macbeth is told the news he has become Thane of Cawdor, an event that initiates his transformation from the body of a leader to a lone king. This period of transition is hinted as Macbeth visits the body of the young soldier, now in a communal burial space. The warrior places two rocks on the boy's eyes, similarly to how he did with his own child early in the film. He puts his face closer to the young soldier's body and says "present fears are less than horrible imaginings." The subject of death permeates the scene in a complex way since while Macbeth witnesses the ravaged state of the soldier's body, a result of violent acts, he contemplates the thoughts of murder regarding the prophecy of becoming king. The corrupt workings of the mind and the horrors of battle are juxtaposed in this scene. The dead and alive bodies are constructed as

signifiers of messages regarding the devastation of violence and Macbeth's internal struggle concerning the act of killing.

The body of the tyrant

As Macbeth returns home and sheds his warrior armor, the memories of battle relentlessly accompany him, particularly while he struggles with the decision of murdering King Duncan. The haunting of the atrocities committed and witnessed in combat is represented in the film as Macbeth finds himself being mentally transported to a past space of war. He is isolated into a world of chaotic memories that suggests psychological injury from combat. Differently from how the battle scenes are portrayed earlier in the film, Macbeth's memories are depicted in a fast-forward manner, demonstrating how the remembrance of events is impacted by a person's psychological state. In one of his memories, while he is framed in the middle of the battlefield, the action around him unfolds in an accelerated speed. The montage of war memories includes the recurring yellow-hued image of the witches and blue-toned image of the young soldier in despair during combat. In the representation of Macbeth's inner world, the focus is not on his victories and accomplishments. On the contrary, the absence of an atmosphere of heroism is contrasted with the haunting aftereffects of warfare which leads to his isolation as a returning soldier.

The scene continues as Macbeth sees the first apparition of the young soldier who holds the dagger and leads the way to Duncan's tent. Dressed in combat clothes, with his bloody throat bearing the cutting marks, the figure of the boy has a layered signification as a reminder of the past horrors and Macbeth's own troubled mind that keeps reminiscing the violence that was witnessed and enacted in combat. Moreover, it is through the memory of the boy who belongs in the parallel dimension of the battlefield and the recollection of Macbeth's warrior-self that the seasoned soldier musters the courage to kill Duncan. The body of the warrior is evoked here to conquer the fear of indecision, but this time Macbeth stands alone without his army. His PTSD condition is highlighted in this scene as the memories from battlefield flood his mind, giving shape to the figure of the young soldier slayed in combat. Randell and Redmond point out "the notion of the unwanted return of the war body is a recurring trope of war trauma testimonies" (2008, p. 6). By depicting the hallucinatory sighting of the young dead soldier, particularly in connection with the king's murder, the film focuses on the downfall process of the collective leader into a lone figure who is psychologically injured and at the mercy of his isolated world of traumatic memories.

The return of the body of the dead continues in the film, this time in connection with the violence enacted by Macbeth after he is crowned king. Through acts of murder, such as the killing of Duncan and Banquo, Macbeth's body is gradually stripped away of the elements of leadership and eventually relinquished to the status of a tyrant. His deep immersion into a world of mental distress is foregrounded in the banquet scene in which he sees Banquo's ghost. The entire sequence is colored in yellow tones, a reminder of the pigmentation used in the image of the eerie sighting of the witches. The increase in Macbeth's mental distress is depicted as not only one shot is singled out as a hallucinatory vision, but the scene as a whole is tainted by the atmosphere of unbalance, similarly to how Macbeth is being thoroughly consumed by the haunting of his past murderous actions. Banquo's body returns with a significant detail: his war-painted face recalls the battlefield context, the time when Macbeth was still the bearer of the body of a warrior and leader. The three black lines painted across Banquo's face bring the combat past to the foreground while his overall presence is a reminder of a much more recent atrocity. As Adele Parker observes, the image of the returned soldier "embod[ies] the subjective experience of living past and present simultaneously, and it is precisely when this experience becomes externalized that it becomes unnatural and unsettling" (2008, p. 97). The uncommon and distressing elements of the sighting are commented by Macbeth when he says "the time has been that when the brains were out, the man would die, and there an end. But now they rise again and push us from our stools." The apparitions solidify the theme of circularity of violence as corporeal reminders of the acts of the past and the consequences in the future.

In the banquet sequence, Lady Macbeth plays an important role in attempting to maintain Macbeth's status as a leader. Her effort to dismiss the atmosphere of strangeness caused by her husband's erratic behavior is frustrated as Macbeth's hallucinations become more substantial and he displays his unstable self in public. When she approaches Macbeth, who stands in the middle of the hall in horror with the sighting of Banquo's specter, he places his body extremely close to her in an attempt to involve her in his own vision of the deceased soldier. Lady Macbeth escorts him back to the table, trying to stifle the strangeness of his words and actions, but his transformation is too apparent. Her efforts to return Macbeth to his old self are a reminder of the former body of the king, of what it should be in terms of posture and speech, and generate an opposite reaction, that is, of highlighting his mental and physical consumption by apparitions and fear in a constant dialogue with unseen figures.

The bodies of the soldiers perished in combat return in an appearance of an army of the dead as bearers of prophecies to Macbeth. This sequence relies on the juxtaposition of yellow and blue film tones to navigate the psychological nuances of Macbeth's perception of events. After being told of his prospects of invincibility by the witches, Macbeth walks through a foggy field in the opposite direction of the returned bodies of his soldiers who warn him against the threat posed by Macduff (Sean Harris). Saturated in yellow hues, the scene depicts the soldiers with swords in their hands, walking toward an off-screen space without making visual contact with Macbeth. The army that once marched with their leader, treads a contrary direction. The film color suffers a sudden change when the young soldier arrives, a portrayal saturated in blue tones. This representation signifies an abrupt return of Macbeth's mental state to the battlefield since this pigmentation has been associated with combat throughout the film. The figure of the young soldier dressed in combat clothes and with his exposed mortal wounds brings a certain familiarity to Macbeth who demonstrates a soft smile. After the boy delivers part of the prophecy which refers to the fact that no man born of a woman will be able to kill Macbeth, the two hug each other. The hallucinatory presence of the young soldier and the affection that Macbeth displays towards him lead to the idea of the complex process of bonding during warfare and the effects of such closeness.

The construction of a comradeship environment and the consequences of witnessing tragic loss on the battlefield are topics that have increasingly been brought to discussion in war studies. Sebastian Junger (2015), a war journalist and filmmaker involved in the coverage of contemporary conflicts, explains in an online interview for the *Vanity Fair* that according to research, for modern-day soldiers the loss of a close teammate is the worst event that can happen during deployment. He observes that the experience of having a friend die "serves as a trigger for psychological breakdown on the battlefield and re-adjustment difficulties after the soldier has returned home" (JUNGER, 2015). In the film, Macbeth clearly shows a fondness for the young soldier while he is alive as well as in the moments of the boy's return after death. Macbeth's mental focus on the atmosphere of the battlefield and reminiscence of the dead soldiers portrays a process of retreat into his own psychological world populated by the memories of loyalty and bonding.

Macbeth's body is foregrounded as lacking the attributes of collective leadership and purpose in the montage that depicts his isolation and mental unbalance. The transformation from the body of a leader to the body of a secluded

king is emphasized in his attempt to keep some military elements of corporeal endurance only to be dragged into a world of dazed contemplation. In the montage, Macbeth is alone in his spacious bedroom where he swirls his sword as if practicing his skills for battle, sprints and jogs from one side to the other. Although he attempts to keep some corporeal elements of his warrior-self, his body is no longer constructed as such. At times he stands still in the middle of the room, his body rocking back and forth as if in a trance. Lennox's (David Hayman) voice-over adds to the deconstruction of Macbeth as a trustworthy leader when he says "those he commands move only in command. Nothing in love." The performance of Macbeth's body is summarized in Lennox's testimony of people's reaction to how the King discloses himself outwardly, an embodiment lacking collective connection with his soldiers.

The final battle sequence of the film exemplifies in an intense manner the transposition of Macbeth's thoughts and emotions into screen pigmentation, allowing the King's body to inhabit a site without spatial boundaries. The dominant color of this scene is red, a reminder of the motif of fire that permeates the narrative. Death and disintegration surround the use of fire, either during burials or executions. Glasman (2015) explains the red hues convey an atmosphere "as if Macbeth had entered his own version of hell." Besides the saturated use of color that addresses the senses directly, the smoke and ashes from the burning forest add to the creation of a parallel space of war, one that is not located in a particular geographical location, but that functions as a projection of the inner turmoil of the characters. The two protagonists of the fight are Macbeth, who attempts to solidify his place as a king by removing all possible threats, and Macduff who seeks revenge for his family's murder.

Dressed in his warrior clothes and with war paint on his face, a hollow emulation of his old self, Macbeth faces Macduff without a loyal army close to him since his performative body as a leader has lost all justification by the end of the film. Instead of a group of warriors, Macbeth is accompanied by a spectral army that distantly lurks in the background, silently watching the events. The fight is portrayed as an intimate encounter of the two characters that alternates between normal speed and slow motion. The moments in which they manage to wound each other are sensorially magnified through a slower speed of image, one that allows the contemplation of the streams of spurting blood. One of the points of contrast between the initial and the final battle sequences is that the latter juxtaposes dialogue with fighting choreography. By dividing his attention between the raw warrior energy and the exposition of thoughts that have consumed him throughout the narrative,

Macbeth opens space for a verbal exchange that eventually leads to the discovery of the vulnerability of his body.

During the face-off, *Macbeth* pins *Macduff* down and forces a sword to his throat, constructing a moment of proximity and revelation. At this point in the narrative, *Macbeth*'s bravery is reinforced by the belief in his invincibility, his "charmed life" in which no man born of a woman can threaten his kingdom. *Macduff* then reveals he was "from his mother's womb untimely ripped," an information that reverses the odds of the fight and condemns *Macbeth*'s body to be vulnerable, an ordinary body, not of a leader, warrior, or king. As *Macduff* strikes him, the close-up shot highlights the running blood from the wound that cascades down *Macbeth*'s fingers. His body is exposed, penetrated by *Macduff*'s weapon and liable to perish. Although *Macbeth* is wounded and lacking soldierly energy, he says "before my body I throw my warlike shield" in an attempt to evoke the past atmosphere of his old self, a body infused with the legacy of combat and brotherhood. Even as *Macbeth* has a dagger in his hand and welcomes the continuation of the fight, his body no longer functions as a warrior and his performance lacks any sort of justification or sense of righteousness. The intimate two-shot close-up of the characters depicts a king who waits for *Macduff* to strike, almost like an act of brotherhood, bringing an end to *Macbeth*'s reign.

Unlike Welles' and Polanski's films, in which *Macbeth*'s head is decapitated, Kurzel's film opts for a different approach concerning the demise of *Macbeth*'s body. Instead of suffering any kind of mutilation, *Macbeth*'s dead body is shown on his knees, with his head down, focusing on its unnatural stillness in comparison to its active performance in previous battlefields. This contrast brings to the surface the lack of power attributed to his now deceased body, one that sits passively on the Scottish landscape as *Malcolm*'s (Jack Reynor) soldiers pass by in a high-angle long shot. The insignificance attributed to *Macbeth*'s body at this point, even though he has exterior features of a warrior, is highlighted in a long shot that depicts his silhouette sitting lonely in the landscape, surrounded by towering mountains. His physical body is whole, but the hollowness of his corporeal performance endures through the aftereffects of his murderous past actions. There is no ceremony to honor the end of his kingdom or friendly soldier to provide a funeral. His lonely body remains out in the open, belonging now to a space of death. The final moments of the film offer a glimpse into the cyclical nature of life and death, juxtaposing *Macbeth*'s dead body and *Fleance*'s liveness as he takes the former king's sword and runs into the open field. *Fleance*, who once had his life in jeopardy as he threatened the fluidity

of Macbeth's reign, is in possession of the very sword belonging to the king, a sign of the inevitability of the witches' prophecy about Banquo's children becoming kings.

Conclusion

The film foregrounds the cyclical nature of human existence by focusing on the role of youth and how death becomes a procreator force instead of a strictly destructive element. The persistent reminders of the sorrowful atmosphere concerning the passing of young characters such as the dead child early in the narrative and the dead young soldier on the battlefield only accentuate the perverseness of Macbeth's actions when he attempts to kill Fleance and burns Macduff's children at the stake. Macbeth's body as a father and warrior facing the death of youth is portrayed in a very different manner from the post-heroic body of Macbeth who is constantly endeavoring to impose sterility on the world around him by killing or attempting to kill the children that threaten his throne. Youth is connected to the loss of heritage and the continuation of legacies, two contrasting positions in which the event of death becomes the decisive element. Death is seen as a force that originates situations and generates attitudes that have consequences in the narrative. According to James Calderwood, "death, perversely procreative, refuses to be terminal. The murder of Duncan begets the revengeful Malcolm, the murder of Banquo begets Fleance and a line of kings leading to James I, and the murder of Macduff's family begets the killer of Macbeth" (1987, p. 124-125). The cycle of life, with its journey across the depiction of youth and death, is represented as an unstoppable force in the film, one that takes place in the vast and unmoving landscapes of Scotland.

Kurzel's *Macbeth* focuses the narrative as a tale of haunting in its portrayal of how the past is enmeshed into the present and how the memories of death and violent acts, whether on the battlefield or in the struggle for greatness, keep resurfacing. Macbeth is depicted as the embodiment of psychological deterioration caused by warfare in a link to contemporary views of PTSD symptoms. His body in battle is constructed in a way that can be connected to elements of leadership and brotherhood, but the toll of the brutalities experienced during combat alter such corporeal composition. Possibilities of greatness and power associated with the haunting past of violence transform the performance of Macbeth's body from a warrior to a king without justification for his actions. The film highlights such psychological states through the saturated colors that differ during the atmosphere of collective combat, lone confrontations, and hallucinations. The speed of the film also adds to the focus on the violent corporeal clashing between the bodies of the soldiers and the

perception of battle as a subjective and turbulent event. The contemporary element of the returning soldier and the intricacies of the psychological state in which they find themselves after undergoing traumatic incidents are additional points that can be observed in Kurzel's *Macbeth*. There is an emphasis on what constitutes corporeal masculinity and a post-heroic war imaginary through the lenses of a contemporary view of warfare. The film brings a complex layered version, in thematic and visual terms, to the already rich story of *Macbeth* by offering a sensorial exploration of how violence in the space of war can have ramifications into the inner psychological worlds of the characters whether they are inside or outside the battlefield.

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