

Violence and Politics in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*

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In a provocative reading of the early scenes of *Macbeth*, Harry Berger argues that critics have failed to notice the deeper irony of the play.¹ Most readers view *Macbeth* as a tyrant whose violent occupation of the Scottish throne represents an aberration from Scotland's usual, and therefore also sacred, political order. On this view *Macbeth*'s defeat by *Macduff* returns Scotland to its rightful order in both the human and natural worlds. The restoration of human (i.e., moral) order is signaled by the return of the legitimate heir (Duncan's son *Malcolm*) from his exile in England, where he has taken shelter under the English king *Edward the Confessor* (whose piety is explicitly alluded to by *Malcolm* in the fourth act). Shakespeare, critics argue, is implying that *Malcolm*'s reign will be as peaceful and benevolent as both his father's and the pious English king's. This renewal of moral order is simultaneously a return of natural or cosmological order, symbolized by the arrival of spring when the greenery of *Birnam wood* rises to envelop *Macbeth*'s dark and wintry castle on high *Dunsinane Hill*.

Berger calls this the "orthodox" interpretation of the play.² No doubt it satisfies our desire for closure and poetic justice. As Berger points out, however, this picture, though certainly suggested by much of the surface of the text, is systematically undermined by a series of deep ironies, ironies which it is wholly characteristic of Shakespeare to insert.

Berger focuses on the play's early scenes, which create a rather ambivalent picture of the last days of *Duncan*'s reign. Far from being an idyllic realm, Scotland is a war-torn mess. Beset from all sides by Scottish rebels, *Duncan* only narrowly escapes death when he is saved by his commanders *Macbeth* and *Banquo*. Berger shows how Shakespeare highlights the uneasy symmetry between the treacherous rebels (*Macdonwald* and *Cawdor*) and their supposedly

heroic vanquishers (Macbeth and Banquo). This symmetry is foregrounded by the captain's rather ambivalent speech to the king in the play's second scene. The image of Macbeth and Macdonwald locked in combat "As two spent swimmers"³ suggests an ambiguous picture in which the swimmers are simultaneously destroying and saving each other (e.g., by using one another as buoys). As Berger puts it, "The simile projects a situation in which enemies cling together as friends, and friends as enemies."⁴ The message is clear. In the civil war dividing Scotland, it is very hard to distinguish friends from enemies. Fair is foul and foul is fair. This is obviously a rather nerve-racking situation to be in and we are given to understand that it typifies Duncan's Scotland. How is the king to know whom to trust? A redoubtable "man of blood" (3.4.127), Macbeth is in the first place a warrior, and his violence is indistinguishable from the violence that both defends and threatens the throne. Duncan knows that it is only a matter of time before he will be the object of another violent attack. Should we really be surprised that he dies at the hand of his most violent warrior?

For those familiar with René Girard's work, the image of two bloody men clinging to one another like "two spent swimmers" suggests the death struggle of mimetic rivals, whose competing desires create the very thing they seek. The picture of Macbeth and Macdonwald drowning in envy and mimetic rivalry is reminiscent of a similar image used by Cassius in *Julius Caesar* to describe his hatred of Caesar. In that play's second scene, Cassius says to Brutus how he saved Caesar from drowning after the two had dared each other to swim across the raging Tiber. Girard notes that the image is used by Shakespeare to portray mimetic envy.⁵ From this perspective it is unsurprising that a heroic battlefield commander such as Macbeth would be simultaneously haunted by a desire for the throne. What else has he been trained for? The very things that make him a supreme defender of his king (desire, envy, fearlessness, predatory violence) make him an obvious candidate to replace him.

What Berger's subtle reading of the text underscores is the deep structural ironies of this political situation. In disposing one set of assassins (Macdonwald, Cawdor), Duncan merely encourages another (Macbeth, Banquo). Nor is Duncan unaware of this fact. In granting Macbeth the additional title of Thane of Cawdor, Duncan is, as Berger puts it, giving Macbeth "honors only a king can bestow, honors by which the king may placate the thane and maintain his own edge of superiority."⁶ The political system in Scotland encourages envy and rivalry among its leading men. But this rivalry is a danger to the king himself. Macbeth's role as superior defender of his king places him immediately in a position of

suspicion. Duncan attempts to placate his most valiant thane by gifting him the title of Cawdor. But he knows that this new threat to his supremacy must be handled with the greatest tact and skill, which is why he showers Macbeth with so many honors, including a royal visit to Macbeth's home in Inverness.

Berger calls this irony "structural," by which he means that the Scottish system of government is built on a foundation of violence that every thane except Macbeth studiously averts his eyes from.⁷ As Macbeth puts it, "Blood will have blood" (3.4.123). The very violence that thrusts Macbeth onto center stage as the foremost defender of his king also condemns him to usurping the royal seat. In this context we can see that Duncan's hasty announcement of his son Malcolm as the royal successor is a carefully premeditated gesture designed to thwart Macbeth by encouraging a less threatening rival for the kingship. Unlike Macbeth, Malcolm seems to have shrunk from violence rather than embraced it. He appears in the play's second scene as the ward of the bloody captain, who has defended him at considerable cost to his person from being captured by the enemy.

Why should Duncan have to announce his eldest son as his successor? Can't we assume that Malcolm's succession would have been expected by the Scottish thanes? A.R. Braunmuller notes that Shakespeare was following his source in Holinshed, who makes it clear that primogeniture was not given in medieval Scotland.⁸ Instead the law of the *tanist*, which means literally "second in excellence," meant that the Scottish system relied on open competition between rival thanes to decide on a successor. Citing the anthropologist Jacky Goody, Braunmuller observes that "the system in early Scotland has been described as 'circulation with elimination,' where 'tension between incumbent and successor is relieved at the expense of increased conflict between the potential successors themselves,' as indeed we see in *Macbeth*."⁹ In this context Duncan's reference to Macbeth as "a peerless kinsmen" (1.4.58) is double-edged. If Macbeth is indeed peerless, then he stands on the same level as the king. As Michael Hawkins notes, in a "feudal society" such as Macbeth's the "phrase. . . needs to be taken literally as denoting someone without equals and set above the rest of the aristocracy."¹⁰ Duncan's admission that he cannot possibly repay his debt to Macbeth ("More is thy due than more than all can pay" (1.4.21)) does not, as Hawkins also notes, do much to discourage Macbeth's sense that he really does deserve the throne.

Here we run into the well-known anthropological problem of political succession.¹¹ Who is to rule after the king dies or is too old to control his warriors? One can announce a successor beforehand, but such a move is always risky. By explicitly pointing to a successor, one may inadvertently invite one's premature

demise. Who is to stop one's enemies (and there are always enemies) from throwing their lot in with the successor, who in all likelihood will be only too happy to take over the job as early as possible? Far better in these circumstances to avoid announcing a successor until the very last minute, when one breathes one's dying breath. Yet there are problems with waiting until the last minute too. In particular, one is courting chaos in the hours, days, or even years leading up to the dying breath. The longer the king lives without a designated heir, the more antsy and touchy his subjects become. Duncan's solution is evidently presented as a compromise. He squeaks out a victory from the latest threat to his kingship but only by promoting a new one, which obliges him to reward Macbeth with the thaneship. As Berger stresses, Duncan knows his gift will be received as an encouragement to seek yet greater honors, perhaps even the throne itself. So what does the king do? He attempts to forestall this danger by announcing Malcolm as the next-in-line. Presumably the relatively weak and feeble son is easier to control than the fierce and valiant Macbeth. With a more easily controllable successor announced, Duncan hopes to nip Macbeth's rise to prominence before it's too late.

As we all know, Duncan's ploy is unsuccessful. The royal visit to Macbeth's home is interpreted by the thane—with some additional prompting from his highly motivated wife—as an opportunity to end all this shilly-shallying. Withered murder moves like a ghost and Macbeth's hands turn the seas blood red. When the king's sons flee, Macbeth has nobody to stand in his way. The crown is free for him to take. And not a soul utters a word in objection.

What I would like to do in the remainder of this chapter is to show how Akira Kurosawa sharpens this focus on what I have called, following Berger, the deeper irony of the play.¹² Most critics have regarded *Throne of Blood* as far more pessimistic than Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Some come to this conclusion by arguing that Kurosawa focuses almost exclusively on making Macbeth's decision to murder the king psychologically plausible, thereby reducing his tragic stature and turning him into an everyman whom it is too easy to judge and therefore also excuse (he is merely acting as everybody else is acting). For example, Donald Richie says that Kurosawa's Macbeth is "not grand" but "a little man, lacking in grandeur precisely because he is not torn between desires."¹³ This Macbeth acts in the same manner as his equally predictable rivals: kill or be killed. Who can blame him for violence in a world where violence is the norm? Likewise John Gerlach argues that "most of Kurosawa's changes are gauged to increase our sympathy for Macbeth so as to involve the viewer in an experience more psychologically

acceptable.”¹⁴ This change increases our understanding of Macbeth’s character, but it reduces his status as a tragic protagonist. For Gerlach, Kurosawa’s Macbeth is merely “a bit of a bungler.”¹⁵ Anthony Davies agrees with Gerlach, writing that “where Macbeth has choice, Washizu [i.e., Kurosawa’s Macbeth] has only destiny.”¹⁶ Other critics point to the lack of any genuinely redeeming characters in Kurosawa’s film. For instance, Bernice Kliman contrasts Shakespeare’s inclusion of the good thanes, who gather around Malcolm at the end, with Kurosawa’s bleak focus on a warrior society fueled solely “by ambition and willingness to kill.”¹⁷ Similarly, Stephen Prince observes that “in Macduff and Malcolm, Shakespeare envisioned moral alternatives to Macbeth’s evil, but Kurosawa’s is a closed world in *Throne of Blood*, from which a moral dialectic has vanished.”¹⁸

These are all pertinent remarks. But I think Shakespeare’s play already contains the seeds of the pessimism Kurosawa emphasizes in his adaptation. Much of this pessimism stems from Shakespeare’s historical conception of medieval Scotland, a conception that Kurosawa recognized as pertinent to his own conception of the period of civil wars in late-fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century Japan. As Graham Holderness notes, for both Shakespeare and Kurosawa ambition is not merely some “eccentric personality disorder”; it is “a central historical contradiction: a natural extension of the militaristic violence which is both liberated and restrained by the feudal pattern of authority.”¹⁹ The deep structural irony of the play is part of Shakespeare’s criticism of the warrior society he describes. Once one notices this irony, it becomes impossible to accept the view that Shakespeare regarded Macbeth as an aberration in an otherwise peaceful political order. On the contrary, what drives Macbeth to kill his king is what drives all the thanes. The same violence that unseats Duncan unseats Macbeth. The difference is that Macbeth sees more steadily and more clearly than his fellows the violence that lies at the heart of the Scottish feudal order. That is why he experiences so much guilt. He alone intuits the horror that lies at the heart of the political system. All others, including his own wife, see only the crickets chirping and the owl screeching. They are, as Berger argues, predisposed to ignore the truth because it is not in their self-interest to acknowledge it.

Kurosawa’s film takes this endemic violence as its central theme. No longer a subtle irony to be weeded out by the perceptive critic, the violent structure of this warrior society is exposed for all to see. The use of a chorus at the beginning and end of the film reinforces this sense of distance from the characters, who now appear as pawns in a violent system they are powerless to resist. Gone are the Shakespearean soliloquies in which Macbeth’s guilt and inner conflict are

revealed. Kurosawa makes no effort to reproduce any of Shakespeare's script, choosing instead to follow only the bare plot. Yet this purely visual emphasis on the scene of violence leads to some startling cinematic revelations.

For example, in Shakespeare the symmetry between Macbeth and Banquo is hinted at but never represented visually on the stage. Banquo is always shown to be one step behind Macbeth, which is why he appears to be an innocent victim of Macbeth's treachery. Yet the symmetry between the two men is made clear in Banquo's soliloquy at the beginning of the third act:

Thou hast it now—King, Cawdor, Glamis, all
 As the weird women promised it, and I fear
 Thou played'st most foully for't. Yet it was said
 It should not stand in thy posterity,
 But that myself should be the root and father
 Of many kings. If there come truth from them—
 As upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine—
 Why, by the verities on thee made good,
 May they not be my oracles as well
 And set me up in hope? (3.1.1-10)

Banquo knows full well that Macbeth is the most likely cause of the old king's demise, but he does not object to Macbeth's coronation. Why not? Because he stands to gain from it. Did not the prophecy predict that Macbeth would cede his place to the sons of Banquo? By allowing Macbeth to take the throne, Banquo hopes to get one step closer to it.

In Shakespeare, the rivalry between Macbeth and Banquo is muted because the two commanders are out of step with each other. Banquo suffers because he does not react swiftly enough, instead succumbing to his rival's preemptive strike. Kurosawa, however, sees the mimetic symmetry between the two commanders and does not hesitate to visualize it. From the beginning Washizu (Macbeth) and Miki (Banquo) are represented as equals, who (we discover later) have also been childhood friends.

The film opens with the camera slowly tracking across a bleak landscape shrouded in fog. We are invited by the chorus to look on the ruins of a castle, the sole remaining evidence of a "carnage born of consuming desire." A weather-beaten post bears the inscription, "Here stood Spider's Web Castle." As the fog thickens, we lose sight of the ruined castle. When the fog lifts, however, Spider's Web Castle stands once again in its prime. We are given to understand that we are about to see the story of this "carnage born of human desire."

A messenger arrives at the castle with news that commander Fujimaki of the North Garrison has treacherously risen in arms against Lord Tsuzuki, overthrowing the latter's fifth and fourth fortresses. Now the lord's third fortress is under attack. Fearing the worst, Tsuzuki prepares to barricade himself inside his castle. But before he can do so, another messenger arrives with the news that second fortress commander Miki (Banquo) and first fortress commander Washizu (Macbeth) have mounted a fierce rearguard action against the rebels and turned the battle in Tsuzuki's favor.

The symmetry between Washizu and Miki is given extended emphasis in their first appearance in the film, which sees them lost in Spider's Web Forest having been summoned to the castle by their lord. At this point, they do not know Tsuzuki intends to honor them with new titles. The camera tracks Washizu and Miki on horseback as they race back and forth looking for a way out of the dense forest. They come upon a hut in which a forest spirit is chanting an eerie song about the folly of human desire. The spirit addresses Washizu as commander of the first fortress, lord of the North Garrison, and future lord of Spider's Web Castle. In a shot taken from behind the spirit that emphasizes the symmetry between Washizu and Miki, we see the two commanders exchange significant looks with one another. Washizu appears to recollect himself from these dark thoughts, because he turns to the spirit and accuses it of treason. The spirit responds by observing how strange it is that humans are so "terrified to look into the bottom of their hearts." Washizu draws his bow as if to shoot the spirit. But Miki deters him, for he too wants to hear what the spirit has to say about his future. The spirit says that Miki is now commander of the First Fortress and that he will be both lesser and greater than Washizu: though Miki will not reign over Spider's Web Castle, his son will.

The scene is shot in such a way that we are constantly reminded of the symmetry between Washizu and Miki. Each man's desire is shaped by the other's. The labyrinth of the forest is a metaphor for how each man is trapped in his rivalry with the other. Once they are finally free of the forest, a heavy fog descends and they gallop back and forth in a frantic race to be the first to arrive at the object of their desire: Spider's Web Castle. The harder they ride, the more intense their desire becomes. Yet the men are totally alone. The thickness of the fog adds to the claustrophobic feeling that the world has narrowed to embrace only the presence of the rival. Each feeds on the desire of the other. The scene is reminiscent of the dark wood in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in which the four lovers get trapped in a maelstrom of mimetic desire.

This symmetry between Washizu and Miki is further enhanced by Kurosawa's decision to have Miki also receive a promotion from Tsuzuki. Washizu receives the title of the now executed rebel Fujimaki. Miki, as the spirit predicted, is promoted to Washizu's former position as commander of the first fortress. In Shakespeare, Banquo receives no gifts from his king and this difference contributes to our sense that Banquo is not as mimetic as Macbeth. Kurosawa evidently did not want to give the same impression. Moreover, the fact that Miki moves into Washizu's vacated position as commander of the first fortress while Washizu himself attains that of the executed rebel Fujimaki suggests that the hierarchy structuring this competitive and predatory society encourages the very conflict that eventually destroys it, as the chorus at the beginning tells us.

This critique of the ethic of warrior society is underscored in a superb scene that takes place when Washizu and Miki are finally released from the fog only to discover that the castle they have been frantically seeking lies directly before them on the horizon. Miki suggests they continue their race by heading toward it at a full gallop, but Washizu says he is tired and urges his companion to rest awhile. The two dismount and we get another wide shot in which the two men sit opposite one another with the castle positioned exactly between them in the background. Washizu says he feels as though he is in a dream. Was not their encounter with the forest spirit a dream? Miki says that dreams manifest one's basest desires and adds, "Who would not dream of ruling over a vanquished castle?" Urged on by his friend's thought, Washizu says, "It seems your son shall become Great Lord of that castle." Miki responds, "No, it is you, yourself, who shall rule over that castle." The two men laugh in an effort to make light of this dangerous but irrepressible thought. Washizu looks at Miki and says, "But first, I must become Lord of the North Garrison." Miki returns his friend's gaze and says, "And I, commander of the First Fortress." They then each repeat the spirit's phrase, "Joyous tidings" and laugh hysterically. Suddenly they stop laughing. Each man begins a sentence with exactly the same word: "Yet . . ." They look at each other alarmed that the other has read his darkest thoughts. Washizu speaks for them both saying, "And yet, what if as of this night, I do become Lord of the North Garrison, and you command the First Fortress." They both rise simultaneously to their feet and stare at the castle in the distance.

In Shakespeare, the scene of Macbeth and Banquo openly discussing their forbidden desires does not exist, though it is hinted at on two occasions. After their interview with the witches, Macbeth says to Banquo that he would consult further with him "upon what hath chanced" (1.3.155). And later, just before

Macbeth murders Duncan, when he meets Banquo and Fleance in the moonless courtyard, Banquo says to him that he has been dreaming of “the three Weird Sisters” (2.1.21). Macbeth denies that he has thought of them but says he would like to discuss the matter with Banquo when a more fitting occasion presents itself.

Whereas Shakespeare’s Banquo merely goes along passively with Macbeth’s sudden rise to power, Kurosawa’s Miki takes a decisive step in assisting Washizu. After Washizu kills Tsuzuki, prince Kunimaru (Malcolm) flees with Noriyasu (Macduff) to Spider’s Web Castle, the command of which had been handed over to Miki for the duration of the king’s fatal visit to Washizu at the North Garrison. Fearing a possible alliance between Noriyasu, Kunimaru, and Miki, Washizu desperately attempts to cut Noriyasu and Kunimaru off but fails. In a dramatic scene, we see Noriyasu and Kunimaru hammer on the castle gate while Washizu and his men stand some distance away, anxiously waiting to see how Miki will react. After some tense moments, a hail of arrows is fired upon Noriyasu and Kunimaru, who are now forced to flee both Miki and Washizu. Again, what was merely implied in Shakespeare is made explicit by Kurosawa. Miki asserts his alliance with Washizu by firing on Noriyasu and Kunimaru. He does not, however, open the gates until Washizu has produced the body of Lord Tsuzuki. The two men are bound in their conspiracy against their former lord. In return for Miki’s help, Washizu promises to declare Miki’s son Yoshiteru his heir and the future king of Spider’s Web Castle.

Kurosawa takes what is implicit in Shakespeare and makes it explicit. Washizu and Miki do not merely hint at one another’s desires. They openly discuss them. The scene in which each commander sits on the ground with the silhouette of Spider’s Web Castle looming darkly on the horizon captures the mimetic or, more precisely, the *scenic* relationship between the two men. They sit equidistant from the object of their shared desire. Kurosawa visualizes with remarkable precision the essential ingredients of Girard’s mimetic triangle and Eric Gans’s originary scene: subject, mimetic other, and desired object.²⁰ The “carnage born of consuming desire” grows from this originary mimetic scene.

What Berger calls the “deep structure informing the surface action”²¹ is vividly represented by Kurosawa in these scenes of mimetic symmetry between Washizu and Miki. The violence endemic to human society is traceable to a minimal scene in which two rivals compete for an object at the center. Human desire exists only within the context of this anthropological scene. As Girard says, desire is always the desire of the other. Spider’s Web Castle, as the name suggests, is a metaphor for the place where these desires converge. What warrior would not dream of

being a lord of his own castle? The dream precedes the reality, but it is only because of the dream—the representation—that the object appears desirable in the first place. Divorced from the scene, the object is insignificant because it is no longer mediated by the other's desire.²²

What Kurosawa sees with great clarity is the endpoint of desire in the *sparagmos*, the tearing apart of the central object/victim. Washizu's grotesque death scene, in which he is pierced by shower upon shower of arrows shot from the bows of his own warriors, underscores the highly ritual and cyclical nature of the violence pervading this society. Macbeth dies with harness on his back fighting his enemies, but Washizu dies without lifting a finger against the advancing forces of Noriyasu and Kunimaru, who have now been joined by Miki's son Yoshiteru. Instead he is trapped in his own castle, cornered by his own men, who quickly see they have more to gain by killing him. Just as Washizu had killed his lord before him, so too these men kill theirs. In Shakespeare, the throne is taken by Duncan's son Malcolm, not by Banquo's son Fleance. Kurosawa dispenses with this appearance of sacred legitimacy. Just as the spirit had predicted, we are given to understand that Miki's son will rule after Washizu has been so ignominiously slain.

I have argued that Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* foregrounds the violence structuring the social order in *Macbeth*. Kurosawa sees what most critics tend to overlook or ignore: namely, Macbeth's participation in a political system that structures the actions of everyone, including the pious Duncan and the "good" thanes who surround Malcolm at the end. What distinguishes Macbeth from these characters is not in the end his violence, but the fact that he sees more clearly than his peers the sacrificial violence that lies at the heart of the Scottish political order.

What is the value of this analysis? In general, I am in agreement with Girard's larger argument in *A Theater of Envy*. Shakespeare sees the insidiousness of the violence that his fellow playwrights shamelessly exploit in their bloody tragedies. Why then does Girard say nothing about *Macbeth*? This is a more difficult question to answer. Here some minor, but pertinent, differences emerge between my understanding of Shakespeare and Girard's.

Macbeth is Shakespeare's most concentrated examination of the problem of evil. Rather than emphasizing the social and political context of the *sparagmos* as he did in *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare traces violence back to the individual's internal representation of it. Unlike Brutus, who feels guiltless both before and after he murders Caesar, Macbeth feels guilty before he murders Duncan. He imagines the deed prior to executing it, and this act of imagination brings home

to him the horror of what he is about to do. Violence, Shakespeare suggests, does not precede representation; it follows it. The guilt precedes the crime.

This view of violence contrasts Girard's understanding of it. Girard is pessimistic about the human capacity to represent, and thereby defer, violence. This pessimism is reflected in his hypothesis of human origin, in which the *sparagmos* precedes rather than follows representation. But representation, or more simply language, is not a supplement to human violence. It stands at the very origin of humanity. Human violence is distinguished from animal violence by this fact. Language gives us a capacity for violence unimaginable in the animal world, but it also gives us the ability to defer it.²³ As Gans puts it, we are heirs of the scene of love and resentment.

Macbeth's tragedy is that he chooses resentment and consequently the violence that attends it. But so do his rivals. Shakespeare clearly believed that Macbeth's choice was not just a pragmatic political choice but a moral one. In depicting Macbeth's tragedy, Shakespeare shows us that we do not have to make the same terrible choice. In the end Macbeth believed his choice to be no choice at all. His last soliloquy affirms the futility of all action, which is full of sound and fury and signifies nothing. But what his actions signify is the perennial problem of human evil. In representing Macbeth's violence, Shakespeare gives us the opportunity to reflect on it—and thereby defer it. The notion of evil as a moral choice is, to be sure, less pronounced in Kurosawa, who emphasizes the political context of a highly mimetic warrior society. But in foregrounding this context, Kurosawa, like Shakespeare before him, gives us the opportunity to reflect critically on the motivations of our own moral choices. Only by representing ourselves can we better understand ourselves.

Notes

- 1 Harry Berger, Jr., "The Early Scenes of *Macbeth*: Preface to a New Interpretation," *English Literary History* 47 (1980): 1–31.
- 2 Berger, "Early Scenes of *Macbeth*," 2.
- 3 William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington, 6th ed. (New York: Longman, 2009), 1.2.8. Act, scene, and line numbers hereafter cited in the text.
- 4 Berger, "Early Scenes of *Macbeth*," 7.
- 5 Girard observes, in *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), that "Cassius refuses to worship a god who owes him his

- very life. Thus Shakespeare turns into evidence of mimetic envy an anecdote that in Plutarch merely illustrates Caesar's physical courage" (187).
- 6 Berger, "Early Scenes of *Macbeth*," 19.
 - 7 Ibid., 3.
 - 8 A. R. Braunmuller, ed., *Macbeth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
 - 9 Braunmuller, *Macbeth*, 16.
 - 10 Michael Hawkins, "History, Politics and *Macbeth*," in John Russell Brown, ed., *Focus on Macbeth* (London: Routledge, 1982), 175.
 - 11 For a lucid discussion of this problem, see Robbins Burling, *The Passage of Power: Studies in Political Succession* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).
 - 12 *Throne of Blood*, directed by Akira Kurosawa (1957; New York: Criterion Collection, 2003), DVD.
 - 13 Donald Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 117.
 - 14 John Gerlach, "Shakespeare, Kurosawa, and *Macbeth*: A Response to J.Blumenthal," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 1 (1973): 357.
 - 15 Gerlach, "Shakespeare, Kurosawa, and *Macbeth*," 358.
 - 16 Anthony Davies, *Filming Shakespeare's Plays: The Adaptations of Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Peter Brook, and Akira Kurosawa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 155.
 - 17 Bernice W. Kliman, *Macbeth*, 2nd ed., *Shakespeare in Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 187.
 - 18 Stephen Prince, *The Warrior's Camera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 144.
 - 19 Graham Holderness, "Radical Potentiality and Institutional Closure," in Robert Shaughnessy, ed., *Shakespeare on Film* (Houndmills: MacMillan, 1998), 79.
 - 20 See, for example, Eric Gans, *Signs of Paradox: Irony, Resentment, and Other Mimetic Structures* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), especially chapter 2.
 - 21 Berger, "Early Scenes of *Macbeth*," 2.
 - 22 As Gans puts it, in *Originary Thinking: Elements of Generative Anthropology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), "Yet the sign designates this center. Through the observed-and-performed sign, the central referent is represented. No doubt the referent can be perceived without the sign; but the observation of the referent in the absence of the sign is incomplete, in-significant. What makes us want to imitate, and to continue to imitate, the aborted gesture-sign of the others is our judgment that the sign is indeed a sign, that it evokes its object without attempting to possess it" (118).
 - 23 The notion of language as a deferral of violence rather than a forgetting of it is Gans's specific modification of Girard's originary scene of mimetic violence. I have developed Gans's originary hypothesis in reference to Shakespeare in *Shakespeare's Big Men: Tragedy and the Problem of Resentment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).