

# Macbeth – polanski's version and bogdanov's version essay



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In Act our Scene 1 we are confronted with many of the themes of the play, which have already been introduced. The themes of the play are the supernatural, blood, good & evil, light & dark ambition, loyalty, love, kingship, corruption, justice and deception. The themes I am concentrating on are the supernatural element of the play and the portrayal of Macbeth himself.

The theme of the supernatural occurs very prominently in Polanski’s version but isn’t as prominent in Bogdanov’s version, and the element of Macbeth himself is presented in both versions of Macbeth, but they are presented differently as you will see. The theme of the supernatural in Polanski’s interpretation gives more depth to the interpretation of Shakespeare’s Macbeth. The setting of this scene is a major factor in giving the interpretation, which Shakespeare himself wanted to portray, because of the older props and the witches who look the way witches were expected to look like in the days of Shakespeare. In Polanski’s version, the scene is set in a dark cave, positioned on a hillside. Darkness is a major theme in the whole of Macbeth, and it is again shown here in the jet-black skies of the night with the only light coming from the cave the witches inhabit.

The musical soundtrack of the film sends an eerie feeling through the scene. The music is Medieval/Baroque style with seemingly out of tune string. This is the only sound apart from the sound of the hoofs on the horse hitting the ground as Macbeth approaches the cave. The music also adds to the supernatural element of the play. The fact that Macbeth cannot resist going in to the cave even though we can see that he is unsure about what to do, in adds to the point that the witches have control over his urges. Elements such

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as the darkness, the freaky witches dancing in the light of the fire still did not make him turn his back on them.

Macbeth’s urge to find out whether or not he would rule Scotland for much longer made him want to find out who would replace him so that he could kill them. The extra witches present, and not the three witches as used in the original play gave the impression that Polanski wanted us as the audience to realise that Macbeth was overpowered by the witches and that the witches were controlling him. This gives the impression that Macbeth is under the witches’ spell, which was made at the very start of the play. The supernatural settings and actions in the play make us almost feel sorry for Macbeth in the way that he has no control over what happens to him.

Even though Macbeth seems to be under the control of the witches, he is driven on by his own ambition. In the premonition granted to Macbeth by the witches, Macbeth lives the premonitions, which did not happen in Bogdanov’s version. This adds to the supernatural aspect of the play. Due to Polanski’s association with the production of horror movies, he constantly wishes the audience to feel scared, and he does this by adding reality to the encounters with the witches. In Bogdanov’s version, there is very little supernatural behaviour. The scene is fairly modern.

The scene is set on a wasteland with only three witches this time. By sticking to three witches, Bogdanov’s version is true to the original, which is an important factor in deciding whether a film is good or not. The three witches also make us feel that Macbeth is more in control, and Macbeth seems to be controlling the witches rather than the witches controlling him. We are

therefore made to feel, that while the witches control Macbeth in Polanski’s version, Macbeth in Bogdanov’s version is in control over his own fate, and has been taken over by his own ambition and madness. The physical destruction presented to us by the use of the wasteland is representing the breakdown of old order and the moral chaos that Macbeth’s actions have inevitably created.

Supernatural elements are also taken from Bogdanov’s version by speeding up the pace of the speech. This speeding up in the pace is supposed to add to the audience’s expectations, but I think it takes away from the anxiety built up in Polanski’s version with the slower speech. In Bogdanov’s version, the horror/tragedy effect is taken out of this scene mainly because of the exclusion of the supernatural element. The fact that this scene is presented as a dream tells us that it is Macbeth’s own madness that is driving Macbeth to extremes and not the witch’s potion, which causes Macbeth to actually live the experience of seeing his fate. The lack of colour in Bogdanov’s version adds to the dreamy effect.

The only colour comes from the red-orange colour of the raging flames coming from the oil drum (cauldron). Due to the scene being black and white, Bogdanov may be trying to represent that only 1 in 4 people actually dream in colour. In Polanski’s version, Macbeth is portrayed as a character that is not in control. In Act four, Scene one; Macbeth is on a horse at the start of the scene and trotting up the dark, gloomy pathway on the side of the hill. The setting gives us a sense of darkness and evil which is a major theme in the play. Setting the scene underground also stresses the

unnatural activities and the feeling that Macbeth has sank to new levels of treachery, which until now he had not even thought about.

Macbeth is curious and anxious at the beginning of the scene as he approaches the cave filled with the naked, distorted, ugly witches, but when the end of the scene arrives he is determined to do away with Macduff, just in case he poses a threat to him in the future. At times during the scene he is showing signs of madness, vulnerability and powerlessness such as the time when he is around the cauldron with the witches. I think that Macbeth is not overly evil in this version, but the witches tear him between his true nature, his desire for power and the supernatural forces such as the spell cast. In Polanski’s version we are almost made to feel pitiful for Macbeth. He seems confused and in a situation where he doesn’t know what he is doing anymore. With the eerie music, the dark skies, and the position of the cave, and the cackling music, we are made feel anxious and hopeful that nothing will happen to Macbeth.

The extra witches in this scene in the cave add to the effect of Macbeth not being in control and overpowered. In Bogdanov’s version, Macbeth is in more control. His evil is ever growing and Bogdanov makes us feel that Macbeth is in more control of his own destiny. He is more aggressive and powerful than he is in Polanski’s version. Macbeth is presented as very evil in this scene and he seems to be giving out orders to the witches. The witches listen to him and give him what he wants.

With there being three witches in Bogdanov’s, the witches are seen to exert less power over Macbeth’s actions. The setting of the scene is a lot more

open due to it being positioned on a wasteland, and the witches are less threatening than the witches in Polanski’s version. From analysing and comparing each version, I can say that I like Polanski’s version much more. This is due to his more realistic interpretation of Shakespeare’s Macbeth. Everything in his scene is what I would expect it to be in Macbeth’s time.

Even though Bogdanov seems to be more faithful to the original play in terms of the words. Polanski re-arranges the order of lines in the play, to reflect the chaos in Scotland at that time. Both interpretations of Macbeth are true to the original in different ways. Polanski’s version is truer to the original in it’s setting, realism and how all the characters and not only Macbeth are portrayed. Bogdanov’s version is truer to the original in the use of the original script of the play, even though some lines are taken out, and also the amount of witches is true to original. I think that what Bogdanov was trying to show was that Shakespeare’s themes are not only relevant to the times of Shakespeare, but they are also relevant to the modern age where war, evil and sin still occur.

I prefer Polanski’s version because of how much Bogdanov’s versions in my mind has strayed from the original. Polanski’s version in my opinion, gives a better insight in to what Macbeths time was like and also to what Macbeth himself was like.