

A comparison between the trevor nunn and roman polanski macbeth films essay sampl...

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Trevor Nunn and Roman Polanski are two famous directors with very different styles and influences. Both have produced versions of Macbeth, one for television and one cinema. In this assignment, I will analyse the key dramatic techniques and effects they use, which differentiates them from each other.

Polanski's version of Macbeth starts right off, before the credits roll. The whole scene is in silence, giving the audience no indication or warning that the film is starting, making the unfolding scenes all the more shocking.

Like the play, the film begins with the witches. However, Polanski sets the scene on a beach rather than the "blasted heath" it is set on in the play. We see, instead, the beach at sunrise, with the wet sand glowing a strange pink. This was done intentionally to weaken the atmosphere and make the shot more calming. However, set to counteract this pleasant background are the witches burying a very realistic severed arm in the sand. This would be even more shocking for the audience, as half of them would not even have sat down, and the credits had not rolled. By making the beginning scene so shocking and so early in the film, Polanski now has the undivided attention of the audience and can continue the themes of death and violence.

The witches then walk into the distance, and this creates a beautiful landscape shot of the beach. The seagulls cawing in the background add a sense of eeriness which is very unnerving and powerful. When they fade off, white mist covers the shot, and the credits begin to roll. However, while they are on the screen, the sound of a battle plays in the background. When they finish, the mist fades off and we see a battlefield covered in bloody corpses.

A lone soldier moves from body to body, checking for signs of life. The audience is then seen this soldier find a survivor, and then pummel him with his flail. This was incredibly realistic and shocking cinema for its time, as was starting the film so rapidly. These ideas were a revolution, and one that is followed by many films to this day.

In contrast, Trevor Nunn starts his version with an aerial view of the cast sitting in a circle. The camera then pans around the circle, slowly moving from person to person with a shot of the head and shoulders. This whole process is incredibly tedious to watch; as it stretches on for a lot longer than it needs to. We then switch to a shot of the witches, with two of them supporting the third.

The camera then cuts to a shot of King Duncan, dressed all in white, reciting prayers. The camera then rapidly cuts between shots of the witches, who are now making animalistic noises and screaming. Church organ music then kicks in, which with the shrieking really creates an evil feeling. The fact that Duncan is one of the two cast members not dressed in black, and the fact that he is reciting prayers gives the audience a clear indication that he represents good in the story, whereas the witches quite obviously represent evil.

The camera shots changing rapidly introduces a key theme of the story to the audience; good versus evil.

Though Nunn does successfully introduce this, all of the sections of the introduction to the play are lengthy and tedious, and rather than getting the

audience interested in the film, is more likely to bore them and to make them lose interest.

Polanski cast Jon Finch to play the main part of Macbeth, a narrowly built, short and totally un-intimidating man. His eyes are large and cute, and his whole aura is not one of bravery and strength. His voice and his manner are hesitant and indecisive. Because of this, the image of a strong, heroic soldier is not really translated to the audience.

Lady Macbeth is acted out by Francesca Annis, who is a very pretty woman, with a feminine figure and a curvy body, and her voice is soft and calming. She does not really give off the impression of a manipulative, hard woman, and again lets down the audience to some extent.

The wardrobe for the whole cast of Polanski's film is very contemporary, most of it being adaptations of 1970's hippy. The style is loosely fitting shirts, which tend to emphasise on the femininity of Finch and Annis, and makes them less powerful to the audience.

Trevor Nunn, on the other hand, chose Ian McKellan to play Macbeth. He is taller and more broadly built, and his actions are decisive and his demeanour is confident. He is able to convey the image of a powerful leader much better than Jon Finch. McKellan is dressed in very tight, figure hugging clothes that show off his build, while blending with the backgrounds giving him a very mysterious aura. His hair is slicked back, and to add to his manly image, his cheek is scarred. Overall he is an incredibly effective Macbeth, and does a lot for the whole production.

Judi Dench, another famous actor, is cast as Lady Macbeth. She has strong facial features that are emphasised by pale make up. This gives her a feel of severity and death. Her eyebrows are thinned to look indistinct with her face, and this coupled with her make up and her confident, rich and often aggressive actions makes a very effective image of we think of as Lady Macbeth from the play. Her costume is figure hugging black, and it also blends with the backdrops, removing all the femininity from her figure, and her hair is swept back with a black head piece so she is nearly all black making her an incredibly effective Lady Macbeth.

Polanski forfeits some of the eerie atmosphere by using very rich, colourful scenery throughout his film, but despite the loss of atmosphere, the film becomes far more cinematically interesting to watch. Polanski uses a lot of panoramic, long view shots, and shoots many scenes outdoors. There are very few scenes in darkness, bar the killing of Duncan, and even the opening scenes, which are perhaps the most shocking, are shot in daylight. A lot of the landscape is shot to show off the rugged, untouched beauty that the Scottish countryside has to offer. Colour filters are used to enhance the colour in some scenes. The green of the trees and the blue of the sky and most of the richest colours in the film are all enhanced. With the idyllic settings, this makes it very pleasing and easy to watch.

In contrast to Polanski's extravagant scenery and landscape, Nunn uses a harsh black background in every single scene. Because of this, the majority of the film is shot in close-ups and mid-shots. The figures of the cast are illuminated by harsh spotlights. Other than these lights, the rest of the

production is shot mostly in near darkness. To begin with, this creates an interesting effect, and the acting of Judi Dench and Ian McKellan keeps the audience on the edge of their seats, but soon the simple scenery and costume design, though effective, makes the film incredibly tedious to watch, and is not an exciting cinematic experience. It is extremely limited visually, and does not keep the audience entertained.

Polanski has included some additional scenes in his version of the film, all of them added to shock the audience in some way and make the film more of a breakthrough. The murder of Duncan is the perfect example of this, as we see Macbeth stab him at least 7 or 8 times, which for its time was incredibly gratuitous, and a lot of the cinema would have been shocked at such scenes.

Another example of this would be the murder of the Thane of Cawdor, which is not mentioned in the play. The scene is done with a lot of macabre violence, bondage and metal chains are on display, but not actually needed. The Thane gives an unnerving grin and jumps to his death, which would have been fascinating to watch for the audience, while being explicit.

Polanski chooses to use special effects to enhance the action for the viewers, and also to increase the drama, whereas Nunn prefers to keep it simple and rely on the powerful acting of the two main characters. In the scene of Duncan's murder, a dagger is digitally imposed onto the screen, which disappears when Macbeth closes his eyes, giving the clear impression that it is a figment of his imagination. These effects would have been impressive to the audience, whereas Nunn has McKellan stare into space. Though he

delivers a convincing performance, it is not as pleasing to watch as Polanski's.

Yet another effect is the scene at the banquet, with Banquo's ghost. Banquo's seat is empty until it crosses Macbeth's path. When this happens, Polanski has shot the scene in such a way that we see Banquo from Macbeth's eyes, and then from a different angle it is empty again. This, again, is supposed to represent that these images are figments of Macbeth's guilty conscience playing on his mind. Nunn opts out of using any effects in this scene, and an empty chair is used instead. We see things from where Banquo would be, and McKellan delivers such a performance that the audience feels riveted, as if they were actually Banquo himself.

There are a few other scenes that Polanski seems to have edited, not for dramatic or artistic value, but to make the film more enjoyable for the audience to watch. The naked sleep walking scene, the 18 naked witches, the short clip of a man getting shot by an arrow and the gang rape at MacDuffs castle are all quite shocking scenes that are not mentioned in the play, but that Polanski uses cleverly to deliver a more varied viewing experience.

Nunn keeps faithful to the script throughout the whole production. Dench and McKellan deliver some stellar acting throughout. Nunn uses the black background cleverly to carry the themes of death and sadness through the whole production. But despite some excellent acting and clever techniques,

the constant stale visuals and repetitive camera angles make it incredibly tedious to watch.

The fact Nunn was commissioned by ITV to direct and produce would have heavily influenced the way he shot the film. He would have been paid before hand and given a set budget to make the film. He did not have to make it a commercial success, and he could stay true to the script. However, despite being much better artistically, and with better acting, the film is incredibly stressful to watch, and by the end of the film the whole audience feels drained.

Polanski had a totally different scenario. He saved up his profits from the numerous “ adult” movies he had produced and put them all into one project that he hoped would bring him commercial success. To ensure this, he chose how to spend his money very carefully. He chose less experienced actors, but many more visual effects and tricks that make the play a lot easier and exciting for the general public watch.

He did not have enough money left over for advertising, and instead submitted it to the BBFC knowing it would cause uproar, and that he would score free publicity. He also “ leaked” a few explicit stills to the press, who happily published them in the knowledge it would boost their sales, and at the same time give Polanski the coverage he needed. As a result of all his careful manipulation of the press, the film became a huge success, and Polanski gained critical acclaim and also made back the money he put in.

Though Polanski used a lot of quite needless, titillating scenes to distract the audience from the fact it didn't really have very high production values, it is a much more enjoyable piece of cinema to watch than Nunn's version, and I feel that although both have their merits, it is Polanski's version that tops Nunn's for sheer entertainment and fun.