

SHAKESPEARE BY ANY OTHER WORD?:
SHAKESPEARE'S *KING LEAR* AND *MACBETH* REINVENTED
IN THE FILMS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA

A Thesis by

Erica Lee Zilleruelo

Bachelor of Arts, Penn State University, 2002

Submitted to the Department of English
and the faculty of the Graduate School of
Wichita State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

May 2007

© Copyright 2007 by Erica Lee Zilleruelo

All Rights Reserved

SHAKESPEARE BY ANY OTHER WORD?:
SHAKESPEARE'S *KING LEAR* AND *MACBETH* REINVENTED
IN THE FILMS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA

I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in English.

Donald Wineke, Committee Chair

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Christopher Brooks, Committee Member

Ramona Liera-Schwichtenberg, Committee Member

DEDICATION

To Art
with love and thanks

What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other word would smell as sweet.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Don Wineke and Professor Chris Brooks for demonstrating that true scholars do still exist in the world. Their wisdom along with their patient and insightful guidance helped in making this project possible. Thanks are also due to Prof. Ramona Liera-Schwichtenberg for providing valuable commentary from a new point of view on my project and to Professor Dean Baldwin of Penn State Erie for providing the spark that began my interest in Shakespeare thereby showing me that my only love could, in fact, spring from my only hate. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their continued support: *Ut legebitis hoc scio, etsi ut non intellegitis dicebo.*

ABSTRACT

Directors world-wide have made countless film adaptations of Shakespeare's works, so a somewhat heated debate exists in terms of what deserves the label "Shakespearean film," initiating conversation regarding what constitutes use of the word "Shakespearean." Without a doubt, and for any given play, Shakespeare borrowed anything from character names to plots, settings, etc.—all the items that form the bulk of his plays. One cannot, however, limit consideration of a signature element to these items, for they exist as stock elements that have repeated and resurfaced over the span of the ages. The language, all inclusively—the diction, puns, measure, etc.—makes Shakespeare's plays Shakespeare's.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare writes, "[w]hat's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other word would smell as sweet" (2.2.43-4); however, can this statement metaphorically apply to that which we have come to know as Shakespearean film? In other words, when a filmmaker removes Shakespeare's language, thereby removing Shakespeare's signature from the work, would the film "smell as sweet," so to speak, as Shakespeare's play, purely on the basis that it names Shakespeare as its source material?

My project will look at two of Shakespeare's plays—*Macbeth* and *King Lear*—and Japanese director Akira Kurosawa's corresponding film versions—*Throne of Blood* and *Ran*, and will assess what happens to the Shakespearean element of these films when Kurosawa translates the plays not only into another medium, but another language.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. Introduction	1
2. <i>MACBETH / THRONE OF BLOOD</i>	2
3. <i>KING LEAR / RAN</i>	18
LIST OF REFERENCES	35

Shakespeare by Any Other Word?:

Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Macbeth* Reinvented in the Films of Akira Kurosawa

Directors worldwide have adapted Shakespeare's works to film for decades, so a somewhat heated debate has surfaced in terms of what deserves the label "Shakespearean film." This dispute includes a spectrum of opinions on the matter, including one extreme in John Ottenhoff's assertion that "no performance can substitute for the richness of reading, discussing, and meditating upon a text" (qtd. in Brode 3) to the other extreme in Douglas Brode's somewhat glib opposing view that "Shakespeare's approach resembles that of a moviemaker[.] . . . Shakespeare was the bravura crowd pleaser, the Elizabethan predecessor to Cecil B. DeMille and Steven Spielberg" (4-5). To address the former, one must consider the time during which Shakespeare wrote his works. In *Will in the World*, Stephen Greenblatt explains that "playing companies were wary about allowing their scripts to circulate widely. . . . [T]hey wanted the public principally to encounter plays in the playhouse, not in the study" (295); moreover, as Brode points out, Shakespeare never even had the plays printed (3), though some evidence stating that he may have intended to do so exists. The presence of such extreme sentiments necessitates an investigation into what must occur in a film to grant it the title of "Shakespearean" in order to help reach some sort of amicable middle ground on the topic.

This is not to say that a film that fails to earn such a label also fails as an artistic expression in its own right; however, some of the films that claim one of Shakespeare's plays as their source material should reasonably go beyond Shakespeare and instead credit the material Shakespeare used as his sources. "As he often did with texts he liked," Greenblatt reveals, Shakespeare adapted other literary works, "lift[ing] . . . wholesale" (270) anything from character names to plots, settings, etc.—all the elements that form the bulk of his plays. One

cannot, therefore, limit the determination of Shakespeare's signature—that which makes a work uniquely his—to such stock elements, for they have repeated and resurfaced over the span of the ages. Such films should perhaps move beyond Shakespeare and credit a more precise source for their plots—the only thing many of these films retain. For instance, filmmakers, critics, reviewers, and many others declare that the films *A Thousand Acres* and *O* root themselves in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Othello* respectively, but as they do not preserve Shakespeare's language or even attempt to parallel it cinematically, perhaps the filmmakers and others should attribute these works instead to Holinshed's *Chronicles* and Giraldi Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* correspondingly.

The language—the diction, puns, lineation, etc.—makes Shakespeare's plays Shakespeare's. Because of this, one easily grants the label to those films that preserve Shakespeare's language, but what of those that alter not only the stock elements, but the language as well, as is the case with Akira Kurosawa's films *Throne of Blood* and *Ran* (adaptations based on *Macbeth* and *King Lear* respectively)? In order to call films of this variety “Shakespearean films,” the viewer must recognize some sort of visual element that acts as a linguistic parallel despite the lack of Shakespeare's language, and the following analysis will determine if that element exists in either of these two films.

For *Throne of Blood*, Kurosawa chose the era of the Japanese samurai for his setting, and though a Western audience might struggle with the idea of Shakespeare's work presented in such a context, Kurosawa essentially does what Shakespeare did and creates the same atmosphere for his cinematic audience as that which Shakespeare would have provided for his own contemporaries. Due to the amount of temporal distance from the type of events that appear in Shakespeare's play, twentieth-century filmmakers have to find some other means of putting their

modern audiences in the same frame of mind in which Shakespeare's audiences would have found themselves. Shakespeare lived and wrote during violent times—violence which he escalated for a more intense dramatic effect in his plays—and over the course of several of his plays (specifically *Macbeth*, for the case of this analysis), the stage becomes littered with bodies. Such events may seem unreal to certain modern-day audiences—particularly those who find themselves sheltered from experiencing political bloodshed in their daily lives. Greenblatt, however, describes a “major tourist attraction” in London with which Shakespeare may have had familiarity:

Stuck on poles on the Great Stone Gate, two arches from the Southwark side, were severed heads, some completely reduced to skulls, others parboiled and tanned, still identifiable. These were not the remains of common thieves, rapists, and murderers. Ordinary criminals were strung up by the hundreds on gibbets located around the margins of the city. The heads on the bridge, visitors were duly informed, were those of gentlemen and nobles who suffered the fate of traitors. (172-73)

Though at times Shakespeare would have obviously employed hyperbole for dramatic effect, his plays still depicted a bloody realism to which an Elizabethan audience would have not only related, but through which that audience would have lived. Similarly, as one of Kurosawa's *jidai-geki*, *Throne of Blood* depicts “the Sengoku period of civil wars (1467-1568) when there were frequent incidents of *gekokujo*, the overthrow of a superior by his own retainers” (Goodwin 176), a time that has much cultural significance despite the fact that Kurosawa's audience would not have actually lived through it.

Shakespeare did not merely include such details to provide shock value, as modern horror films do today, though shocking his audience did act as a means to an end. Brode explains that end:

The audience of Shakespeare's time exited the playhouse believing that despite the virtual horror show they had just relished, right had proven its might. . . .

Shakespeare's entertaining propaganda assured the populace that their beloved England did indeed exist under God's proper tutelage. (28)

Because a Japanese audience may remain unable to relate to the precise political matters and actions Shakespeare presents in *Macbeth*, Kurosawa uses characters, a setting, and a plot to which his audiences could relate. He sets his film in feudal Japan to place his audience in closer proximity to a time that shaped much of their own culture. This element alone, however, does not make his work stand out from any of the other *Macbeth* adaptations; one can list several pieces of source material from which Shakespeare borrowed in the composition of *Macbeth*—Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Gwinn's *Tres Sibyllae*, and even his own *Richard III*—and, while Kurosawa never indicated that he consulted these sources, some may argue that his film departs so much from Shakespeare's play that it has more in common with these other works.

To distinguish his films from all the other adaptations, Kurosawa insures that the essence of *Macbeth* does not get lost in his translation, so to speak. In *Cinematic Shakespeare*, Michael Anderegg observes, “[c]ritics treat Akira Kurosawa's . . . *Throne of Blood* . . . as among the best Shakespeare films, even though it uses none of Shakespeare's language” (5). Kurosawa mainly accomplishes this through employing visual parallels to Shakespeare's language, and, therefore, his film displays precisely what it means to be a Shakespearean film as it enables itself to uphold that which Shakespeare himself accomplished, and it recontextualizes *Macbeth* into a creation

his ideal audience experiences in the same way Shakespeare would have intended for his audience.

First and foremost, Kurosawa often addressed the question of his ideal audience throughout his career. In *The Japanese Film*, Joseph L. Anderson and Donald Richie allow Kurosawa to speak for himself on the issue:

I haven't read one review from abroad that hasn't read false meanings into my pictures. . . . I would never make a picture especially for foreign audiences. If a work can't have meaning to Japanese audiences, I—as a Japanese artist—am simply not interested. (376-77)

Perhaps those critics who disagree with the fact that *Throne* does, in fact, earn the label of Shakespearean film discount it due to their own ignorance regarding the ways in which Japanese audiences interpret films and Kurosawa's specific cinematic styles. One thing in which Kurosawa has no interest is upholding the conventions of Western society. The scene in which the witches prophesy the futures of Macbeth and Banquo demonstrates this point exactly. Kurosawa obviously made some alterations for *Throne of Blood*, one of which surfaces in presenting only one witch as opposed to Shakespeare's three. As mentioned earlier, just as twentieth century filmmakers encounter the obstacle of putting their audiences in the same frame of mind in which Shakespeare's audiences would have found themselves, Kurosawa must make further adjustments to put the essence of the culture Shakespeare depicts into a context to which his Japanese audience can relate. In *Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos*, T. McAlindon explains the specific mythological significance Shakespeare's trinity would have held to a Renaissance audience:

It has long been recognized that *Macbeth* abounds in trinities and that this accords with the traditional association of the number three with the rituals of witchcraft. . . . [T]rebling and doubling [are] . . . extended to include the idea of endless multiplication. What this pattern does—or would have done for a Renaissance audience attuned to cosmological discourse—is to evoke in large the Pythagorean concept of cosmos as limit and measure and of chaos as the unlimited, the innumerable. (200)

While such interpretations make sense within the confines of Elizabethan England, the “trebling and doubling” would have no symbolic significance for a Japanese audience. In *Filming Shakespeare’s Plays*, Anthony Davies explains that “a substantial interpretative problem” exists and becomes “especially true where an original work is taken from one culture and articulated through conventions of another” (154). In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare presents his audience with three “weird sisters” (1.3.32) whose physicality becomes a topic of discussion between Macbeth and Banquo:

What are these
So wither’d and so wild in their attire,
That look not like th’ inhabitants o’ th’ earth,
And yet are on’t? Live you? or are you aught
That man may question? . . .
.....
You should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so. (1.3.39-47)

In addition to Kurosawa's reduction of the number of witches to only one, the audience may not even deem "witch" an acceptable label for the character the viewer sees. While he maintains the gender ambiguity of Shakespeare's characters, not much else remains the same.

In *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, Donald Richie explains the reasoning behind making such a change:

[T]he idea of a trio of malevolent witches is far from the Japanese imagination. The witch, the warlock, are really priests, embodiments of nature which is neither good nor evil. They are diviners and fortune tellers who attempt to pierce the future but the gratuitous evil of Shakespeare's witches is impossible. (117)

To further this point, Kurosawa reveals, "the story is understandable enough but the Japanese tend to think differently about such things as witches and ghosts" (qtd. in Richie). Although the character presented in *Throne* possesses a nature similar to that of *Macbeth's* witches, Kurosawa presents his audience with the image of a single androgynous, elderly creature singing a song—even the voice of the character fails to reveal its sex. Washizu (the Macbeth counterpart) and Miki (the Banquo counterpart) refer to the creature as an "evil spirit" or a "spirit creature" (*Throne*). Although the scene lacks a direct, point-by-point parallel to Shakespeare's scene, Kurosawa has translated the essence of Shakespeare's scene to a corresponding image to which a Japanese audience would relate. In other words, this scene, for Kurosawa's ideal audience, creates the same reaction that Shakespeare's original would have drawn from his ideal audience.

Similarly, the scene immediately following this one illustrates Kurosawa's direction in that "words have successfully been replaced by imagery, which is at once vivid for the viewer and functional for conveying information the Bard had expressed in words" (Brode 193). Davies also comments on this assertion, explaining that *Throne* "finds a spatial articulation which almost

dispenses with the need for dialogue” (143), though Peter Brook argues that critics should not consider it Shakespearean on the grounds that “it doesn’t use the text” (qtd. in Davies 154). The scene in question depicts Washizu and Miki riding their horses through a thick mist whilst searching for Spider’s Web Castle (the film’s Inverness). The scene lasts for almost three minutes with only the slight sound of ominous background music and the horses’ hooves. Each time Kurosawa cuts, he presents his audience with the same image: that of the two men riding straight towards the camera out of the mist. The reiteration of this image—twelve times—relays the idea that Washizu and Miki have found themselves lost and confused—a visual echo of the asides Macbeth and Banquo speak in Act I, scene iii of *Macbeth*:

Ban. The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
And these are of them. Whither are they vanish’d?

Macb. Into the air; and what seem’d corporal melted,
As breath into the wind. Would they had stay’d!

Ban. Were such things here as we do speak about?
Or have we eaten on the insane root
That takes the reason prisoner? (1.3.79-85)

Anderegg offers an explanation that coincides with that of Brode when he says, “[w]ith *Throne of Blood*, the argument seems to be that Kurosawa captures the thematic essence of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and finds visual equivalences for his figurative language” (5). Kurosawa, though, replaced not only Shakespeare’s figurative language, but most of the language in general with his visuals. In doing so, his film presents the same bleakness and confusion that Shakespeare’s language illustrates.

Davies points to another scene in the film in which Kurosawa successfully substitutes visuals for Shakespeare's language—when the audience first sees Washizu and Lady Asaji (Kurosawa's Lady Macbeth) together:

As Washizu's instincts begin to yield to Asaji's rational persuasion, our attention is drawn, by the intrusive sound of galloping hooves in the silence, to that part of the courtyard visible through the open door in the depth of the frame. A horse gallops wildly round within the courtyard stockade. In its evocation of powerful instinctive forces unnaturally contained, it is a most eloquent commentary on Washizu's emotional confusion. (160)

Though initially Davies draws attention to the sound of this scene, the sound acts in turn to draw attention to the visuals. Despite the fact that one never encounters such a scene in Shakespeare's play, one can see the horse as analogous to Macbeth's confinement due to the way Lady Macbeth treats him. Whenever Macbeth attempts to assert himself, Lady Macbeth thwarts those attempts. For instance, she insults his masculinity when, regarding the killing of Duncan, he firmly states, "[w]e will proceed no further in this business":

Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valor
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would,"
Like the poor cat i' th' adage? (1.7.31, 39-45)

In *Macbeth*, Macbeth yields to his wife, becoming contained within her plans for him, and Kurosawa's translation of the essence of the emotional content Shakespeare demonstrates in his characters remains undeniable. Though audiences over time may have attained some of their exposure to Shakespeare through the written word, one must remember that in a film, Kurosawa needs no such convention—especially regarding the expository sections of Shakespeare's play—for to include such an element would detract from the overall quality of the work.

Any director takes on a difficult task when he or she attempts to modernize or recontextualize a Shakespearean work, for one must make a major creative decision about whether or not to maintain Shakespeare's language. Davies speaks further on this issue in regard to Brook's adaptation of *Lear*:

Recognizing that Shakespeare's poetic complexity is not easily accessible to the modern audience, Birkett and Brook asked Ted Hughes to prepare a modern "translation" for the film. Hughes' script was later abandoned because "the greatest passages in the play . . . have a force and emotional power that no translation, no paraphrase can possibly match." . . . Such detailed consideration of dialogue without its integration in a predominantly visual context must invite an ultimate seniority of word over visuals. (147)

This applies equally to Kurosawa's film. Kurosawa could not afford to sacrifice visuals in favor of words because of the medium in which he worked. While Kurosawa worked from a screenplay, as do all filmmakers, writers of screenplays do not necessarily mean for an audience to read their works; therefore, Kurosawa undertook the task of translating Shakespeare's work not only into another culture but also into an entirely different medium. Robert Frost's assertion that "[p]oetry is what gets lost in translation" furthers and clarifies this idea. If, while remaking

Lear, Brook encountered such obstacles in translating Elizabethan English to modern English, one can only imagine first, Kurosawa's hardships in translating Elizabethan English to Japanese and second, translating Shakespeare's play into the medium of film. Because the nature of language dictates the impossibility of maintaining accuracy in translation, subtitles generally have a tendency to border on the bland and sometimes ridiculous, a burden which Kurosawa's film does not have to bear in that it requires very little dialogue due to his exemplary use of the visual medium.

To speak specifically about his use of the medium, the fact that Kurosawa shot his film in black-and-white also warrants some discussion, especially when one considers A. C. Bradley's observation that "*Macbeth* leaves a decided impression of colour" (293), mostly centering on the red of the blood that haunts both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth after Duncan's murder. In one such passage, Macbeth discusses removing the blood on his hands, bringing to mind both the red of the blood and the green of the sea:

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red. (2.2.57-60)

In an admission of the guilt she also feels, Lady Macbeth invokes color when she responds, "[m]y hands are of your color; but I shame / [t]o wear a heart so white" (2.2.61-2). Both Macbeth and his wife return to the image of the blood on their hands throughout the following scenes, but the reader also encounters a different bloody image regarding the slain Duncan and his guards:

Here lay Duncan,
His silver skin lac'd with his golden blood,
And his gash'd stabs look'd like a breach in nature
For ruin's wasteful entrance; there, the murderers,
Steep'd in the colors of their trade, their daggers
Unmannerly breech'd with gore. (2.3.111-16)

Though the blood appears red on the hands of Macbeth and his wife, calling it golden here separates the nature of the true king from his usurper. In a “live-by-the-sword, die-by-the-sword” moment, and to further the charade that the guards killed Duncan, Macbeth reminds both the men to whom he speaks and the readers that these men work in a bloody “trade” and expresses no surprise that the murdered guards lay enveloped in red from their skin and daggers to their clothes and bed linens.

Because Kurosawa has shot his film in black-and-white, he obviously could not visually include these colorful elements, but black-and-white film tends to emphasize light and shadow more than color, allowing for a manipulation of these elements that proves highly beneficial to capturing the mood present in Shakespeare's more colorful images. This is not to say that Kurosawa replaces Shakespeare's more gory moments with something else; in fact, the absence of color in the film better allows Kurosawa to accurately capture the disturbing tone of the scenes Shakespeare created. Richie illuminates this aspect of the film when he explains, “[v]isually, the film is a marvel because it is made of so little: fog, wind, trees, mist. . . . There has rarely been a blacker and a whiter black and white film” (*Films of 120*). An interesting parallel comes to light with this idea in that Kurosawa depicts a world dominated by black and white, while Bradley also addresses the image of darkness that “broods over this tragedy” (292) and the images of

light that arise out of discussion of that darkness. Bradley observes that “almost all the scenes which at once recur to the memory take place either at night or in some dark spot” (292), so while red does figure heavily in Shakespeare’s work, the ideas of darkness and light preside over it much like Kurosawa’s black and white. One such scene occurs just after Duncan’s murder when Rosse and the Old Man discuss the “sore night”:

By th’ clock ‘tis day,
And yet dark night strangles the traveling lamp.
Is’t night’s predominance, or the day’s shame,
That darkness does the face of earth entomb,
When living light should kiss it? (2.4.4-10)

In *Shakespeare’s Tragedies*, Phyllis Rackin explains Shakespeare’s use of darkness:

In Shakespeare’s day the king was traditionally associated with the sun, and sunset was a typical image for his death or overthrow. . . . In addition, sunset suggests the milieu of the play, for the entire action will take place in darkness.
(108)

Based on the centrality of the darkness present in the play, one can see from where Kurosawa could have drawn his inspiration to uphold the same. As Richie confirms, “[t]he only two scenes where the sun is allowed to shine are, first, at his mansion where Washizu still has a chance, and—second—when he is leading his men, and may still turn back” (*Films of 120*); therefore, to borrow Rackin’s diction, the milieu of Kurosawa’s film supports the milieu of its source.

To slightly shift the focus to a parallel in content, one debate central to the study of both *Macbeth* and *Throne of Blood* addresses whether Macbeth and Washizu act out of free choice or destiny. Do they deceive and kill due to the power of suggestion, or do they commit these acts

because they were destined by fate to do so? Shakespeare structured his play in a way that one cannot conclusively decide between the two: evidence exists to support both sides. Regarding *Throne of Blood*, however, Richie suggests, “[t]he characters have no future. Cause and effect is the only law. Freedom does not exist” (*Films of 115*), and Davies furthers this perspective and offers commentary on *Macbeth* as well:

Macbeth is a drama about the power of choice, and the exercise of that power.

Throne of Blood, on the other hand, is a drama about inevitable prophetic truth. . . . Where *Macbeth* has choice, *Washizu* has only destiny, and this distinction between Shakespeare’s play and Kurosawa’s drama is forcibly announced at the beginning and the end of the film, by the chanting chorus which rings out the inevitable fate of ambitious men. (155)

In addition to the chanting Davies mentions, the evil spirit also uses the word “destiny” when it speaks to *Washizu* and *Miki* about its prophecies. One possible rationale for such a claim lies in the belief in spirits present in the Japanese culture in general. In “Ghosts, Demons and Spirits in Japanese Lore,” Norman A. Rubin explains that “[b]elief in ghosts, demons and spirits has been deep-rooted in Japanese folklore throughout history” (Rubin); one specific type of supernatural entity, the *Tengu*, corresponds to the behavioral patterns *Throne of Blood*’s “evil spirit” displays. The *Tengu*, Rubin says, “[live] in mountain forests . . . and anyone entering the territory of the ‘*Tengu*’ unwittingly can fall into strange and unpleasant situations” in that the *Tengu* “maliciously tease people with all sorts of nasty tricks,” and, like the spirit in the film, “as quickly as they appear, just as quickly they vanish” (Rubin). Rubin’s assertion that “some ancient beliefs depicted the ‘*Tengu*’ as creatures of war and conflict” also raises interest here mainly because of the circumstances under which *Washizu* and *Miki* come upon the spirit in the

first place. The song that opens the film acts as a foreshadowing device; the lyrics speak of carnage and the spirits born from the like that now inhabit this place, and the opening dialogue reveals the details of the war taking place: fortresses change hands, and the fields abound with death and devastation. One man says Washizu's gambit wasted the enemy, and even as that enemy begs for peace, the victorious army refuses and pursues violence. During their journey back to their superiors, Miki and Washizu become lost and encounter the spirit, which (in considering the description of the creature Rubin provides) may have materialized in response to the conflict surrounding these two characters; therefore, this may lead one to the conclusion that Washizu did, in fact, act because it was his destiny to do so.

One could plausibly see how Davies came to his conclusion that *Macbeth* dramatizes choice while *Throne of Blood* depicts destiny, because the traditional image of witches to a Western audience means something somewhat different from what the evil spirit in *Throne of Blood* means to a Japanese audience. One piece of information Davies neglects to consider, however, negates the argument that Washizu can only act under the pretense of destiny; in one scene, Miki's son raises the question that perhaps the evil spirit merely suggested one course of action and Washizu carried out that suggestion of his own accord (*Throne*). This scene alone introduces enough reasonable doubt that one cannot assuredly state that Washizu had no freedom of choice, thus forming another parallel with Shakespeare's play through the shades of grey in terms of choice versus destiny.

An understanding of the beliefs Kurosawa's Japanese audience holds contributes to the credibility of the argument that this film has earned its status of "Shakespearean film adaptation" in that through this understanding, one can more accurately assess the reasoning behind any changes Kurosawa made: Kurosawa has translated *Macbeth* into a frame of reference relevant to

a Japanese audience and has thus recontextualized the experience of *Macbeth* into an accurate parallel of Shakespeare's work. Despite the strong foundation to the argument that Kurosawa's film does, in fact, deserve the title of "Shakespearean film," the argument still continues. Davies explains the counterpoint to this foundation:

Those like Geoffrey Reeves and Peter Brook, who argue against the consideration of *Throne of Blood* as a Shakespearean film do so on the grounds that Kurosawa is "doing what every film-maker has always done—constructing a film from an idea and using appropriate dialogue; where the story comes from doesn't matter."
(154)

Davies also refers to Kermode's essay "Shakespeare in the Movies" in which Kermode "pointedly excludes *Throne of Blood* on the grounds that it is 'an allusion to, rather than a version of, *Macbeth*'" (154). To say that the film merely alludes to *Macbeth* and to discount its Shakespearean nature would detract from Kurosawa's accomplishment in translating the experience of Shakespeare's play to Japanese cinema. Rackin comments on the specific theatrical experience one encounters in *Macbeth*:

Unlike *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, *Macbeth* contains no subplots, and the main plot is remarkably simple. The complexity of the play derives from its complicated language, themes, and characterization. . . . *Macbeth* is profoundly introspective and subject to powerful internal conflicts. . . . His soliloquies reveal those conflicts in language so richly allusive and so elliptical that it often verges on opacity[.] (107)

Not unlike the stance Rackin adopts regarding the experience of *Macbeth*, in *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, Donald Richie posits a similar view on the experience of *Throne of Blood* when

he indicates, “[u]sing only a few components—drifting fog and smoke, a rainy forest, . . . cloudy skies, the dead white of skin—Kurosawa, with his cameraman, Nakai Asakazu, created a film with a definite texture” (174). As Richie mentions here, one way in which Kurosawa parallels—rather than alludes to—the thickness of Shakespeare’s language surfaces in the way he uses the image of fog throughout the film. In the case of the spirit scene, for instance, the fog serves as a substitute for the asides Shakespeare provides, thus standing in as a visual parallel for the linguistic disorientation Macbeth and Banquo exhibit as a result of the witches’ prophecies; in fact, Kurosawa fills *Throne of Blood* with such parallels.

While, of course, audiences can regard *Throne of Blood* as a powerful film and an artistic achievement in its own right, Kurosawa expands his success exponentially with the added achievement of translating the essence of Shakespeare’s work so thoroughly. Anderegg expresses the issue accurately when he speaks to both sides of the argument simultaneously:

Again, Kurosawa’s *Throne of Blood* provides an exemplary instance even as it is inimitable. Both *Macbeth* and not *Macbeth*, Shakespeare and not Shakespeare, a ‘pure’ film that is highly theatrical, *Throne of Blood* draws as much on Shakespeare’s sources as on Shakespeare. Kurosawa’s triumph was to create a completely coherent, self-contained text that in no way depends on familiarity with the original even as it enriches our appreciation of Shakespeare’s play. (8)

In this expression, Anderegg acknowledges all of the potential source material without detracting from the Shakespearean influence. While one recognizes Anderegg’s accuracy in saying the film “in no way depends on familiarity with the original,” the viewer who possesses a knowledge of *Macbeth* may bring a finer understanding to any discussion thereof in terms of formulating a more comprehensive interpretation; furthermore, one cannot refute Anderegg’s assertion that

Throne of Blood in turn “enriches our appreciation of Shakespeare’s play.” If Kurosawa has produced a text so complete that it enriches the study of *Macbeth*, it seems unreasonable that anyone would deny its standings as one of the true Shakespearean films.

Almost three full decades after making *Throne of Blood*, Kurosawa released *Ran*, another film in which one can see Shakespeare’s influence. Regarding *Throne*, Kurosawa expressed that he “wanted to do something with Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*” (qtd. in Richie’s *Films of Akira Kurosawa* 115); *King Lear*, however, did not initiate Kurosawa’s impulse to write the screenplay for *Ran*, though it later informed and shaped some of the film. In *Akira Kurosawa and Intertextual Cinema*, James Goodwin elaborates:

Inspiration for the story [of *Ran*] came first through Kurosawa’s notion to invert the legend of Motonari Mori (1497-1571), whose three sons are admired in Japan as the ideal of family loyalty. . . . Once Kurosawa had begun scripting *Ran*’s story of a feared yet aging ruler deposed by disloyal sons, similarities to *King Lear* became apparent to him. . . . Though plot elements, important incidents, and central metaphors are drawn from Shakespeare’s tragedy, the textual treatment of adapted material is governed by Kurosawa’s original conception of an inversion to Japanese ideals of family and political loyalty. (196-97)

Like *Throne of Blood*, *Ran* reimagines its source material, but the initial source was something other than Shakespeare’s play; furthermore, due to its primary source material, like *Throne*, it also does not use Shakespeare’s language, but instead uses Japanese with modern English subtitles. Moreover, and in this case unlike *Throne of Blood*, *Ran* lacks any sort of visual substitution for Shakespeare’s language that Kurosawa could have employed after realizing the film’s similarities with *Lear*. Finally, whereas Kurosawa set out to adapt *Macbeth*, *King Lear*

proved merely an afterthought with its similarities to his project underway becoming “apparent” only after he had begun scripting *Ran*. One can see Shakespeare’s influence on this film in terms of plot and characterization, but some fundamental differences exist. Due to these aspects of the film, and despite the brilliance of the film itself, perhaps *Ran*, rather than *Throne*, fits better into Kermode’s description as “an allusion to, rather than a version of” (qtd. in Davies 154) Shakespeare’s work.

Since the word “ran” means “chaos,” one can see that the title fits perfectly with this specific type of Shakespearean influence because several of Shakespeare’s plots can border on the chaotic in regard to the relationships between the characters. The production notes provided on the *Ran* DVD explain an element of Japanese culture that makes an influence of this sort fitting for this film:

[A] Japanese influence not immediately apparent to western viewers is the underlying theme of “giri,” the complex system of interpersonal obligations that is a fundamental concept of Japanese culture. The title *Ran*, which may be translated as “chaos,” can be thought of in this sense as the destruction of the bonds of duty uniting a son to his father, a brother to his brother, and a samurai to his lord. (*Ran*)

Ran’s plot basically follows *Lear*’s in that it depicts an aging father who has decided to split his territory between his three children, two of whom prove less than worthy of such a gift. Both *Lear* and *Hidetora* (the *Lear* analogue) express that they have made such a decision in recognition of their own increasing years, and both have come to this conclusion before the audience meets them. *Lear*, however, expresses his age in direct relation to his decision:

Know that we have divided
In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age,
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburthen'd crawl toward death. (1.1.37-41)

While Lear makes this one all-encompassing statement, Hidetora expresses his sentiment in two different scenes, first commenting metaphorically on his age and then announcing his decision to retire and split his lands. Kurosawa's expression of these plot points in two scenes better represents both main pieces of source material. The section about age better relates to *Lear*, whereas the scene in which Hidetora divides his lands better relates to the Motonari Mori inversion. *Ran* opens with men on a hunt, and when one of the younger men suggests roasting the slain boar, Hidetora responds using the boar as a metaphor for his own situation, saying, "[h]e was old. His hide is tough, it stinks. Indigestible. Like me, Hidetora. Would you eat me?" (*Ran*). This sentiment also acts as a foreshadowing device in that, by the end of the film, the chaos will metaphorically consume Hidetora.

The specific chaos that will consume him begins to form in the Motonari Mori retelling. Largely due to the similarities between this story and *Lear*, the men's reasons for the land division appear to echo one another. Lear divides his kingdom because he recognizes his increasing age and additionally wishes to "publish / [his] daughters' several dowers, that future strife / [m]ay be prevented now" (1.1.43-5). In the same vein as Lear's wish to prevent "future strife," Hidetora presents three arrows intended to represent his three sons. First, he hands each son an arrow and gives instructions to break them, which they all do with ease. Then, he presents a bundle of three arrows, and upon receiving the same instructions, the sons cannot

break the bundle, thus expressing Hidetora's reasoning that a land ruled by three brothers together has more strength than a land governed by a single ruler. Just as Cordelia's statement that she loves her father "[a]ccording to [her] bond, no more nor less" (1.1.93) upsets Lear and results in her banishment, Hidetora's youngest son Saburo snaps the bundle of arrows over his knee, proving his father's faulty reasoning and questioning his faith in the old cliché of strength in numbers, an action that enrages Hidetora, who rashly decides to banish Saburo.

As Kurosawa initially set out to adapt the Motonari Mori story, he has provided three male children—as opposed to Lear's daughters—between whom Hidetora will divide his lands, and, regardless of which source provided the land division plot, it would not have held historical accuracy to give such a responsibility to daughters in medieval Japan, even in the interest of maintaining that aspect of Shakespeare's plot. The three sons—Taro, Jiro, and Saburo—will each become responsible for a castle—First, Second, and Third Castles, respectively—under the united rule of Taro, the eldest son; furthermore, like Lear, Hidetora will retain his title of Great Lord and a retinue of thirty troops. He will also move around between the sons, spending time as a guest under their care. Furthermore, like Lear's daughters, the two older sons in *Ran* prove unworthy of their father's bestowment while the youngest and most laudable son lives in exile.

In one of the commentary tracks on the *Ran* DVD, film historian Stephen Price explains the specific type of reinvention Kurosawa has achieved in *Ran*:

Kurosawa does not simply adapt a literary source, in the sense of illustrating it. He transforms it; he makes it his own, not just in terms of the superficial transposition of Elizabethan England to sixteenth century Japan, but also in terms of some critical changes that he will be making. (Price)

As mentioned previously, simply maintaining the plot of Shakespeare's play does not provide enough material to deem the film "Shakespearean," and *Ran* not only strays from making a visual analogue to *Lear* the way *Throne* does with *Macbeth*, but it also strays from *Lear*'s plot in one major aspect that distances this film from its Shakespearean counterpart and thus helps remove *Ran* from consideration for inclusion under the name "Shakespearean film." Early in the film, the viewer encounters Lady Kaede, Taro's wife. Upon his death, however, she becomes the mistress and then the wife of her brother-in-law Jiro in an attempt to retain her power. The addition of Lady Kaede adds to the chaos of the film in many ways as well as to the Shakespearean flavor of the film in its trading of partners and revenge plot, but it detracts from transforming *Lear* in that it removes much of the responsibility and guilt from Taro and Jiro and applies it instead to Kaede; in this element, one of the features on the DVD describes Lady Kaede as "an amalgam (in motivation and character) of Cornwall, Edmund, Regan and Goneril," (*Ran*), but one can also contend that perhaps Kurosawa has decided to blend some aspects of Lady Macbeth with Lady Kaede. In fact, Goodwin solidifies this parallel by comparing Lady Kaede to *Throne of Blood*'s Lady Asaji when he points out similarity in "physical bearing" and acknowledges that "[b]oth women give the appearance of immobility and passivity while violent intentions surge within them" (210).

Lady Macbeth first appears reading a letter from her husband, and she issues a response demonstrative of her overall character. In her eyes, Macbeth "is too full o' th' milk of human kindness" (1.5.17) to do that which he must to become king, a sentiment not unlike that which Goneril expresses to Albany in *Lear* when she addresses his "milky gentleness and course" (1.4.341). Of the former, though, Lady Macbeth's more direct violence perhaps better echoes that of Lady Kaede:

Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
And chastise with the valor of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round[.] (1.5.17, 25-8)

Superficially, the reader knows that this excerpt contains violence in that it marks the beginning of the plot to kill Duncan, but her diction also communicates a certain level of violence against Macbeth. When she likens telling Macbeth her plot to pouring poison in his ear—an act that would kill him—she suggests the inevitability that Macbeth will die by the end of this play, and Lady Macbeth’s poison words will have at least some responsibility for that death. Similarly, the word “chastise” draws attention to itself as a punishment for any rational thoughts Macbeth may have contrary to her plot. Finally, the word “valor” better ties Lady Macbeth to Lady Kaede in that both women proceed with the understanding that their actions retain valorous properties.

One instance that breaks this parallel surfaces when Lady Kaede expresses to Taro her motivation to destroy the house of Ichimonji. While her dialogue articulates her plot for revenge, the utterly vacant expression on her face during her monologue lends an even more disturbing tone to the scene:

I was born and raised in this castle. It belonged to my father. I left it to marry you. My father and brothers, after the marriage, relaxed their vigilance. Hidetora murdered them. Now I am back in my family castle. How I have longed for this day. (*Ran*)

Throughout the film, Lady Kaede reiterates this plot at specific moments—at times, to gain leverage, and in other instances, to punctuate some of her more triumphant moments. For example, to maintain her standing in the hierarchy of the house of Ichimonji, she reveals, “[w]hat

concerns me is my own future. . . . This castle was my father's. I won't leave it!" (*Ran*), a sentiment that convinces Jiro not only marry her, but to have his existing wife Sué killed. Furthermore, in one of the most memorable scenes in the film, in order to finalize her destruction of the house of Ichimonji, she shouts, "I wanted to avenge my family! I wanted this castle to burn! I have done all I set out to do!" (*Ran*), after which the men behead her.

One effect Lady Kaede's presence in the film has on reminding the audience of *Ran's* distance from the *Lear* plot lies in the relationships and motivations of the characters surrounding her. In *Ran*, the two older sons behave the way they do because they have fallen under the control of Lady Kaede in her attempts to avenge the wrongs done against her family, an influence Hidetora recognizes, which he brings to Taro's attention in saying, "[t]he hen pecks the cock and makes him crow" (*Ran*). Additionally, one of Jiro's men tells the tale of a white fox with nine tails that disguises itself as a woman for the purpose of causing chaos. Lady Kaede literally breaks apart the family from the inside because of vengeance, whereas in *King Lear*, one has a sense that Goneril and Regan act on their own accord out of greed and envy.

Goneril initiates the daughters' plot against Lear by depleting his number of attendants by half because they disrespected her men:

Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires,
Men so disorder'd, so debosh'd and bold,
That this our court, infected with their manners,
Shows like a riotous inn. (1.4.241-44)

Because Lear retains so many attendants, his power persists in a way unsuitable to Goneril and Regan. Later in the play, Goneril's husband begins questioning her behavior towards her father in a moment not unlike the fox of nine tails accusation against Lady Kaede:

Thou changed and self-covered thing, for shame
Bemonster not thy feature. Were't my fitness
To let these hands obey my blood,
They are apt enough to dislocate and tear
Thy flesh and bones. Howe'er thou art a fiend,
A woman's shape doth shield thee. (1.4.62-7)

The sisters' desire for power only increases throughout the course of the play and does not stay focused on Lear, for they soon become envious of one another. By Act IV, both women become infatuated with Edmund and his bloodthirsty nature, but obviously they cannot both have him. As Regan has become a widow at this point in the play, she sends a message to Goneril stating that "more convenient is [Edmund] for [her own] hand / [t]han for [Goneril's]," which only amplifies Goneril's jealousy, and in Act V Goneril murders her sister by poisoning her. The murder does not fulfill its purpose, however. When Edmund dies in a duel, Goneril commits suicide, so no one has emerged victorious.

Regarding the treatment of Lear and Hidetora, Goodwin points out that "[m]adness ultimately brings insight for Hidetora" (206), and the specific brand of insight Hidetora finds has similarity to that of Lear's insight in that both men reach that stage on their own. Both men exist under the care of a fool: Lear's Fool, and Hidetora's Kyoami. Despite the fact that both the Fool and Kyoami express the foolish nature of their counterparts, Hidetora only develops an awareness of his faults through observing nature's cruelty to its own kind as a strong wind twists through the tall grass, prompting him to reply, "[f]orgive me" (*Ran*). Much in the same way Hidetora can metaphorically apply nature's corruption of itself to his own actions against his

family and his people, Lear reaches his awareness when he meets Cordelia during the depths of his madness:

If you have poison for me, I will drink it.

I know you do not love me, for your sisters

Have (as I do remember) done me wrong:

You have some cause, they have not. (4.7.71-4)

Though both Lear and Hidetora reach enlightenment ultimately on their own, one may reasonably argue that the gibes from the fools help steer them in the appropriate direction.

Throughout both works, the Fool and Kyoami have freedom seemingly uncharacteristic of their social class, and they use this freedom to bring the foolishness of their masters to the forefront.

In *Lear*, the “all licens’d Fool” (1.4.201) freely expresses his thoughts whenever Lear proves himself the true fool; even when Lear questions the Fool about his behavior—“Dost thou call me a fool, boy”—the Fool responds unreservedly: “All thy other titles thou hast given away, / that thou wast born with” (1.4.148-50). In *Ran*, Kyoami takes similar liberties in addressing Hidetora, but to see this relationship as a retelling of *Lear* may prove erroneous. While similarities become apparent, Kurosawa did not set out to formulate an analogue with these characters. John Powers explains the historical and cultural source material for such a character:

Warlords of the period had people in their entourage of very low birth. . . . [T]heir main function was to be a conversationalist. Through them, the warlord would learn about what the people he governed were really thinking. And since they were not of the samurai class . . . they were exempted from the majority of the rules of etiquette. So Kyoami can say anything he wants. (qtd. in Goodwin 207)

Bradley formulates an interesting analogy regarding the fool: “Imagine the tragedy without him, and you hardly know it. To remove him would spoil its harmony, as the harmony of a picture would be spoiled if one of the colours were extracted” (271). Regardless of source material, the fools in both works find a commonality in their essentiality to the works in which they appear.

To return to Lady Kaede, she adds intriguing dimension to the film, but also adds a problematic element in terms of Kurosawa’s intended audience. To borrow Peter Rabinowitz’s term, one cannot resolve whom Kurosawa intends as the “authorial audience” due to the blending of Shakespeare’s works. The packaging of the DVD advertises *Ran* as a “brilliantly conceived retelling of *King Lear*” (*Ran*), despite Kurosawa’s intent to retell the story of Motonari Mori and his sons. Kurosawa acknowledges, though, that *Lear* informed and shaped the film, but as he only perceived the similarities after the fact, one would remain unable to name *Lear* as the primary source material and may even struggle with calling it a source at all since *Ran* seems merely to allude to it rather than to retell it. To further complicate things, one could safely assume that Kurosawa’s “authorial audience” would have familiarity with *Lear* in order to recognize the allusions, but the audience members who have familiarity with *Lear* would likely also have familiarity with *Macbeth* and, therefore, would not only comprehend the Lady Macbeth analogue in Lady Kaede, but would become distracted and pulled out of the *Lear* retelling by such an element, thereby negating any impact the *Lear* story could have had. Because of the *Macbeth* allusion, viewers may look for a canonical revision of Shakespeare, which they also do not get in this film. As Shakespeare wrote in *Lear*, “[n]othing will come of nothing” (1.1.90), and so seems the case in *Ran*, at least regarding its status as “Shakespearean film.”

In speaking of the nothingness, and as the word “nothing” appears twenty-six times throughout Shakespeare’s play, the concept of nothingness proves a major theme in the work, and this concept surfaces as well in Kurosawa’s film through the cinematography. As the film opens, Kurosawa presents his audience with two images: empty, green land and land populated only by four or less stationary men on horseback. In *Japan Color*, Ikko Tanaka indicates that green represents “the color of eternal life” (note to plate 22), a point that adds irony to Kurosawa’s film. Goodwin expands:

The film’s most ironic uses of color are in the case of green, which dominates many scenes set in nature. In its natural settings, however, *Ran* often dissociates green from the mythic conventions of spring and summer as restorative or redemptive of humanity’s spirit. A plain lush with tall grasses and wildflowers is the landscape of Hidetora’s derangement. . . . Opposing armies amass on a field and surrounding hills lush with summer grasses. (213-14)

Because he associates the color green with derangement, war, death, and destruction Kurosawa inverts the traditional cultural awareness of the color. In this sense, though, Kurosawa has found one way in which to parallel Shakespeare’s use of nothingness. In an attempt to bring new life to his kingdom, Lear divides it—an act which makes his kingdom, his family, and his life devolve into nothingness. Similarly, Kurosawa illustrates the various stages of nothingness in Hidetora’s lands and family issues through first, redefining the color green and second, applying his new definition and reiterating it throughout his film.

Like the blackness and whiteness present in *Throne*, Kurosawa’s use of color adds an intriguing facet to *Ran*. This element approaches Shakespeare’s linguistic accomplishments, much like the Lady Kaede aspect of the film does. Furthermore, both of these elements prove

similar in that they completely overshoot what Shakespeare does with his language. In fact, Richie maintains that the film is “color coordinated within an inch of its life” (*Hundred Years* 277). Kurosawa presents his characters in colors that draw the audience’s attention in a very specific way: each of the three sons and Hidetora appear as though Kurosawa has color-coded them for some reason. Tanaka addresses “the cultural significance of color” (Tanaka), an examination that may assist in contextualizing the color scheme for a western audience.

Hidetora first appears in white, an interesting paradox when one applies Tanaka’s explanation that “[w]hite has long been regarded as the color of the gods; pure and unsullied, it reflects the existence of this sacred glory” (note to plate 1). At the outset of the film, the audience knows that “pure” does not accurately describe Hidetora’s character, and the further the film progresses, the audience sees how far from pure his actions keep him; however, one may view the integration of “the color of the gods” as a comment speaking to that which Hidetora progresses by the film’s close. In every scene, Hidetora gets whiter, to the end that his “facial coloration has turned emphatically unnatural” (Goodwin 206) by the end of the film, which may act as an outward expression of his journey through various stages of madness progressing towards the great man he wants others to see him as.

Color-coding applies to the other main characters in the film as well, an element on which Goodwin expounds:

The most obvious example of color as a cultural sign is in the military gear of warring armies. The color used in the soldiers’ pennants and helmets is an index to their political identity: the troops of Taro are in yellow, those of Jiro are in red, Saburo in blue[.] (213)

The separate armies appearing color coded to represent their political and military affiliation echoes Shakespeare's opening stage direction in Act V, "*Enter, with Drum and Colors,*" and adds to *Ran*'s epic quality, another embellishment of *Lear*. In *Ran*, the armies fill the horizon line of the barren sprawling fields from the beginning of the film, whereas almost all of the battle in *Lear* takes place in the stage directions. In scene two, the reader encounters the stage direction "*Alarum within. Enter, with Drum and Colors, [the POWERS of France],*" and a mere eleven lines later at the beginning of scene three, England has emerged victorious when they "*Enter in conquest, with Drum and Colors.*"

Saburo's troops appearing in blue combined with Tanaka labeling blue as "the color of the people" (note to plate 33) adds an interesting comment that perhaps Saburo represents all the people against whom Hidetora has acted throughout his rule. Red appearing as Jiro's color also contributes to the interest of the color scheme, but in an ironic way. Tanaka describes red as "a color representing life and vitality" and as a reminder of "the sun: . . . radiating its vitalizing life-force into human beings" (note to plate 1). Jiro seems to represent the opposite of red in that he literally robs both his older brother and his wife of their lives and vitality; he also metaphorically robs his father of the same. Finally, in conjunction with Rackin's statement that "[i]n Shakespeare's day the king was traditionally associated with the sun" (108), the irony of Jiro taking measures to destroy the king lends itself well to an inversion of the Motonari Mori story as well as an inversion of *Lear*'s nature.

Unlike Anderegg's assertion that in *Throne of Blood* "Kurosawa captures the thematic essence of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*" (5), *Ran* seems to almost completely remove the essence of *Lear*. One can see that essence in Bradley's clarification of what elements comprise a tragic hero when he states, "[t]he tragic hero with Shakespeare, then, need not be 'good', though

generally he is ‘good’ and therefore at once wins sympathy in his error” (16), and in *Shakespeare After All*, Marjorie Garber looks specifically at Lear’s progression as this play’s tragic hero:

Lear himself is greater at the close of the play than at the beginning. His growth from error to acknowledgement of his poor, stripped nature, to repentance and a humble kneeling before Cordelia, is an upward progression as well as a downward one. He is greater on his knees than on his throne. (693-94)

Rackin also addresses the opti-pessimistic nature of the play, focusing on Lear’s last utterance of “Look on her! Look her lips, / Look there, look there!” (5.3.311-12):

One reason why Lear’s last words are so difficult to interpret is that the passage itself seems to support an optimistic reading, while the play as a whole seems to demand a pessimistic one. . . . When he draws his attention back to Cordelia . . . he seems to be seeing something new. . . . The only new thing he could be seeing, it would seem, is some grounds for hope. . . . The audience has no evidence other than Lear’s word that Cordelia is anything but dead and that the universe of the play is anything but a meaningless chaos. . . . But the very lack of evidence, the very difficulty of belief, is what serves, paradoxically, to make Lear’s belief so meaningful. (103-4)

Unlike the sympathy one feels for Lear and the ensuing twofold progression Shakespeare presents in his play, the audience remains unable to view Hidetora as a sympathetic protagonist due to the amount of back story Kurosawa includes which details Hidetora’s heartlessly cruel past dealings as one can safely assume that the events that transpired against Lady Kaede’s family were not an isolated incident. Goodwin elucidates in stating, “[a] principal consequence of the film’s creation of a detailed past of misdeeds by the character is to make Hidetora not only

less tragic but also less heroic than Lear” (212). In order for *Ran* to fall under the category of “Shakespearean film,” one must be able to look at Hidetora as a Shakespearean tragic hero, and because of the amount of detail the audience receives from Lady Kaede regarding Hidetora’s past, one becomes unable to reconcile that detail.

Goodwin points out that “Kurosawa considers his film more hopeful than Shakespeare’s tragedy” (212); Kurosawa has made this decision consciously and speaks about his intent on this topic:

I believe my film to be less pessimistic than *King Lear*; in any case, it is with this sense that I made the film. In contrast to King Lear, who has no regrets, who does not contemplate his past, who needlessly falls in this terrifying drama, Hidetora reflects on his past and regrets it. In this sense, I think my work is less tragic.

(qtd. in Goodwin 212)

In terms of authorial intent, since Kurosawa has purposefully set out to depict a less tragic version of “the greatest of Shakespeare’s tragedies” (Rackin 86), seeing this film as a transformation of Shakespeare’s play, as opposed to a true adaptation, has more accuracy. Some may argue, however, that Kurosawa has not fulfilled his intent to depict a “less pessimistic” story than that of Lear, and Goodwin delves into some of what actually happens in the outcome of

Ran:

War ultimately brings new social order in the heroic tragic worlds of *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, but it does not do so in the world of *Ran*. . . . At the conclusion of *Ran*, war has only further intensified the disorder within family and society. (214)

Can one call a universe plunged deeper into the depths of chaos “less pessimistic” than a universe that manages to show at least one small glimmer of hope amidst the despair? Because

of these elements in *Ran*, some may argue that the film actually presents a more pessimistic story than that of *Lear*, an issue that raises the question of how much one should consider authorial intent in analyzing a work. To further investigate this point, William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley illustrate what they call “The Intentional Fallacy”:

If the poet succeeded [in his intent], then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem—for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem. (1375)

Regardless of whether or not Kurosawa has succeeded in his attempts, and regardless of whether the film displays an optimistic or pessimistic conclusion, it has removed the simultaneous retention of both optimism and pessimism that *Lear* manages to preserve. Therefore, the same end result holds true, even to those who view authorial intent as the “intentional fallacy,” and *Ran* subsequently cannot fully depict the essence of Shakespeare’s play.

In viewing both of Kurosawa’s attempts at recontextualizing Shakespeare’s work next to one another, the many shades of gray that exist between “Shakespearean film” and its opposite come to the forefront, so one may not feel obligated to label these films as one of the two extremes. Goodwin bypasses these extremes in looking for the “intertexts” of the film as opposed to the actual source material:

It is most accurate to describe *Macbeth* as the primary intertext for *Throne of Blood* rather than as the basis for a Shakespeare adaptation by Kurosawa. In similar fashion, *King Lear* can be considered one of two principal intertexts for *Ran*. In taking material from the Renaissance tragic repertory, however, Kurosawa disrupts and contests conventions of the genre. The individual, tragic

worldview in the Shakespeare plays is reconceived in the Kurosawa films and becomes a tragic world without heroism. (169)

In this sense, and in light of the analysis set forth in this essay, one can easily accept *Throne of Blood* as at least coming closer to achieving that which Shakespeare achieved in *Macbeth*, thereby making it a better candidate for “Shakespearean film” than *Ran* on the overall scale of possible films under consideration for such a label for several reasons.

As *jidai-geki*, both of these films succeed in translating Shakespeare’s context to one that would have as much cultural significance to Kurosawa’s audience as Shakespeare’s plays held to his. In regard to any sort of visual parallel to Shakespeare’s language, only *Throne of Blood* demonstrates success here. In its visual repetition and scenes depicting confinement, *Throne* accurately represents Shakespeare’s asides that convey the states of confusion in which the characters find themselves when they become lost. Likewise, despite that Kurosawa has shot a black-and-white film, he maintains the mood of the more colorful scenes in *Macbeth*. He also manages to do this while retaining the major plot points, an element that *Ran* lacks mostly due to the fact that Kurosawa did not use Shakespeare as his initial source for the film—as Richie illustrates, “*Ran* . . . is neither a realistic rendition nor an illustration of the King Lear story, nor is it intended to be (*Hundred Years* 175). Finally, *Throne* demonstrates a successful translation of the essence of *Macbeth*, whereas *Ran* inverts the essence of *Lear*. In its employment of rain and fog, light and shadow, *Throne of Blood* illustrates the opacity of Shakespeare’s language in the play.

LIST OF REFERENCES

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Anderegg, Michael. *Cinematic Shakespeare*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.
- Anderson, Joseph L., and Donald Richie. *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry*. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1982.
- Bartlett, John, ed. *A Complete Concordance to Shakespeare's Dramatic Works*. Edinburgh: R. & R. Clark, 1855?
- Bradley, A. C. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. 3rd. ed. New York: Palgrave, 1992.
- Brode, Douglas. *Shakespeare in the Movies: From the Silent Era to Today*. New York: Berkley, 2000.
- Davies, Anthony. *Filming Shakespeare's Plays: The Adaptations of Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Peter Brook and Akira Kurosawa*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988.
- Garber, Marjorie. *Shakespeare After All*. New York: Anchor, 2004.
- Goodwin, James. *Akira Kurosawa and Intertextual Cinema*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Will in the World*. New York: Norton, 2004.
- McAlindon, T. *Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1991.
- Price, Stephen. Commentary track on *Ran* DVD.
- Rackin, Phyllis. *Shakespeare's Tragedies*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1978.
- Ran*. Dir. Akira Kurosawa. Perf. Tatsuya Nakadai. Wellspring, 1985.
- Richie, Donald. *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 2001.
- . *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1984.
- Rubin, Norman A. "Ghosts, Demons and Spirits in Japanese Lore." 12 May 2006.
<<http://www.asianart.com/articles/rubin/>>.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of King Lear. The Riverside Shakespeare*. 2nd. ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.
- . *The Tragedy of Macbeth. The Riverside Shakespeare*. 2nd. ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.

Tanaka, Ikko and Kazuko Koike, eds. *Japan Color*. San Francisco: Chronicle, 1982.

Throne of Blood. Dir. Akira Kurosawa. Perf. Toshiro Mifune, Isuzu Yamada. Toho, 1957.

Wimsatt Jr., William K. and Monroe C. Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: Norton, 2001. 1374-87.