
As adaptation theorists such as Linda Hutcheon recognise, we experience an adaptation as a complex palimpsest that resonates not only with the hypotext, but potentially with a range of other hypertexts (Hutcheon 2013, 8). This is particularly the case with *Macbeth* screen adaptations, which are in dialogue with a range of earlier film adaptations, as well as with Shakespeare's playtext. Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth* (2015) presents a compelling new adaptation, adding to the play's rich screen history and drawing elements from several filmic predecessors. At the same time, this adaptation brings a new dimension to the field by emphasising the motif of the child in a very physical and embodied way, and it is this aspect that I explore here.

Key elements of this vein of imagery include the opening sequence, in which the Macbeths bury their child, the inclusion of children in the band of weird sisters, and the foregrounding of the Macduff children in the narrative's most chilling scene. Kurzel has reflected that he sought to suggest a loss within the Macbeths' lives, "perhaps a child" and that ambition for them becomes a way "to fill a void" of their grief (cf. interview with Kurzel, DVD *Macbeth* [2016], extra features). His focus on children in key scenes impacts on the performances of adult characters and retells *Macbeth*, affecting our response to the film and our interpretation of the play. Macbeth's lack of heir, and his identity as a killer of children, is a sign of his unfitness to rule. Kurzel's new vision in this regard taps into Shakespeare's close linking of political virility with paternity across the tragedies and histories.

Lost Children

The emphasis on the embodied presence of children in this adaptation begins with the opening shot. The camera gives us the Macbeths' point of view, looking down on their dead son. The Macbeths (Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard) appear in mourning cloaks, with the melancholy landscape around them. To the left are Banquo (Paddy Considine) and Fleance (Lochlan Harris). This is the first of many scenes throughout the film that emphasise living children as counterpoints to the Macbeths' state, the fruitful, happy families that surround them and highlight their childlessness.

This initial interpolated scene, of mourning for a dead child, recalls a similar device used in Geoffrey Wright's 2006 screen adaptation. It picks up on Lady Macbeth's claim that she has "given suck and know[s]/ How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks [her]" (1.7.54-55). The suggestion in the playtext that the Macbeths previously had a child becomes fully realised in the moving opening scene. The effect is to humanise the Macbeths at this early stage of the tragic arc. Before they become monsters, they are grieving parents, situated from the outset in a state of intense personal grief. Lady Macbeth lays a flower on the corpse, and Macbeth places coins on the dead child's eyes and then scatters soil on the body. The child's deathbed thus becomes a grave, and a fire is lit beneath the bier. The motif of fire will echo subse-

---

1 Screenplay by Jacob Koskoff, Michael Lesslie and Todd Louiso.
2 All references to *Macbeth* are taken from The New Cambridge Shakespeare edition (Shakespeare 2008).
quently when Macbeth lights the fire to kill the Macduff children, and the final battle scene is set amidst flames.

Dead children haunt Macbeth and return in various guises in Kurzel's adaptation. In the first battle Macbeth acts paternally towards a boy soldier (Scot Greenan) and after the battle, when Macbeth encounters his dead body, he places coins on his eyes, echoing the earlier scene with his dead child. It also links war with sterility, the death of the next generation. Macbeth addresses his questions to the dead adolescent, as if he is somehow a link to Macbeth's dead child. Again Macbeth lights a fire to burn the bodies. This death of a second "child" emphasises again Macbeth's childlessness, and his link with the death of children.

The ghost of the boy soldier is subsequently conjured in the invisible dagger episode, when Macbeth reaches for the face of the young boy, not the dagger. As Claire Hansen observes, this gives a new reading to the playtext's reference to a "dagger of the mind, a false creation" (2.1.38): "Macbeth's hallucination or spiritual encounter is not only brought on by the violence of the deed he contemplates, but by his grief for absent children" (Hansen 2015). The boy then leads the way and Macbeth follows. Kurzel thus explicitly links the temptation to regicide with one of the lost child figures, violence with the spectre of the absent heir.

The Weird Sisters and the Child

The weird sisters are intimately connected with the theme of children in this adaptation. Throughout the first scene of mourning, as the Macbeths stand watching the bier burn, we hear unsettling music, in a minor key and slightly discordant, with dominant strings. This will signal their presence throughout the course of the film. We then see our first glimpse of the witches (Lynn Kennedy, Seylan Baxter, Kayla Fallon and Amber Rissman), as figures silhouetted against the mountains. The witch at the left has her hands on the shoulders of a young girl, while the middle witch holds a baby. The witches as parental figures create an unsettling echo of and juxtaposition with the childless Macbeths. This depiction of the witches also creates an interesting dialogue with the playtext. In the play, the witches are associated with anti-nurture; their potion includes a "birth-strangled babe,/ Ditch-delivered by a drab" (4.1.30-31) and the blood of a sow "that hath eaten/ Her nine farrow" (4.1.63-64). The implication is that their power derives in part from the death of children. So do they silently mock the Macbeths in the film scene, adding salt to their wounds by appearing with children? Are they associated with the child's death in some way, as early modern witches often were? Do they steal children, like the fairy figures of early modern folklore (Purkiss 2000, 106-109)? As an outsider group, a family-like tribe with no males, they also suggest a feminist threat to the patriarchal system of thanes, reminiscent of Roman Polanski's version of the witches as an alternative feminist cult-like group in his 1971 adaptation.

The witches then speak their familiar opening lines: "When shall we three meet again" (1.1.1), says one. They do not look at each other; uncannily they stare straight ahead, implicitly at the Macbeth family burial, but also perhaps at the more distant view of the unfolding pattern they are about to set in motion. One of the witches holds in her hand a strange and disturbing object – the skull of a bird tied to other bones, which has a doll-like charm. An eerie close-up focuses on the object, as we hear the lines "Hover through the fog and filthy air" (1.1.13). The strange object recalls the

---

3 The film's soundtrack was composed by Jed Kurzel (cf. Internet Movie Database).
Performing the Child Motif in Kurzel’s Macbeth (2015)

The contents of the cauldron (4.1) and Orson Welles’s use of a voodoo doll object in his 1948 adaptation, to convey the uncanny effect of the witches.

This first glimpse of the witches precedes the intertitle that locates Kurzel’s film in early medieval Scotland and emphasises the civil war context, placing Macbeth’s subsequent regicide in a larger context of pre-existing disloyalty to the crown. The witches thus preside over, or flourish at the margins of, a chaotic political scene. I have previously explored the questions raised by filmic depictions of the weird sisters, arguing that adaptations often create the sense of “weird space,” whereby images, events and uncanny linkings suggest the pervasive presence of the weird sisters, magnifying their effect and power beyond the actual scenes in which they physically appear (Bladen 2013). The close linking of children, death, the weird sisters and Macbeth created in the first scene has the effect of generating a trace of weird space in all of the subsequent evocations of the child throughout the film.

The weird sisters are also depicted in surveillance of the first battle. Just as they were onlookers to the Macbeths’ child’s funeral, they can also be glimpsed through the battling men. The discordant music eerily registers their presence while the battle is presented as a dance between noise and silence. The powerful slow motion shots are indebted to Kenneth Branagh’s treatment of battle scenes in Henry V (1989). While figures move around him, Macbeth appears motionless, disengaged and staring ahead, seeming, at some level, to sense the presence of the weird sisters. His first encounter with them is located just after he and Banquo have been dealing with the bodies, thus linking the witches closely with the business of death and conflict. Macbeth and Banquo question the witches, and tellingly it is the child witch who is closest to them. This intermediary figure recalls the lost children of Macbeth and it is to this young witch that their first questions are directed.

The child approaches Macbeth and Banquo with something in her hand, possibly the ghoulish trinket. A blonde, younger witch touches Macbeth’s face in a tender gesture, searching in his face. This quasi-loving, wifely gesture creates an eerie link between the witch and Lady Macbeth. The camera then cuts to a visionary scene of Macbeth being crowned king, a vision of the future. The witches then leave Macbeth to ponder the prophesy; he makes a gesture to follow them but they ignore him, continuing to walk away, holding the hand of the young girl between them. This image of nurturing again emphasises Macbeth’s lack, even in the wake of the alluring vision, and the figures blur into the mist.

The link between the weird sisters and children is also emphasised in the scene of Banquo’s murder and Fleance’s escape in the forest. The discordant music signals the presence of the weird sisters. We see a shot of the child witch and Fleance, who regards her momentarily. Banquo lies dead, or dying, with his eyes open. We are then given the attackers’ point of view scanning the forest but Fleance has disappeared. The suggestion is that the child witch has facilitated Fleance’s escape, implying the weird sisters’ agency in securing the fulfilment of the prophecy.

For the depiction of the cauldron scene, 4.1, Macbeth is seen riding out in his nightgown, either in reality or in his dream. He walks through the mist and the weird sisters appear (once again with the baby and young witch who holds the tinkling toy).

The child has three raised, cultish marks on her face between her eyebrows. This suggests ritual, and echoes the three black lines of Macbeth in going into battle, and the general linking of the witches with the number three and the significance of three throughout the play. In addition to the three weird sisters themselves, there are three levels of Macbeth’s ambition – Glamis, Cawdor and king - and three key murders scenes – Duncan, Banquo, and the Macduff family.
He drinks their brew, then sees various warriors approaching him through the mist. Kurzel has stated that he conceived of Macbeth as a soldier suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome (cf. interview with Kurzel, DVD *Macbeth* [2016], extra features). This idea, of the violence bleeding over from war zone into domestic space, thus grounds and provides a rationale for Macbeth's own violence. The passing figures of the cauldron scene are consistent with Kurzel's concept of Macbeth as a product of war. One of the figures is the ghost of the boy soldier, who becomes the Second Apparition of the playtext, the "bloody Child," advising Macbeth to "Be bloody, bold, and resolute" and to "laugh to scorn/The power of man, for none of woman born/ Shall harm Macbeth" (4.1.78-80). Macbeth embraces him in gratitude.

The Macbeths as Child-Killers

Shakespeare conveys the evil potential of Lady Macbeth through her chilling rhetorical analogy of dashing out her child's brains, to articulate the idea that the commitment to keep an oath outweighs considerations of morality and human feeling (1.7.54-59). Left unanswered is the question of what could lead her to swear such an oath of infanticide. Also missing is the evidence that Macbeth made such a promise. Nevertheless, Lady Macbeth's rhetoric is effective in moving Macbeth to be both persuaded and impressed by his wife. Her display of violent potential as a parent leads Macbeth to imagine her as a generator of sons, as future soldiers and violent patriarchal leaders (1.7.72-74). Whereas in the early part of the play it is Lady Macbeth who appears as the most potentially violent towards children, as the play progresses, she seems to retreat from the horror, corroding inwardly from the effects of repressing natural human empathy. It is Macbeth who develops from a position of initial reluctance to resort to violence to one of wholly embracing the most brutal of solutions to his uneasy wearing of the crown.

In Kurzel's film, after Macbeth has been promoted to Thane of Cawdor, as the weird sisters prophesized, we are shown Lady Macbeth in a chapel holding the Cawdor ribbon. That her entreaty to the "spirits/ That tend on mortal thoughts" (1.5.38-39) in the chapel strikes us as particularly blasphemous. She asks it before a panel with a cross flanked by two trees, the iconography of the trees of life and knowledge. In her appeal to the dark spirits, she is thus linked with Eve, the mother who brings death to her offspring through original sin. Other panels in the room depict biblical scenes. The tree imagery also resonates with the idea of the family tree. Thus the *mise-en-scène* resonates with the theme of the Macbeths' sterility, their lack of a continuing family tree, and their status as a withering branch that will end with their deaths. A shot of an angel on a panel is covered with the shadow of flickering flame (part of the vein of fire imagery through the film that is tied to burning dead and live children, associated with the Macbeths). It is appropriate that Lady Macbeth's performance of anti-nurture – "Come to my woman's breasts and take my milk for gall" (1.5.45-46) – is placed in the context of the tree imagery on the panels. It links her with the sin, death and sterility of the tree of knowledge side of the paradigm. Her voice coincides with a shot of a panel depicting souls toppling down to Hell alongside a demon. Her appeal to dark forces to steel her resolve is thus expressly linked with the casting of the sinful into Hell in the Last Judgement. Burning candles at left light up the panels; the performance is blasphemous and presented as a deliberate decision to sin.

---

5 I have written previously on the presence of tree of life imagery in Shakespeare's work, and how this has been drawn on in film adaptation (Bladen 2009; 2016).
When the Macbeths greet Duncan, their hooded cloaks recall the burial shots in the opening scene. The effect is to import the trace of death into the very greeting of Duncan and link the loss of the child with the regicide. Their stark stance also resembles the posture of the witches, linking them with the weird sisters, and bringing an uncanny echo into the scene. Children also function as a thematic echo in a scene after the regicide. As Macbeth speaks with Lennox (David Hayman) outside Duncan's tent, while MacDuff goes to rouse the king, there is a shot of children playing and jostling in the background, one wearing a crown of sticks. The children's ludic mirroring of the tussle for power is given a violent undercurrent by the context of its appearance, as we already know that Duncan is dead. At the same time, the competition that the crown incites is implicitly recast as child's play, albeit a deadly game.

The linking of the Macbeths with the death of children is also emphasised in the post-coronation scene where we see Macbeth on the floor. His lowly position immediately after the coronation scene reiterates his inability to enjoy his new position (the coronation scene itself is contaminated by flashbacks of his frenzied killing of Duncan). Macbeth is supposedly elevated yet he sits on the floor like a lowly servant, degraded and brought low by the aftermath of his actions. He is dragging the edge of a dagger along the stone floor as Lady Macbeth approaches. She takes the crown and places it on Macbeth's head, as if to convince him that he is really king. Her gesture links her with the weird sisters, as implicitly instrumental for the fulfilment of the prophecy. However, Macbeth laments that "Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown/And put a barren sceptre in my gr(3.1.62-63, 65). In the playtext, this is a soliloquy, but placed here, in Lady Macbeth's presence, it creates a suggestion of blame. In a menacing gesture, he points the tip of his dagger at Lady Macbeth's womb. He implicitly directs his anger at the female body that has failed to provide him with a lasting heir. "For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind" (3.2.36). His dagger remains on Lady Macbeth's belly, who is disconcerted at this alteration in her husband. Macbeth smiles grimly as he says "full of scorpions is my mind" (3.2.36). He leans forward menacingly and lifts up Lady Macbeth's skirt; the threat of the dagger increases. Lady Macbeth pushes away the threat and kisses him. The tear that rolls down Macbeth's cheek is a physical reminder that grief for the lost children is at the core of the violence, in this interpretation of Shakespeare's tragedy.

Marjorie Garber draws a biblical link with the vein of child deaths in the play: "The play suggests that we have been witnessing a kind of massacre of the innocents, like the slaughter by Herod of all the newborn boys in Bethlehem to prevent one of them from becoming the Messiah" (Matthew 2:1-18; Garber 2004, 720). The most disturbing scene of Kurzel's adaptation, which emphasises Macbeth as a killer of children, is the burning of the Macduff family. By foregrounding the children in this scene, with shots of the young sons tied to the stake, and the emphasis on Macbeth's direct and physical involvement in the murders, the horror is intensified. It also functions as a culmination of the various threads of imagery throughout the adaptation, linking the Macbeths' trauma over the loss of their children, their anti-nurturing associations, their failure as a ruling couple to embody the fertility expected of the throne, and their function as a blight on the Scottish landscape. The killing of the children in this scene brings these elements together and reveals the utter depths to which Mac-

---

6 The implicit threat to Lady Macbeth's womb invokes a dark aspect of the play's screen history; Polanski's adaptation was haunted by the 1969 murder of his pregnant wife Sharon Tate and unborn child, by the Charles Manson gang (Garber 2004, 723).
beth's potential has now sunk. There is a physical, tactile quality to the flame, and Macbeth's ready involvement, his continuing to hold a lit torch throughout, conveying his obsession. The action speaks of the futile attempt to burn out the loss and pain at the core of the Macbeths. The burning of the Macduff children echoes with the opening burial shot (and also with the early modern practice of burning witches). There is a lingering shot of Macbeth looking at the young Macduff boys tied to the stake while Lady Macbeth weeps. After Macduff is told, he screams "He has no children" (4.3.218). Macbeth's childlessness is directly linked to his incapacity to feel empathy.

**The Child and Performance**

Children both humanise the Macbeths, and emphasise the horror of the play's events, situating them in the context of family groups. Throughout Kurzel's adaptation, there are many moments where the physicality of children is a significant vehicle for expressing relationships and emotions. Fleance's embrace of his father Banquo, when the latter returns safely from battle, is a full leap onto his father, wrapping his limbs around him while Banquo cradles him like a baby. The bond between child and parent is expressed in a physical and unselfconscious way and it creates a tactile effect for the audience. The emphasis on the child puts Macbeth's lack in relief, particularly the physical gesture of treating the boy like an infant, which recalls Macbeth's much younger dead child. The loving gesture of son and father in this brief moment also contrasts with the predominant violence of the Macbeth narrative.

In an evocative early scene, a group of children sing for Duncan by candlelight, linking the king with a sense of abundance and fertility that forms a stark contrast with Macbeth. Macbeth can hear the voices from his tent, and his face registers the pain as the children's voices recall his loss as a parent. There is then a shot of Banquo with Fleance on his lap, again emphasising parenthood. Lady Macbeth joins the children, standing before a tentpole decorated with leaves. The vegetative imagery evokes the idea of the family tree, however it also echoes with the earlier scene of Lady Macbeth's blasphemous prayer before the panel with the trees of life and death. If the singing children resonate with the trees of family and life, Lady Macbeth is the dark counterpart amidst it. With the candlelight, there is the subtle juxtaposition of children and fire that links back to the opening burial, and foreshadows the horrific burning of the Macduff children. Fittingly, amongst the imagery of children and vegetation, fertility and abundance, Duncan announces his succession, putting a chair on a table and pulling Malcolm to him as he names him as his successor. Family ties win over merit. As he names Malcolm Prince of Cumberland, the vegetation on the central pole appears to sprout above Malcolm, just as visually Malcolm sprouts from Duncan. The mise-en-scène thus emphasises paternity and the transference of power through blood.

We then cut to Macbeth standing outside, towards the dark night, cast out from this scene of family ties and monarchical power for his "If it were done when 'tis done" speech (1.7.1-28). The discordant music characterising the weird sisters suggests that their influence and/or surveillance is pervasive. A technique Kurzel uses throughout the film is that voices in speeches from one scene often overlap with subsequent scenes. That is, the voice shifts from being an intradiegetic part of the performance in one scene to becoming disembodied, disconnected from the visuals as it shifts to an extradiegetic component of another scene, haunting it, and floating somewhere between the world of the film, and that of the audience. The effect is to blur the boundaries between scenes, and create intersections through the sound track. While Macbeth speaks his soliloquy there is a shot of the children singing for Duncan, some
with flowers in their hands. Macbeth's voice over the visual shot of the children, as he contemplates murder, performs a violation, foreshadowing not only his regicide but also his potential as a killer of children. Duncan passes his sword to the children to marvel at. This is another type of violation, creating a disquieting conjunction of children with a symbol of violence. Macbeth, meanwhile, leans his head on a wall, grappling with the enormity of what he is contemplating.

Macbeth seems constantly surrounded by fathers. At Duncan's funeral Macduff cradles one of his children. Banquo and Fleance approach the body and Banquo looks anxiously and questioningly at Macbeth. A shot from above, of the bier with Duncan's body, recalls the opening shot of the dead Macbeth child, linking his loss with the regicide. The physical presence of children acting in the various roles naturally impacts on the performances of actors in the adult roles. It would have enabled and facilitated actors drawing from their own experiences as parents, guardians or mentor figures. Carol Chillington Rutter has explored responses to the concept of the child in the performance history of Macbeth and cites the performance of Sinead Cusack's for the RSC in 1986 as a key moment. "By insisting that performance gives weight to the images she heard the playtext activate," Rutter argues, Cusack "reconnect[ed] Macbeth to its early modern origins – to its children" (2007, 171). Whereas in early literary critical discourses critics debated the relevance of the question of the Macbeths' lost child, as Rutter points out, every actor had to interpret the issue as part of their performance (2007, 171).

Performance is a dialogue with the playtext as both historical object and living story, an interpretation of narrative and poetry, using the body, through expression, gesture and movement, as a vehicle to convey emotion and motivations. Performance transposes thought. An actor's performance is also in dialogue with the bodily presence and movements of those around them. The lost child, as a haunting third presence, is a constant tangible presence, echoed in the living children that surround the Macbeths. In Kurzel's adaptation Lady Macbeth gives her final speech, "Out, damned spot" (5.1.30-58), while sitting inside the doorway of the chapel in which she initially evoked the spirits, as snow drifts in. The speech seems directed slightly offside from the camera. We then get a reverse shot and realize that Lady Macbeth has, all this time, been talking to the ghost of her dead child. This brings the initial arboREAL symbolism, with its suggestions of sin, and the sterile family tree, full circle. As Marion Cottilard observed, this interpretation brought a new dimension to her performance, grounding her final speech in the pain of losing the child. It also created a circularity with the opening scene. After finishing her speech, she walks out in the snow, uncovered and unhinged. She sees the weird sisters in the distance, still with their baby and young girl, silently mocking her loss with their family.

**Political Infertility**

The Macbeths' childlessness has a political dimension. This becomes particularly relevant after the regicide and upon Macbeth becoming king. In the early modern period, royal fertility was inseparable from political power. As Rutter observes, "the very idea of the king, of his legitimacy and succession, is bound up with paternity, with the idea of the child" (2007, 157-58). Across Shakespeare's plays, virility is often a sign and measure of kingship. The absence of children reflects on a monarch's lack of fitness for rule; it is the "mark of a usurper" (Rutter 2007, 158). The film's emphasis on the child foregrounds this link between children and politics in the play, and its historical context. As Hansen observes, Macbeth "is a play famously preoccupied
with succession – and of course, with the interruption or disturbance of primogeniture” (2015).

Kurzel locates two key scenes of killing, Banquo's and the murder of the Macduff family, in forest settings. While this taps into the natural association of the forest as a space of fear, it also resonates with some of the arboreal imagery that the film draws on, and the idea of family trees. Macbeth's attack is one against family trees, those around him that threaten his narrow and fragile reign with their fertility. It is thus appropriate that his attacks against these family trees are situated in forest settings. Later, when Birnam Wood burns, and the wood comes to Dunsinane through the air, as burning ashes, it is as if the family trees that Macbeth has attacked themselves retaliate. Macbeth strides out for the final battle amidst the fire and we get a shot of the weird sisters through the haze of the fire in a silhouette shot as they watch the battle. There is also a shot of the ghost of the boy soldier, so the space of the final battle merges with the space of Macbeth's vision of his earlier encounter with the weird sisters.

There has been a common trend in film adaptations of Macbeth to introduce Fleance to the closing scenes, utilising the mythic founder of the Stuart family line to suggest that the cycle of violent ambition for the crown will continue. William Carroll (2013) has traced this phenomenon in the screen history of the play. Through this, many screen adaptations suggest the seeds of future violence, embodied in a child figure that will implicitly haunt the new king. Kurzel continues this trend. There is a shot of the weird sisters walking away while Macbeth watches them go as he dies. Fleance stands over the kneeling body of Macbeth, whose corpse is locked in a position of homage. Fleance picks up a sword and the shot is juxtaposed with a shot back in the cathedral where Malcolm also wields a sword and regards the crown. The camera oscillates between Malcolm in the cathedral, the duly appointed heir, and Fleance with a sword, amidst the fire; two contenders whose fathers were brutally murdered. In the final shot of the film, Fleance runs away from the camera into the red haze.

Killing the Seeds of Time

As Rutter argues, Macbeth as child-killer is tied up with his futile attempt to curb the future. Children embody the future and Macbeth is tied to the past. She observes: "Having no children, he has no future. To keep that future at bay, he must kill it – by crushing 'the seeds of time' (1.3.56) that are the future. The children" (Rutter 2007, 165). This expresses the paradox at the heart of the intersection of violence and grief in Macbeth. While children are the future, they also recall the past. Rutter points out that "nostalgically the child represents a longing for the adult's past: his innocent selfhood" (2007, 169). The lost child that haunts Macbeth throughout Kurzel's film also embodies Macbeth's lost innocence, his lost peace of mind. The absent child is the path Macbeth chose not to take, the lost choice for good.

The figure of Fleance, who slips from Macbeth's grasp, is emblematic of what continually eludes and haunts him. As Greenblatt states, Macbeth discovers, to his horror, that "the dream of a 'clean' regicide proves psychologically untenable" (2008, 2712). His child-killing is part of a futile attempt to seek a conclusion to the killing, to
render the deed "done." That Kurzel's Macbeth personally lights the fires to kill the Macduff children, not content to simply order it, or even supervise from a distance, conveys his horrific compulsion to hold back the future, to stop the threads and consequences that proliferate from each new deed and to attack the fertility that evades him and mocks his barren crown.

The series of child figures throughout Kurzel's adaptation embody Macbeth's mourning and loss. They foreground and materialise not only his personal loss, but his political failing. His parental sterility is a sign of his unfitness to rule, his illegitimacy in the position of monarch. The anti-nurturing quality of the Macbeths aligns them with the weird sisters; they are a source of sterility and, in power, a blight on the land and people. The film's insistent recurrent imagery of children highlights the play's connection between fertility and politics. The embodied presence of children throughout the film performs Macbeth's lack, making visible the void at the heart of the character as a man and ruler. Thus Kurzel's vision opens up new perspectives on the play, inviting us to see new facets of the flawed couple and the pain that lies at the core of their violence.

Works Cited


