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**“FAIR IS FOUL, AND FOUL IS FAIR”:  
A CARNIVALESQUE APPROACH TO JUSTIN KURZEL AND  
BILLY MORRISSETTE’S CINEMATIC ADAPTATIONS OF  
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE’S MACBETH**

**Abstract:** *The conventional approach to literary adaptation, which insisted on rigid adherence to the source and denounced any deviation from the established text as unprofessional and negligent, has been substituted with attitudes that define the adaptation-source relation in new ways. Bakhtinian dialogism, as one of these approaches, redefines this relation in terms of a persistent contact between the two sides as the participants of a never-ending, all-inclusive network of relations. The idea of carnivalesque, a key part of Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, can be used in adaptation studies to reflect both on the nature of adaptation-source relation and the internal mechanisms and techniques used by a particular adapter to reverse and suspend the orders and hierarchies established in its source work. Within this framework, the present study investigates Bakhtinian carnivalesque in Justin Kurzel and Billy Morrisette’s cinematic adaptations of William Shakespeare’s Macbeth (1606). Kurzel’s Macbeth (2015), set in Scottish Highlands during the 11th century, seeks to retain the Shakespearean air while addressing its contemporary issues mostly by highlighting or adding to the elements of carnival within the play. Morrisette’s Scotland PA (2001) takes a radically different stance toward the play, though. He transforms Shakespeare’s bloody tragedy into a dark comedy about the revolt of the lower class against the social structure. The study suggests that while these two adaptations take different, and at times opposing, approaches toward the play Macbeth, they both point to the carnivalesque potential of the play which can be released in and adapted to various socio-cultural contexts.*

**Key Words:** *adaptation studies, Mikhail Bakhtin, dialogism, carnivalesque, William Shakespeare, Macbeth*

## **Introduction**

Adapting Shakespeare for screen has long provoked various responses among literary critics. While some insist on sticking hard to Shakespeare’s texts and denounce any deviation from the Bard’s poetic language, others argue that a successful Shakespeare film needs to be

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grounded in its contemporary socio-cultural context. The former group of critics – referred to as proponents of fidelity criticism – attribute the success of an adaptation to the degree that it upholds the magnificence of Shakespeare's language and his choice of setting as well as character and themes. The latter, however, contend that if movie directors seek to nod vigorously to the youth audience and reflect the values of their current society, they have to refashion and modernize their narratives.

Much of the debate between these two camps lies in their different attitudes toward the relationship between the source text and the adapted film. Fidelity criticism establishes a vertical relation between the source and the adaptation where the source text finds a sacred position which must be respected by the adapted work. Thus, even minor changes in the adapted movie suggest either irreverence or ignorance on the part of the filmmaker. This trend, which still has its own apologists, was partly popularized because of the immense influence of classic works of literature in the early days of cinema. Back in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, pioneers of movie industry had to rely on renowned literary classics to guarantee large numbers of viewers. Moreover, since early movies were silent, the most assured way to avoid the spectators' boredom was activating their previous knowledge of famous stories. That's why the first cinematic adaptation of a Shakespearean play, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree's *King John* (1899), is nearly as old as the cinema itself.

As the number and quality of cinematic adaptations grew, the methodology of the critical evaluation of these works changed too. Faithfulness is no longer an absolute yardstick to assess the value of an adapted film and determine its success or failure. Instead, every adaptation is treated as an autonomous discourse and a living utterance which is in perpetual interaction with other textual, political, social, and cultural discourses. Therefore, an adapted film, while affecting its surrounding discourses, is subject to multiple influences which are not necessarily the ones that the source text has been exposed to. This results in highlighting certain elements of the source text while undermining or even omitting certain others.

As this study endeavors to show, Justin Kurzel and Billy Morrissette's adaptations of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1606), despite all their differences, stress the carnivalesque features of the play through addition or deletion of specific elements or dealing with the play in totally new contexts. The next section addresses a brief history of carnival as a key cultural and social event. Then, the project will discuss the theory of carnival and the concept of carnivalesque as stated in the works of the Russian thinker Mikhail Bakhtin. The study will continue with the discussion of the carnivalesque in Justin Kurzel's

*Macbeth* (2015) and Billy Morrissette's *Scotland, PA* (2001), showing how each movie director benefits from the carnival world and atmosphere to voice his concerns. The last section of the study draws together the key staples of the paper, pointing out how Bakhtinian carnivalesque can enrich our understanding of Shakespeare on the screen.

### **Carnival; A Brief History**

Although the precise beginning of carnival as a seasonal event before Lent is not clear, some scholars argue that "the word 'Carnival' may have come from the Latin term *carnem levare*, meaning 'the putting away or removal of flesh (as food)'" (Isaac-Flavien, 2013: 43). This festive activity has been celebrated around the world in different ways. While each carnival has features that are unique to the region where it is held, there are certain common features, too. In his study of popular culture in early modern Europe, Peter Burke mentions that one central concept nearly in every carnival was "the world upside down" (1978: 189). The idea suggests that carnival, as opposed to state or church-sponsored feasts, "celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin, 1984: 10). The suspension or reversal of the social hierarchies during carnival season turned it into the most popular festival of the year. Burke maintains that in southern Europe during early years of modern period, "carnival was the greatest popular festival of the year, and a privileged time when what oft was thought could for once be expressed with relative impunity" (1978: 182)

The celebration of carnival was not limited to the European territories though. For instance, in the West Indies, particularly in Haiti and Trinidad, the African slaves revolutionized the carnival celebrations by bringing them out of ballrooms and dance halls and taking over "the city streets and the festive areas of the plantation" (Liverpool, 1998: 30). In Haiti, "the edict of February, 19, 1765 ... forbade the participation of slaves in Carnival" stating that "a slave in a mask or in disguise would be arrested, whipped, marked with the fleur-de-lis, and placed in an iron collar; there would be harsher punishment, possibly including the death penalty, for a second offence" (Matibag and Larose, 2013: 148). The carnival season, thus, was a type of resistance for these slaves who had to put up with their masters' atrocities and torturous behaviors throughout the year and be deprived of an activity whose main objective was undermining the racial and social ranks. Therefore, carnival signified "a direct revolt by the Afro-Caribbean people, against oppression" (Stevens, 1995: 65). This crucial

feature has endured in the contemporary carnivals albeit to various degrees and with different implications. Moreover, carnival was a unique opportunity for these slaves to preserve and “reconstruct their fragmented histories, which were effectively eroded through colonization” (Alleyne-Dettmers, 2002: 241).

The contemporary celebrations of carnivals have gone through many changes. Some of these transformations originate from technological advancements which introduce new gadgets and devices for holding the festivals. In London’s Notting Hill Carnival, for instance, the use of GPS trackers and iAuditor app has made it possible for the organizers to keep track of every detail during the event. Sometimes, these changes have come in the form of restrictions and prohibitions imposed on carnival by those institutions which consider the event a threat to public order and morality. In spite of all suppressions and oppositions, carnival has managed to establish itself as a “social fact” which represents the collective identity of a society or a class of society and “affirms the collective creativity of the people” (Matibag and Larose, 2013: 147).

### **Bakhtin and the Carnavalesque**

The carnivalesque is one of the central ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin and one of his major contributions to social and literary studies. The influence of carnival on Russian society and literature attracted Bakhtin though he was not the first scholar to investigate this festive activity. According to Krystyna Pomorska, “the nineteenth-century critic Vissarion Belinsky’s renowned characterization of Gogol’s universe as ‘laughter through tears’ was probably the first observation of this kind” (1984: xi). Similarly, in the English literary studies, critics such as Northrop Frye and C.L. Barber are associated with the study of carnival and festivity before Bakhtin’s comprehensive study of carnivalesque in *Rabelais and His World* (1965) was published and translated into English. What differentiated Bakhtin’s work from those of Frye and Barber, though, is his radical, non-conservative approach which “brings out the deeply ideological significance of such phenomena in a way that has been claimed by Marxist, anarchist and humanist” (Knowles, 1998: 7).

Although the studies which take Bakhtinian carnivalesque as their critical approach to specific literary works have been mainly concerned with identifying comic imagery, grotesque moments, and sexual indecencies, Bakhtin’s view of carnival is far more comprehensive. For Bakhtin, carnivalesque suggests a force that “illustrates the way the principles of inversion and permutation work underneath the surface of carnival and festive misrule” (Laroque, 1998:

83). It is within this context that he is able to find essential elements of carnivalesque in Shakespeare's drama: "And first of all this 'belief in the possibility of a complete exit from the present order of this life' determines Shakespeare's fearless, sober (yet not cynical) realism and absence of dogmatism. This pathos of radical changes and renewals is the essence of Shakespeare's world consciousness" (1984: 275). Although Shakespearean plays render such accessible manifestations of carnivalesque like lower body stratum and banquets, it is a sense of carnivalesque that is pervasive in his works as well as those of Boccaccio, Rabelais and Cervantes. Here, Bakhtin is not dealing with the impact of certain themes, ideas, or images, but rather with "the deeper influence of a *carnival sense of the world itself*, that is, the influence of the very *forms* for visualizing the world and man, and that truly *godlike freedom* in approaching them which is manifest not in the individual thoughts, images, and external devices of construction, but in these writers' work as a *whole*" (1999: 158; emphasis original).

As Robert Stam contends, "Bakhtin's approach ... has a built-in 'place' for film" (1992: 59). Thus, the present study aims to identify the elements of carnival and festive culture that find expression in the new – but totally diverse – socio-cultural contexts of Justin Kurzel and Billy Morrissette's cinematic adaptations of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. But more importantly, the study discusses the significance of these carnivalesque elements in each adaptation and their role in expressing the voice and conveying the intended meanings of the directors.

### **Kurzel's *Macbeth*: Carnival in Scottish Highlands**

Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth* (2015), similar to its Shakespearean source, opens and closes in the 11th century Scottish highlands, but what happens between the opening scene and the closing montage reflects the director's many concerns that diverge from those of the playwright. Unlike Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Kurzel's film does not begin with questions. However, the opening of the movie creates serious questions for his spectators about what is about to come. There is no thunder or the appearance of the three witches at the beginning; instead, the camera renders a close-up of a boy-baby lying dead on the pyre set to be burned before it moves to a crowd of mourners including his father Macbeth (Michael Fassbender) and his mother Lady Macbeth (Marion Cotillard). It is after this unexpected opening scene that we encounter the three weird sisters.

Kurzel's witches are not alone though. The three sisters are accompanied by two kids: a baby lying in the arms of one of them and a young girl standing by their side. The appearance of three new characters, all children, in the first five minutes of the film proves

Kurzel's concern with the state of children not only in the 11th century Scotland, but more importantly, in the 21st century socio-historical context. In her study of the representations of children in some adaptations of *Macbeth* including Kurzel's, Gemma Miller notes that Kurzel "takes the all-pervasive trope of childhood in *Macbeth* and turns it into a visual image that permeates the landscape of his film" (2017: 62). Kurzel's emphasis on the role of children in *Macbeth*'s story is unprecedented among all cinematic as well as dramatic adaptations of the play. *Macbeth* (2015) suspends and reverses the relation between adults and children, giving the often neglected kids of the play a decisive role in the film's narrative.

In the carnivalesque air of the film, children show "an active interdependence rather than the playing out of a predetermined role within a rigidly fixed structure" (Matibag and Larose, 2013: 150); a structure which promotes an innocent image of children. In other words, the film defies the conventional and straightforward binary opposition of innocent children versus cruel adults and establishes "an ideal and at the same time real type of communication, impossible in ordinary life" (1984: 16), but totally feasible during a carnival. In his book *The Disappearance of Childhood* (1982), Neil Postman points to "the 'adultification' of children and 'childification' of adults" (qtd. in Miller, 2017: 54) as a consequence of the erasure of the boundary between children and adults. Kurzel's *Macbeth* reflects the destruction of this boundary and turns the world of Shakespeare's tragedy upside down. Burke notes that the concept of 'the world upside down' was a favorite theme in popular prints during the early modern Europe as "the son is shown beating his father, the pupil beating his teacher, [and] servants giving orders to their masters" (1978: 189).

The 'child beating adult' motif underlines Kurzel's position on the child-adult relation throughout the movie, but it reaches its apex at the end where the adult Donalbain is replaced by Banquo's returning son Fleance. The movie displays a destructive Fleance, through parallel scenes, retuning to confront *Macbeth*'s successor Malcolm. Walking past *Macbeth*'s dead body in the bloody battlefield, the boy heads to challenge Malcolm with his sword which he can barely hold. The camera then shifts to show Malcolm alone in his castle apparently unaware of the imminent danger. Fleance is back "to fulfil the witches' prophecy and seize the crown by means as violent as *Macbeth* himself" (Miller, 2017: 53). Paradoxically a victim and a victimizer, Fleance represents one example of the carnivalesque atmosphere of the movie in which "fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1.1.12).

As Knowles contends, "carnival always celebrates renewal" (1998: 5). Kurzel's adaptation, similarly, ends with a sense of

regeneration, but it is more a warning than a celebration of renewal. The reappearance of young Fleance to claim the throne of Scotland implies “a continuation of the cycle of violence extending beyond the ending of the play’s narrative, and certainly beyond the deaths of the protagonists” (Miller, 2017: 52).

The movie’s cycle of violence far exceeds the violent images of the play. Early in the movie, the three witches ask their opening questions about the time and location of their next meeting: “When shall we three meet again? ... Where the place?” (1.1.1-6). The question highlights what Bakhtin calls the “literary chronotope” which means “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” or, in other words, “expresses the inseparability of space and time” (Bakhtin, 2011: 84). The witches’ answer to the ‘when’ question is the same as their reply in the play. However, their response to the ‘where’ question is not “upon the heath” (1.1.7), but “upon the battlefield” (Kurzelt, 2015). This change of place, and accordingly the change of chronotope, is a crucial step toward reaching the carnivalesque atmosphere of the movie because a battlefield better represents a carnival as “a festival of aggression, of destruction, desecration” (Burke, 1978: 187). Similar to almost every carnival, Kurzelt’s film contains a plethora of violence and hostility. From the horrific scenes of the Battle of Ellon, especially when a very young soldier’s throat is slit, to the final confrontation between the tormented Macbeth and Macduff, the movie indulges his viewers’ vicarious desire for violence and bloodshed. During the Battle of Ellon the camera lingers most of the time, including the moment of the young soldier’s murder, and prolongs the sufferings of men on the battlefield in a painful slow motion. The fact that no heroic music accompanies the fighting scenes in this movie indicates that war, for Kurzelt, is not a time of valor and bravery, but a carnival of unrestrained brutality and self-annihilation where soldiers are not glorious warriors, but worthless individuals who kill and are killed indiscriminately.

Kurzelt’s decision to reduce the number of castle scenes is also in line with the general carnivalesque attitude of the movie. Act 1, scene 6 of the play begins with the arrival of Duncan and his attendants at Macbeth’s castle. The castle obviously impresses the Scottish king as he opens the scene by saying: “This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air/ Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself/ Unto our gentle senses” (1.6.1-3). In the movie, however, these lines are omitted because the whole idea of Macbeth living in a castle seems unfitting to Kurzelt for his project. Moreover, we see almost no real houses in the movie. Lady Macbeth’s “All our service,/ In every point twice done and then done double,/ Were poor and single business to contend/ Against those

honours deep and broad wherewith/ Your majesty loads our house” (1.6.15-19) has been reduced to “All our service, in every point twice done and then done double” (Kurznel, 2015), removing, among others, the word ‘house’. It is worth mentioning that the word ‘house’ is not mentioned at all throughout the movie and the word ‘home’ is mentioned only once (Banquo: “That trusted home might yet enkindle you unto the crown besides the Thane of Cawdor”) (1.3.119-121).

In Kuezel’s film, Duncan is settled, and then killed, in a tent, not a house. It seems impossible for Macbeth to commit its murderous crime in a house because, as Roberto Da Matta states, “the category ‘house’ pertains to a controlled universe, where things are in their proper places” (qtd. in Liebler, 1995: 208). According to Burke, “physical space helps to structure the events which take place in it” (1978: 108). Therefore, Kurznel selects a tent for Duncan’s temporary dwelling at Macbeths’ to dilute the intimacy, order, and firm relations associated with a house and let his protagonist challenge his code of hospitality, shatter the social structure and implement his plot.

Despite the changes made to the play, Kurznel preserves the banquet scene with almost fewer alterations compared to the other parts of Shakespeare’s tragedy. Macbeth’s irrational reactions at the banquet after he encounters Banquo’s ghost disrupt the event’s expected arrangement and push Lady Macbeth “to play the perfect hostess, cover Macbeth’s lapses, and maintain the required order” (Liebler, 1995: 215). In the movie, as well as the play, Macbeth opens the scene by saying, “You know your own degrees; sit down” (3.4.1). This very first sentence promises an ordered and organized banquet where everyone will sit, eat, and behave according to the established hierarchy. What follows, however, is a hard blow to the customary structure despite Lady Macbeth’s claim that it is “a thing of custom” (3.4.97).

Macbeth’s fatal action temporarily disrupts the hierarchy of nature and drives Scotland into disorder. He wants to safeguard his reign with his subsequent crimes, but neither nature nor Scotland is tolerant of the reversal of the order. The camera’s insistence to show wide shots of Scotland’s scenery in which the protagonist is dwarfed suggests Macbeth’s inability to defy the natural order. Moreover, Malcolm, with the help of England, struggles to stop the chaos and reestablish the Scottish hierarchy. At the play’s ending, he fulfills this mission by having his thanes and kinsmen ranked as “earls, the first that ever Scotland in such an honour named” (5.9.30-31). The movie’s ending, however, differs sharply from the play as it shows the retuning Fleance running past the dead Macbeth with a sword in his hand. The editing of the scene, which also shows Malcolm leaving his castle carrying his sword, suggests a looming battle between Fleance and



Malcolm for the throne of Scotland, a continuation of disorder, and a further suspension of hierarchies.

The plenitude of grotesque images in the movie, the unrestricted violence and aggression, the different position of children who maintain a high profile throughout the movie, the absence of any reference to 'house' and 'home', and the extension of disorder beyond the filmic ending add to the "scene of soothsaying" (1984: 244) which Bakhtin refers to as an indication of carnivalesque in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Kurzel's movie takes up the carnivalesque approach not only in its internal mechanism, but also in its relation with its source play. The film ranks high among the cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare's bloody tragedy because it redefines its dialogic tie with the play by not adhering to its established structure.

### **Morrisette's *Scotland, PA: Revolt of the 'Underachievers'***

What connects Billy Morrisette's *Scotland PA* to William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is not how the film hints at its possible Shakespearean links, but how it strives to suggest that the classic story is unfit for the modern times. Set in the early 1970s, Morrisette's dark comedy replaces Scottish nobles with low-born residents of rural Pennsylvania. Shakespeare's Dunsinane Castle has been substituted by a fast-food restaurant called 'Duncan's Cafe' which later is renamed as McBeth's. The new chronotope of the film makes significant changes to the major ambition of the protagonist, transforming it to an unquenchable desire to fulfill class aspiration and walk up the social ladder by killing the restaurant owner, Duncan, and usurping his business.

The relationship between crime and class has been the subject of several studies. Anthony Walsh, for instance, investigates the traditions that probe the relationship between class and crime. He states that although the existence of such a relationship has not been supported by the studies, "when people get less than they expect they are ripe for criminal behavior" (2011: 66). Therefore, the director's choice of class is his response to a major socio-political phenomenon of his time. Although the concept of class still remains ambiguous and poorly defined, "it continues to be crucial for any detailed understanding of the dynamics of the Western capitalist society" (Scase, 1992: 4). Central to the Morrisette's adaptation of *Macbeth* is the idea of challenging the established social order by those who make up their minds to undermine the hierarchy. Here, the filmmaker is not primarily concerned with the unequal distribution of wealth, but deals more with consequences of class inequality which, according to John Kirk, "cut into subjective experiences and bury themselves deep, and

this in turn has profound implications for how people see themselves, others and the world" (2007: 5). Morrissette's protagonists, Joe 'Mac' McBeth (James Le Gros) and his wife Pat McBeth (Maura Tierney), are "not bad people"; they're "just underachievers who have to make up for lost time" (Morrissette, 2001). Their murderous act is rooted in their lack of respect for the "other half, better half" (Morrissette, 2001) of the class-based society which leaves them with no alternative but contriving a plan to protest against its discrimination and injustice. This American adaptation of *Macbeth* "translates the play's tragic ambitions into anxieties over class and social mobility, while at the same time self-consciously involving itself in the kind of 'low-class' representations of Shakespeare that displace his own traditional status as high-culture" (Brown, 2006: 149).

To highlight such class-related anxieties, the director frequently draws attention to the meaningful differences between the McBeths' characteristics on one hand, and Duncan and McDuff's traits on the other. The last name of the couple, McBeth, instead of Shakespeare's Macbeth, may be influenced by the process which has been termed as "McDonaldization": a concept "synonymous with the culture of mass consumption and globalization" (Hoefer, Jr., 2006: 157). While Duncan is associated with fine arts and Beethoven's music, Mac and Pat's scenes are accompanied by rock music soundtracks. Duncan repudiates his son Malcolm for playing in a rock band instead of working for their family business. Also, the film contrasts the McBeths' carnivorous habits and their fascination with fast food with McDuff's vegetarianism and thus "articulates a clear connection between taste, class, and moral character" (Deitchman, 2006: 144).

Morrissette expresses his carnivalesque attitude toward the play from the very beginning of the movie when three stoned hippies meet Mac at a carnival and prophesy that he will be managing a drive-through restaurant in the near future. The movie's portrayal of the three witches soon clarifies the director's intention to diverge from Shakespeare's text and loosen his film's ties to the play. Morrissette's choice of plot and characters indicates that he is not reluctant to invite his viewers to draw an analogy between his film and the play because such a comparison "underscores the sordid and petty rather than heroic dimensions of the McBeths' small-town, working-class ambitions" (Lanier, 2006: 194). However, the specific features of the filmic chronotope have left the director with no choice but to eliminate all the signs that, as Morrissette himself acknowledged, seemed "too Shakespearean", making a "Shakespeare for the kid in the back row who is getting stoned, reading the Cliff Notes" (qtd. in Brown, 2006: 147). Thus, the Shakespearean model of Duncan's murder with a

dagger is replaced by Morrissette's model where he is immersed in the boiling oil of a fryolater. The filmmaker does not stop at this point, but goes further to question if any other approaches to adapting Shakespeare for the 21<sup>st</sup> century audiences can be possible. When the hippies are thinking of a way to help Mac to get rid of McDuff (a lieutenant investigating the case of Duncan's death), Hippie #2 suggests that Mac kill McDuff's whole family. This solution draws ire from Hippie #3 who responds: "Oh, yeah, that'll work ... about a thousand years ago" (Morrissette, 2001). He then elaborates on his answer: "These are modern times. You can't go around killing everybody!" (Morrissette, 2001). This meta-cinematic scene mocks its source text and rejects Shakespeare's method to move the story forward as irrelevant, "both in the sense that modernity cannot accommodate medieval historical events, and that this particular Macbeth adaptation cannot, or is not willing to, accommodate certain major plot turns in Shakespeare's play" (Semenza, 2013: 145).

Morrissette brings the marginalized Mac and Pat into the center of attention and power in his film and temporarily reverses the established order which makes *Scotland PA* a carnivalesque space. His protagonists are among the few individuals in their neighborhood – as a microcosm of the world – who realize the controlling power of social hierarchies because such hierarchies are "absorbed within comportment as part of the being-there of the way of life into which individuals are socialized" (Charlesworth, 2004: 220). However, since the suspension of this system is just temporary, the couple fails to promote their social class, which proves that even excessive use of violence cannot help individuals find a way to escape the categories that the social system imposes on them in a class-based society.

Late in the movie when the couple is enjoying financial success and social power after Duncan's death, we see a photo of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis before the camera shows a shot of Pat who, ugly and scruffy, is staring at herself in the mirror. The contrast suggests that class mobility is impossible and the underachievers are unable to run away from their origins and doomed to remain underachievers forever. Lower-class individuals like Morrissette's couple embarrass the social order which always regards them as "waste people" (Isenberg, 2016: 19). *Scotland PA* is a comedy. However, the grotesque and dark fate of the modern Mac and Pat in an indifferent society is not less painful than the tragic end of Shakespeare's protagonists. The movie provokes laughter, but it "is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival" (1984: 11-12). In other words, Morrissette's cinematic discourse transforms *Macbeth* story into a

grotesque narrative of “laughter in the face of death” (Harrison, 2017: 188).

The grotesque imagery is present up to the very end of the movie when the lead character falls off the roof of the restaurant after his fight with McDuff and is impaled on the horns of his car. The death of the protagonist, as the representative of the socially deprived category, signifies, firstly, the annihilation of his dream to flee from the class he is forced to belong. More importantly, though, it points out to the triviality of Mac’s death as it stirs no commotion in the neighborhood and can’t foil McDuff’s plot to take possession of the restaurant. Given Duncan’s first name, Norm, which implies his normal position within the society, Mac’s attempt to seize his boss’s place is a manifestation of his desire to be treated as a normal individual, not an ‘underachiever’.

### **Conclusion**

Bakhtinian carnivalesque is one of the key concepts in his theory of dialogism. Although he did not coin the term, he was the first to give a comprehensive account of the history and application of carnivalesque. Bakhtin studied this idea in a number of his essays, but it was in *Rabelais and His Work* that he fully investigated carnivalesque and its practice in literature. In addition to Rabelais, Bakhtin referred to Cervantes, and Shakespeare, among others, as writers whose works manifested elements of carnival. Since carnival is a time of total reversal or suspension of hierarchies and the established social order, it is commonly associated with comic moments, laughter, and bodily references. However, as Bakhtin contends, with writers like Shakespeare we shouldn’t wait for particular carnivalesque moments or images as the spirit of carnival is embedded in their works.

The two adaptations in this study reinforce the carnivalesque atmosphere of William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* in two different ways. The choice of the dominant chronotope in the movies has made significant changes to the outcome as “chronotope in literature has an intrinsic generic significance. It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions” (Bakhtin, 2011: 84-5). Justin Kurzel’s *Macbeth*, set in the 11th century Scotland, endeavors to preserve the main chronotope of the play while undermining some of its established systems including the marginality of children. Kurzel’s movie provides ample space for children to exert their influence on the course of action and even on the film’s ending. The adaptation also omits the word as well as the concept of ‘house’ as a further attempt to buttress its carnival spirit. Billy Morrissette’s *Scotland PA*, which grounds Shakespeare’s play in the socio-political

context of the 1970s, is also set against a carnivalesque backdrop. However, as a dark comedy, it differs sharply from Kurzel's version because it makes no attempt to sound like Shakespeare; instead, it opposes the elitism and high culture long associated with the Bard. *Scotland PA* elaborates on the relationship between class and crime to show that in a society where people are valued based on the class they belong, even committing murder can't help those at the bottom of the hierarchy to get rid of their forced categories and experience life like 'normal' people.

Kurzel's *Macbeth* and Morrissette's *Scotland PA* both highlight the carnivalesque aspects of Shakespeare's play to express each director's distinctive concerns. However, while Kurzel's film builds on the play's potential to be carnivalesque by stressing certain aspects and elements, Morrissette recontextualizes the early 17<sup>th</sup> century dramatic work into a modern bloody comedy of class struggle.

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