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THE COMPLEXITY OF THE TYRANT:
RETHINKING TYRANNY IN RECENT FILM ADAPTATIONS OF *MACBETH*

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ABSTRACT

How does Shakespeare's *Macbeth* comment on the subject of tyranny? Traditional interpretations of *Macbeth* fault its title figure with perpetuating tyranny, but recent interpretations of the play on film, specifically Justin Kurzel's film (2015) and Rupert Goold's stage-to-screen production (2010), re-examine the nature of Macbeth's character, and even render him in a manner that almost forgives his violent behavior. The following analysis of these two screen adaptations and their attempts to explain the additional factors to blame for tyranny invite us to reconsider how we judge aggressors in power, throughout history and today. For Kurzel and Goold, those factors come from places beyond Macbeth himself. This thesis argues that the bridge between the contemporary moment and Shakespeare's time is these modern adaptations, through their acknowledgement of the political issues consistent between the two. It explains how, through Kurzel and Goold's adaptations, Shakespeare's works are a didactic source of wisdom for our world by showing patterns in human behavior across time. Though it may manifest itself differently now, tyranny is still a challenge to modern society. We encounter the factors that these directors cite as the precursors of violence and totalitarianism: In Kurzel's we see the trauma that contributes to gun violence, and in Goold's, the mass ideology that emboldens leaders like Donald Trump.

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Introduction

Suggestions for the Source of Tyranny

...there is no tyranny more complete than that which a self-centered negative nature exercises over a morbidly sensitive nature perpetually craving sympathy and support.

George Eliot, *The Lifted Veil*

In George Eliot's novel *The Lifted Veil*, the clairvoyant narrator, Latimer, extrapolates the essence of human sympathy through his analysis of other people's sympathies. Upon encountering one character he cannot read with his supernatural power, Latimer describes her as exercising power over *him*, which reveals that he, too, craves the sympathy and support he cannot see that she feels. The perspective that Eliot presents is useful for considering the nature of a relationship in which one party exercises control over the other, comparing it to the level of power a tyrant has over his subjects. But it does so in a way that places responsibility for this controlling bond on the secrecy of the tyrant's feelings. *The Lifted Veil* argues that this sense of hidden character is what makes others subject to the tyrant because they cannot fully perceive who he is. Eliot's presentation of the bond between a domineering authority and their obedient subordinate highlights not only the level of secrecy present between the two, but also the mutual benefits involved in creating such a relationship. Without the needs of Latimer's "morbidly sensitive nature," the "tyranny" described is not as free to occur, and Eliot's presentation of the tyrant as defaulting to another to enable his power calls the tyrant's level of responsibility into question. If he ultimately depends on another to inspire tyranny, perhaps a certain amount of responsibility lies within the enabler as well. Such a suggestion is not unique to Eliot's idea of tyranny, however.

Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth*, published in 1623, responded to the Jacobean era, but has remained a celebrated depiction of tyranny. Significantly, it does not necessarily indict its tyrant completely. Like Eliot's assessment of tyranny, the play does not leap to the conclusion that pure evil—some innate penchant for violence and total control—is the sole responsibility of the villain and hints at other sources for the manipulative relationship that exists between the tyrant and his subjects. The moral conflict within *Macbeth* suggests it is Lady Macbeth that ultimately convinces him to do wrong, or that the witches' prophecy has preoccupied him into an obsession with fulfilling the murder plot. Thus, Shakespeare implies that creating the perfect storm for tyranny involves the mutual contribution of the tyrant and the situation around him. As political movements and social situations change and unfold, modern writers and artists often turn to *Macbeth* to reflect on the complex power dynamics it brings to our attention. Directors Justin Kurzel and Rupert Goold have made this possible using their 2015 and 2010 film versions to explore a modern understanding of tyranny. Their versions situate *Macbeth* in a more contemporary moment that reflects recent political and social issues, that cause the treatment of tyranny to diverge in notable ways from its original rendering.

The two films offer different perspectives on the forces that perpetuate tyranny, but each reinforces the message that tyranny goes beyond the voluntary act of the individual. They argue that tyranny can be thought of as a response to trauma or abuse that leads to or enables the enactment of violence. For Kurzel, Macbeth's haunting past pushes him to tyranny. For Goold, it is the consistent and even blind support Macbeth receives from others, who enable his malevolence by submitting to him. Though Goold's reading of tyranny is not new, it pursues the unique implication that subordinates to a tyrant share the blame for his actions by lack of resistance. Kurzel's more novel suggestion that trauma is the driving force in Macbeth's tyranny

couples with Goold's take on the root of tyranny as enabled by supporters. Together, they tease out explanations of Macbeth's behavior which take direct blame away from him. Each director's individual suggestions about tyranny turn *Macbeth* into a useful lens through which to observe and analyze the contemporary politics relevant to their audiences. Through a stage-to-screen rendition of the play, Goold presents tyranny by focusing on the power behind corrupt governments; and in his film, Kurzel homes in on the issue of mass violence as a response to trauma. By obliquely connecting tyranny to these specific modern concerns, the directors challenge the traditional perception of the tyrant figure as purely motivated by power and status. Ultimately, they provide powerful frameworks within which to examine two specific experiences in contemporary life: the role of mental health in gun violence, represented by Kurzel, and the lack of opposition that has enabled Donald Trump to rise to power, exemplified by Goold.

CHAPTER 1

The Character of Macbeth according to Kurznel and Goold

Justin Kurznel's film offers fresh insight into Macbeth's character by portraying Macbeth as a trauma victim. His Macbeth (played by Micheal Fassbender) evidently suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which connects his personality flaws (and the actions stemming from them) to the influence of the emotional damage he has experienced. Dr. Lars Kaaber, director and scholar of Shakespearean drama, talks about the film in his book, *Murdering Ministers: A Closer Look at Shakespeare's Macbeth in Text, Context and Performance*. He states that the film's opening scene is an immediate indication of Macbeth's psychology—what motivates and drives him, first to brutal but celebrated heroism in battle and later to the actions he takes to ensure the truth of the weird sisters' prophecies. "By opening his film with the funeral of Macbeth's infant son and then taking us straight to the carnage of the Macdonwald rebellion, Kurznel hints that Macbeth's brutality is motivated by his devastating loss" (229-30). More simply, opening the film with a funeral for Macbeth's infant son—an element *added* to the play by the director—immediately sets the tone for the production by highlighting a level of grief and loss which is not written explicitly in the play. The original Shakespeare rendition implies that the Macbeths may have lost a child, but it does not include a direct representation of this loss happening. The beginning scene in Kurznel's adaptation, though, introduces Fassbender's Macbeth in a deeply troubled state, focused on his grief. Though Lady Macbeth is beside him, the emphasis is on *his* difficulty with the burial, with the camera trained on him and giving less attention to her reactions. He is shown struggling to drop dirt onto the grave, and then rests his hands on top of his dead son's; both actions seem to signify his struggle to accept and let go in the moment of this final encounter with his child and heir. The bloody

McDonwald battle immediately follows, and the film leaves no time for its hero to recover, catapulting him into the still more bleak circumstances of war and mass death. By placing Macbeth in such a harsh environment and offering no relief for him, the film approaches its leading figure as someone vulnerable and lays a foundation for him to perhaps be forgivable.

Rupert Goold's *Macbeth* works to create a much different tone from its start. It begins in the emergency room where the three weird sisters first appear as nurses ministering to an injured captain. The captain, who is covered in blood, receives a transfusion from the witches on a gurney. In Michael Collins' review of the Goold adaptation, he describes the action as follows: "one of the nurses administered an injection, and, as the captain jerked spasmodically on the gurney, the nurses, who turned out to be the weird sisters, stood by and watched him die...[and] went on, for the rest of the production, to pose as servants in Macbeth's household" (190). The sense of trust that is implied by having the witches double as nurses and servants (including cooks who prepare the Macbeths' meals) while being scripted as evil is a provocative contradiction. By creating this tension between care and violence, Goold establishes that the tragedy is enabled by trust in the wrong people, those who disguise themselves as trustworthy.

The concept of misguided trust is echoed throughout by Macbeth's character, who is played (by Patrick Stewart) more traditionally to "Look like th'innocent flower, / But be the serpent under't," (1.5.76-78) as Lady Macbeth instructs him to do. In Goold's version, Macbeth is deceptive and cunning in order to maintain the trust of his followers; thus, Goold figures tyranny as a result of support in corrupt leaders. He presents his Macbeth's violent actions as being enabled by those around him: they follow and trust him without questioning the suspiciously covert aspects of his character. Goold doesn't make his Macbeth susceptible to the emotional damage experienced by Kurzel's Macbeth. Instead, he focuses on the predicament of

blind trust—stimulated also by fear and desperation. The weird sisters, too, for example, ultimately prove to be evil, but gain trust by being available in situations where there is nowhere else to turn for aid, such as in the hospital scene. The manner in which desperation misleads those involved to unknowingly put faith in leaders who will fail them is instrumental to Goold's explanation of how tyranny develops and destroys.

By using PTSD to focus on Macbeth's humanity, Kurzel's film turns the blame for his mental state on the past rather than on an essential character flaw. Kurzel presents the state of Macbeth's mind as separate from who he is, indicting mental illness, rather than lack of morals, for his poor choices. The extreme deliberation that goes into his decisions, though they are ultimately brutal, ascribes those decisions to the grief he has experienced and allows him to be pitiable. In other words, the audience of Kurzel's adaptation is more inclined to sympathy than anger toward Macbeth, because the trauma he has endured is made available as an apology for his behavior.

In order to establish Macbeth as redeemable, the film balances the brutality of his actions with greater focus on his internal battles, which display his conscience more clearly. Macbeth seems to hesitate and resist the initial pull he feels toward dark desires and violence, as he does in the play the way it is written. Kurzel uses this indication of hesitation by taking it to the extreme—he shows Macbeth's more severe state of weakness after the death of his son and the war, which then take the blame for his ultimate submission. He is shown in tearful isolation

while he contemplates killing Duncan, watching from afar as the king and other dwellers at the Macbeth house celebrate, completely unaware of his distraught state:



Figure 1. Macbeth crying during his soliloquy, Macbeth, dir. Justin Kurzel, 0:28:12

His torture over the decision is further revealed, showing him hitting his head against the wall. At last when Lady Macbeth approaches him, he holds her face to convince her that he should not go through with the murder. His desperation is evident in the gesture—the body language of fervent entreaty. His decision, then, is ultimately not truly a product of his character, and is shown to be the product of his state after the war. His initial resistance to act in the manner of a murderer is not countered by extreme emotion in the play text, but is heartily enacted by Fassbender, who demonstrates the delicate emotional state in which Macbeth has found himself as a result of his recent trauma. The deterioration of decision-making capacity implied by Macbeth’s state excuses his succumbing to nefarious actions, citing not his character but his mental state.

Goold’s Macbeth displays some hesitation about the murder of Duncan—hesitation which is baked into the text. But Stewart plays Macbeth as considerably more resolved in this moment. His firmness, calculation, and collectedness are a much more typical depiction of this famous character. Upon expressing opposition to Lady Macbeth’s suggestion that he kill

Duncan, Macbeth's resistance is not highly emotional but shows him to be even-tempered and considered. When he ultimately settles upon the decision that killing Duncan is the desirable course of action, he and Lady Macbeth hold hands while they return to their guests, suggesting the unity they feel in their decision about committing the murder. Their intent is reflected as mutual and equal, furthered by the image of him carrying wine and she cake as they leave the kitchen. These gestures of harmony negate any previous doubt or inner-conflict within Macbeth, thus showing him to be in control. Non-verbal movements are significant, too, when considering the nature of his agreement with Lady Macbeth. Before Macbeth has consented to carry out the plan, she compares his level of resoluteness with hers, saying: "I have given suck, and know/ how tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me. / I would, while it was smiling in my face, / have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums / and dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you / have done to this" (1.7.62-67). Immediately after she has delivered these lines, Macbeth embraces her:



Figure 2. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth during their argument, Macbeth, dir. Rupert Goold, 0:30:38

By portraying Macbeth's response to her anger this way, Goold shows that Macbeth allows her capacity for violence to startle him into submission. The physical attempt to appease her reflects that his agreement with her plan comes from a place of intimidation, and that he has enabled her

to convince him rather than try her patience. Macbeth becomes the compliant party in the situation, which can clearly be seen in the image above—she is scowling in anger, while his expression shows an effort to win her over again, his brow furrowed, and his chin upon her shoulder. Although Macbeth is labeled the “tyrant figure,” his wife enacts tyranny over him in these moments, to which he submits rather than resisting—a key element of producing tyranny throughout the play according to Goold.

Goold’s portrait of the dynamic between the Macbeths not only incorporates the basic element of food (which appears again later in much the same sense), but locates them in the kitchen, a mundane and accessible setting. It speaks to a level of normalcy in tyranny, and a level of numbness to it, which is not shown by Fassbender’s Macbeth. Goold has directed the scene so that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth treat the argument as if it were about something much less significant than committing treason. It appears a typical domestic argument, as Lady Macbeth drops off dishes and leans against the sink with her arms crossed:



Figure 3. Lady Macbeth after she enters the kitchen and addresses Macbeth, Macbeth, dir. Rupert Goold, 0:28:34-0:29:09

For Goold, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are not fazed enough by deciding to carry out murder to pause their simple routine dinner party rituals. This feeds into the idea that Macbeth's resoluteness thereafter intimidates his subordinates into submission, just as Lady Macbeth has done to him using hers, leading back to the point that tyranny can only happen if the subordinate party submits.

Goold's Macbeth's more obviously domestic and casual tone toward such a weighty subject contrasts starkly with that of Kurzel's Macbeth, which presents the potential to incite violence as a burdensome prospect. Stewart's rendition of Macbeth is one whose character is not disrupted by traumatic experiences, acting with very little hesitation. Thus, his actions are easily viewed as the product of poor morals, without the presence of factors that corrupt his judgement, such as those faced by Fassbender's Macbeth. For Stewart's Macbeth, the murder is not easy, but it reads as something like business as usual in the cold, cut-throat household.

CHAPTER 2

The Influence of Fear, Trauma, and Loss

Though Macbeth's personality varies significantly between the two screen adaptations, both Kurzel and Goold give attention to the way he is *influenced*. Kurzel makes an exploration of this influence one of his primary interpretive interventions. For Goold, the treatment of influence is subtler but still evident. Lady Macbeth undeniably has a hold on Macbeth as Shakespeare has written the play. These adaptations capitalize on this dynamic, through the different ways they present her persuasiveness. Her character, eager to become involved in attaining power through violence, is used in both films to emphasize the specific flaws within Macbeth that account for his inclination to tyranny in each. For Kurzel, the flaw is Macbeth's mental state, which prevents him from resisting Lady Macbeth's demand for power, and for Goold, it is the faith others have in him as a leader that convince him he can succeed in cheating his way to power. Goold's Lady Macbeth is a prime example of how encouragement from others only deepens Macbeth's urge to act the way he does. In these ways, Lady Macbeth is used as a device by which the audience recognizes the other features at work in the process of enacting tyranny. For Patrick Stewart's Macbeth, it is the support of a group, while for Michael Fassbender's, it is the infiltration of mental illness.

Despite their divergent perspectives on the source of Macbeth's impetus to take the weird sisters' prophecy into his own hands, Goold's and Kurzel's versions of *Macbeth* both play with the idea of fear as a driving force for the play's tumult. The Stalinist Russian setting in which Goold's Macbeth unfolds enforces the very real presence of political fear—the fear of punishment for resisting the government by death. Its response to the *real* history of the dictatorship of Josef Stalin evokes a type of fear with which audiences are already familiar.

Using this basis in reality, Goold's version effectively exemplifies the mentality of those under a dictatorship. His *Macbeth* states that tyranny is enabled by such a mentality—a submissive mindset, an acceptance that to follow is the only way to survive, thus permitting the tyrant to climb to power with ease.

As opposed to the fear inflicted by the tyrant upon those subject to him, fear is also seen as something that takes shape inside the tyrant's own mind. This is what Kurzel's version presents, highlighting Macbeth's fear of losing his control. He fears losing control of his fate in fulfilling the predictions of the witches, losing control of his succession on the throne, and losing control of his plot to protect both of those things. It is a fear that rises out of insecurity and compels Macbeth to lash out in order to compensate for this. A moment in which Kurzel very effectively demonstrates the obsession born out of Macbeth's fearful insecurity is the dagger soliloquy. In Macbeth's vision of the dagger, it is held by the dead boy whom he had earlier looked after as his own son (and who is not written into the original text). Kurzel adds him as a device to convey the haunted nature of Macbeth's subconscious. The reappearance of the past shows that Macbeth has not moved forward, but has unresolved feelings about former events, which return to him in recurring visions. The way the dagger appears—not floating in the air, but held before him by the dead boy—is a manifestation of reliving negative memories, which is characteristic of a PTSD sufferer. Evidently, Fassbender's Macbeth is in need of relief from the symptoms of his loss. The visual association of the dead boy with the idea of killing Duncan implies that, for Macbeth, taking this action is a way to cope with his pain of losing an heir.

Using the vision of the boy as the means of presenting the dagger, Kurzel also represents Macbeth's reasoning for deciding that Duncan's murder is justified. By having the apparition of an innocent, slaughtered child provide the ultimate endorsement for Macbeth to follow through

with the bloody plot, the film aligns with Kurzel's version of Macbeth who resists evil, but ultimately falls into the trap of his mind. This Macbeth craves release from his mind, but further still, release from fate, which will allow him to regain the control his mental state has taken away. This scene is prefaced by a flashback to the battle at which the witches had been watching Macbeth, focused on only him in the midst of the violent action. The fact that Macbeth remembers this moment with the witches points to his consciousness of their constant, overbearing presence in his life. It suggests that he is motivated to take the dagger by his desire to be free of them. The scenario makes us believe that he thinks he can achieve this liberation by being the one to secure his destiny as king, rather than simply waiting for it to happen itself.

In relation to the control Macbeth seeks to reclaim, the Kurzel film illustrates Macbeth as subject to discomfort with childlessness, specifically as it relates to having a male heir. Even after he's been crowned king, Macbeth still shows uneasiness with his lack of a son. He holds his dagger up to Lady Macbeth's lower abdomen as he delivers the line "no son of mine succeeding" (3.11.64), solidifying the pervasiveness of his desire for the heir he cannot have, the heir that has been taken away—lost. Kurzel deliberately connects Macbeth's "fruitless crown" (3.1.61) to the fruitlessness of his marriage. His kingship cannot be fulfilling, both because he has no one to succeed him, and because he will be forced to live in paranoia as long as the attention is on him as a leader. This desperation to cover up his crimes is the reason he threatens Malcolm, who, in this adaptation, witnesses his father's murder. Malcolm's threat represents not only Macbeth's compulsion to drive out suspicion but his reaction to not having an heir (which Malcolm is to Duncan).

To show his preoccupation with the witches' prophecy deepening further, Fassbender's Macbeth delivers the line "infected be the air whereon they ride, and damned all those that trust

them” (4.1.138-39) looking upward and exclaiming it, showing a slight smile as in relief, and cheering to signify his satisfaction after hearing that “none born of woman shall harm Macbeth” (4.1.79-80). At this point in the film, his character is so blinded by his worry over the words of the witches and ensuring that he has control that he has neglected his appearance, wearing dirty white robes and no shoes. The audience can conclude that Macbeth’s behavior in all of the above ways is a direct result of his increasing insecurity.

Concentrating on the issue of childlessness, a lack of children is distressing for Lady Macbeth, too. Her trouble with the concept, like that of her husband’s, is highlighted in the way Kurzel directs her character to be played, and it can be linked closely with her later mental illness to explain her cruelty. According to Freud, the mental instability demonstrated by Lady Macbeth is a result of the pain of being without children: “Lady Macbeth’s illness...could be explained directly as a reaction to her childlessness” (322). He suggests that perhaps the descent into madness for Lady Macbeth could be understood not as just the manifestation of a guilty conscience but also the torture her character endures for being childless. The play itself does not feature children, and this element is added to the Kurzel adaptation to present her as a victim of grief and to understand her character as vulnerable, just as one is to understand Macbeth’s character. Especially because a woman was pressured to produce a male heir, one sees the vulnerability and humanness in Lady Macbeth, producing sympathy for her, rather than condemning her. This way of reading her character is another way to consider the intent behind actions that characterize tyranny: to show that they are not always purely brutal, but may emerge to compensate for feelings that are much the opposite.

In particular, Lady Macbeth’s sensitivity is revealed in a scene near the end of Kurzel’s *Macbeth*, just before she commits suicide. Rather than have the doctor and gentlewoman in the

scene, as the original play script does, Lady Macbeth is alone in the chapel, where she sits on the floor for her speeches. This isolation and elimination of the other characters' lines brings the focus onto the secrecy of her mania, and mirrors Macbeth's earlier isolation and hidden despair as he emotionally debates about whether to kill the king. Her emotionally fragmented state can be seen in this context as something that others were not aware she was experiencing, something she worked hard to *conceal* from them. Her weakness is shown to the film audience, but not a spectacle for other characters to behold. This secrecy is telling, because it shows how she resists admitting to her vulnerability and assigns responsibility for her toughness to her need to compensate for that which she is so determined not to display. By revealing an additional dimension of who she is, rather than confining her to the traditional interpretation of her character, Kurzel gives her a level of redeemability. He allows her to show humanity in the demons she grapples with.

The film presents this suffering in her frenzy of emotion as being connected with her childlessness, just as Freud has stated. Kurzel shows this plainly in the vision she has of the infant before her. Her son is shown there just as he had died, bearing the same red markings on his face that he was shown with at the burial, which adds another meaning to her exclamation: "out, damned spot!" (5.1.30). Tom Ue's review of the film suggests that the word "spot" here was used to refer to "an eruptive or other disfiguring mark on the skin." Ue explains that diseases like typhus or typhoid fever covered the body with spots, which points to the idea that Lady Macbeth's trauma is linked with her son's death. The portrayal chosen by Kurzel changes the meaning of Lady Macbeth's exclamation from a guilty one to one that is grief stricken, because it does not refer to her part in the murder, but instead, her loss of a son. In this sense, the audience is invited to view Lady Macbeth less as a villain and more as a tragic figure. By

extension, Macbeth himself is meant to be viewed in a similar light. Both are portrayed more or less as products of their grief.

Kurzel's Macbeth laments the loss of and lack of a son in various ways. The emotions he is prompted to experience in response to the void where there was a son are exemplified, each further expressing this Macbeth's true characteristics. His fatherly interactions with the boy soldier he fights alongside at the beginning of the film show the tenderness inside him and remind the audience of his tremendous sorrow. Later he is shown in a silent moment of support with the young soldier after he has helped apply his battle paint. But soon he is standing over the boy's dead body, staring, expressing a feeling of loss and repeated pain after his connection with the boy had perhaps given him some comfort. He is shown covering his eyes as he did with his own son at the film's opening, a type of funeral ritual. The idea of giving the boy a moment to honor him personally through this symbolic action denotes the attachment Macbeth must have felt to him, as dead soldiers typically ceased to be recognized as individuals. Crossing his hands over his sword, which parallels his relationship with the boy to that of his son's, shows the care he has for him despite barely knowing him.

Macbeth's jealousy of other characters' children is implied throughout as well, in the way the film seems to focus on moments between parents and children and juxtapose them with Macbeth's alienation. Banquo's relationship with his son, Fleance, is shown when the two embrace after Banquo returns from battle. Immediately after, Macbeth's loneliness is shown by a downtrodden look on his face. Once again, the bond of father and son is shown with Macduff as he and his son stand with their foreheads together, their intimate connection evident before they part. This moment is shown immediately before Macbeth reenters, so that his plot to annihilate Macduff's family will be interpreted as not merely an echo of his fixation on the prophecy but a

focus on his feeling of *deprivation* without a son. This deprivation possesses him to take that object away from others, as he attempts with Fleance, and then succeeds in doing with Lady Macduff and the Macduff children. As the NZ Herald's review of Kurzel's film explains, the film "makes the...murderous actions part of a monstrously twisted attempt to ensure their line's survival." The audience is meant to think of Macbeth as less of a villain than a deeply damaged man, who has been driven away from any consciousness of his own violence by his aloneness and will to keep his name alive. Thus, the impact of the loss Macbeth experiences is inextricably entwined with having no one to succeed him, leaving him to retaliate by seizing power that is not his to take. These actions ultimately perpetuate his dissatisfaction and instability (emotionally and mentally) as more and more desperate measures are called for to correct his indiscretions.

CHAPTER 3

A Sympathetic Perspective

Just as Kurzel's *Macbeth* invites his audience to sympathize with the way he struggles against loneliness in the absence of a son, Goold's *Macbeth* prompts the audience to feel sympathy not for Macbeth, but for Lady Macbeth. Goold's production takes great pains to trace her downfall, as Kurzel's does with Macbeth's. Lady Macbeth moves from feeling she finally has the opportunity to enjoy certain liberties as a woman in male-dominated society to feeling she has no choice but to submit to the demands of her husband and be part of his corruption. Kate Fleetwood, who plays Lady Macbeth, makes this comment on her character: "the main thing you feel, you want, ought, to feel about Lady Macbeth, by the end, is pity, not hatred." Fleetwood captures the sense of her portrayal of Lady Macbeth in Goold's adaptation by underscoring her ultimate existence as a tragic figure rather than her traditional reading as heartless and bloodthirsty. Instead of choosing to see her as a cold character, Goold has Fleetwood make Lady Macbeth forgivable by bringing to light the oppression she experiences, in her role, and ultimately in her marriage, when Macbeth slips from her grasp. The play alone does not give her as much character depth as Goold's adaptation, which elects to assign additional layers to her and to represent not merely the actions but the complex motivations behind them. While it is true that she is power-hungry at the start of the play, her intense desire for authority is explained by the female role she has been thrust into. Fleetwood remarks, "Rupert suggested to me about the domestic side...seeing her as a hostess." The hostess imagery at the beginning of Goold's adaptation evokes an understanding of the stereotypical housewife position that Lady Macbeth believes she must adopt, showing her preparing cake in the kitchen for the guests,

wearing a dress. There is a suggestion that her inclination to attain power could arise from a certain starvation of self-determination, a confinement only to roles thought to be female.

Worth noting as well is her obsession with appearances, which is closely linked to her female domesticity. Goold's version adapts Act 1 to focus on Lady Macbeth's obsession through emphasis on her domestic abilities. As the last gesture in the act, Macbeth takes Lady Macbeth's hand to join her in going through with the plan to deceive their guests into trusting them as hosts so that he can eventually kill Duncan. He holds the wine, and she the cake, which represent their power as entertainers, and are directly linked to their intention to act violently, given the necessity of hospitality in the success of their plan. This moment shows Lady Macbeth's agency because she has successfully manipulated Macbeth into acting sly, thus overcoming standards imposed upon her by her patriarchal society. Goold directs this performance to suggest that appearances are Lady Macbeth's way of staying in control of the situation, while paradoxically showcasing her use of the feminine responsibilities that have taken away her freedom to act in a way that a man might. She rebels against these responsibilities by using them to her advantage, to cover up the plot she has convinced her husband to enact. Conforming to traditional female domesticity allows her to be in charge of the appearance created by their household. The portrayal creates a juxtaposition between ideas of female sensitivity, tenderness, and compliance with men's standards, and actions that show the autonomy and leadership acceptable for and expected of men. In this case, the latter are shown more by Lady Macbeth than by her husband. In a later example, though, her loss of control of appearances deeply affects her, and becomes a symbol in shift of control from her to Macbeth. Only when she loses the ability to decide what her guests see and do not see in Goold's banquet scene, when Macbeth has visibly reacted to seeing Banquo's ghost, does she begin to submit to her husband as if she does not have a voice

of her own. She reluctantly lets Macbeth pull her from her chair to lead her to bed without any objection, thus abiding by feminine standards. The two are evidently disconnected, Macbeth delivering his lines calmly, while Lady Macbeth continually cries as she speaks to him. He looks off rather than looking at her, and when he finally tells her “I will to the weird sisters,” tapping her arm and trying to offer a solution, she responds by continuing to cry:

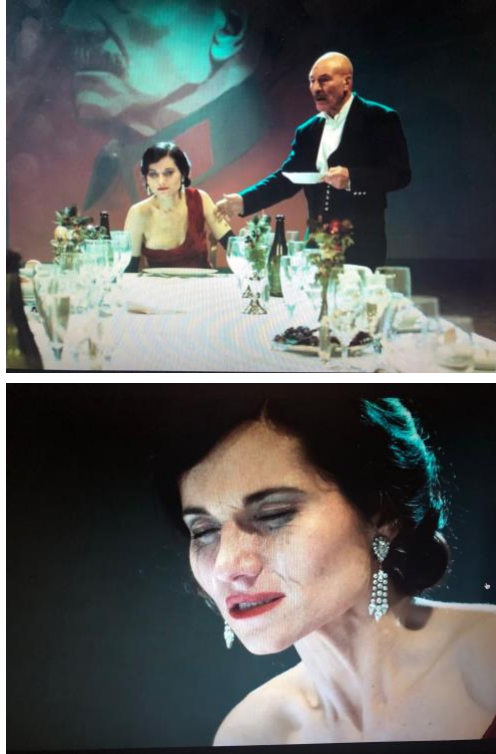


Figure 4. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth after the banquet, Macbeth, dir. Rupert Goold, 1:29:47-1:29:55

Their interaction displays Lady Macbeth’s sudden lack of congruence with her husband’s behavior, and thus, her loss of ability to dictate what he does.

Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking scene, then, completes the string of instances that track the depth of her control, with the complete loss of any remaining power she had. Fleetwood remarks that by the end of the film Lady Macbeth’s state, as she has performed it, evokes pity from the audience. Fleetwood says, “When you hear her scream, it’s like hearing someone—I remember Rupert giving me a really, really good note about it, which was, ‘Imagine you’re being buried

alive, and there's nothing you can do.' And that harrowing scream you might hear from somebody, so that the audience should feel not hatred but deep pity." Goold's portrayal produces sympathy for Lady Macbeth. Despite her notoriety as a brutal character; she becomes instead a human figure whom society has placed in a complicated situation. Her wish to escape gendered expectations is revealed from her first appearance: "Come, you spirits / that tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, / ... That no compunctious visitings of nature / Shake my fell purpose nor keep peace between / Th'effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts / And take my milk for gall" (1.6.38-39, 43-45). Reading her intentions as a wish to *escape* the limitation inherent in the expectations placed on women, Goold lets his audience interpret Lady Macbeth as reacting to the suppression of her desires, rather than being founded in simple self-glorification.

Kurzel's film gives Lady Macbeth's character tragic value by using a similar portrayal of a woman who does not realize what she is becoming involved in, and who is blinded by her wish to adopt masculine qualities. Like Goold, he attributes more humanity to Lady Macbeth than seems to be expressed in the play as Shakespeare has written it. In both adaptations, the realization there is nothing she can do to stop her husband makes her distraught and reveals the deep despair this loss of control causes her. Despite her brutal attitude at the beginning, it becomes clear later on that Lady Macbeth never intends for the amount of death that her husband ultimately brings about. Neither version paints her as a villain but actually makes her redeemable through the sensitivity shown later on. As mentioned previously, her presence in male dominated society can be seen as a large part of the motivation she has for attaining power.

Kurzel's version effectively shows the heightened vulnerability she feels as the action progresses, as reviewer Francisco Salazar put it: "[U]nlike some Ladies she has a conscience...Cotillard's Lady increasingly becomes vulnerable and this is best displayed when

Lady Macduff is killed...[she] shows a tortured and suffering woman suffering the guilt of her own impulsive actions.” As with Fleetwood’s Lady Macbeth in Goold’s version, Cotillard’s Lady Macbeth seeks a way into a deeper level of control and agency in her life, but she does not realize what it really entails until it is too late and it has in fact backfired, making her less in control of the situation. “Cotillard [is] superb...her meltdown begins long before Act V,” the NZ Herald says of Kurzel’s *Macbeth*. As she loses her initial connection to and influence over her husband, Lady Macbeth gradually loses her stability and control over her outward appearance of toughness. Her reaction to Macbeth’s execution of Lady Macduff and her children is a testament to the disparity between her will and his. The sorrow she displays through the breakdown shown in this scene is a stark contrast with the lack thereof in his violent rampage:

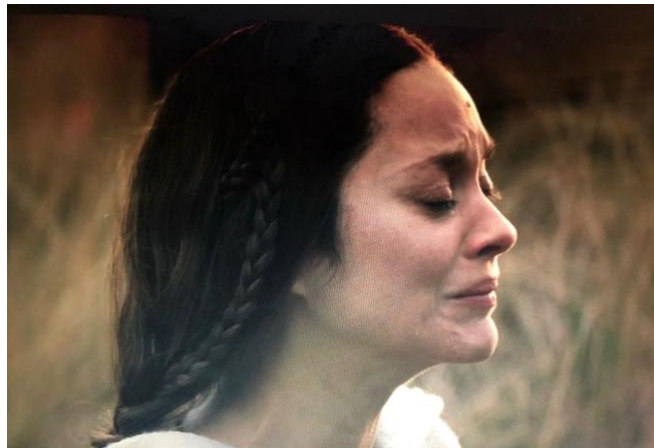


Figure 5. Lady Macbeth while Macbeth prepares to execute Lady Macduff and her children, Macbeth, dir. Justin Kurzel, 1:16:01

The audience can understand this Lady Macbeth the same way they understand Fleetwood’s Lady Macbeth—as a tragic figure, motivated by that which she lacks, and so desperate to make up for it that she fails to understand what she is doing; her judgment is clouded by deep hunger for that which she’s been deprived of but she shows regret for what she’s done and ultimately tries to prevent further violence.

For Macbeth, too, Kurzel traces the downfall of a would-be hero as a sad spectacle, rather than as an anticipated delivery of retribution. The humanity displayed at the beginning of the film undergoes a gradual but powerful transformation into complete loss of control in the middle, when it is clear that Macbeth is no longer fully *aware* of what is happening, or what he is doing. His loss of awareness is evidenced by short, jumpy clips in which Macbeth is alone in his chamber performing random, sporadic movements, representing the instability which has now arisen from his condition. He races from one side to the other, lazily plays with his sword, and walks around repeatedly, which demonstrates the consuming level of mental instability he has reached. He is not someone the audience sees as likely to plan any violence, but someone for whom actions of ferocity are far from premeditated, on the whim of his flighty, waning mind.

Kurzel's version of Macbeth strongly clashes with Stewart's more deliberate, calculated Macbeth in Gold's film. His sanity seems intact, and his behavior shows undisturbed contemplation rather than deranged mania. In the famous "dagger soliloquy," Stewart's demeanor reflects a Macbeth who is almost amused by the concept of killing the king. He tries and fails to "clutch" what one is made to understand as an *imaginary* dagger, rather than a concrete vision that Macbeth believes to be before him but which is really absent. This Macbeth knows there is no dagger before him, giving the sense of his clear-headed coolness because he differentiates reality from his thoughts. In contrast, Fassbender's Macbeth sees an apparition of the boy before him holding the murder weapon—though the viewer knows there is no dagger. Where Fassbender's Macbeth shows hesitation to go through with his act of violence, Stewart's version of Macbeth laughs during his soliloquy. He looks directly at the camera, too, suggesting a heightened consciousness of where he is and what he is going to do next, and delivering the dialogue as if he is simply picturing it playing out in his head.

The mental health of both Macbeths elicits emotion, particularly in how they deliver their final words to Lady Macbeth. Their directors' messages about Macbeth's mental state by the end of the films create distinctive judgments about his character. In Goold's film, Macbeth makes a speech over Lady Macbeth's body, remaining calm throughout. Rather than showing feelings of mourning or grief, he exhibits an acceptance that she is dead, although in the film her declining health is not brought to his attention and one can assume that her death *should* be a surprise. He throws the hospital sheet back over her face and walks away from the gurney where her corpse remains, staying steady and emotionally detached, and moving on quickly from something as major as the death of his wife. The reaction of Kurzel's Macbeth to Lady Macbeth's death proves him to be much more unhinged. He picks up her corpse and dances with it, eliciting discomfort from everyone else in the room, which he does not perceive at all. The way he sits down with her in his arms and strokes her hair reveals how disturbed he is emotionally by her death. It feeds into his mental disruption, echoing his response to prior trauma and thus attributing the emotional toll of everything he has been through to his descent into mental illness, for which the viewer is meant to feel pity. Goold's Macbeth, rather than evoking pity, instead creates a sense of shock at the coldness of Stewart's rendition, who is so disconnected from affection or tenderness that he does not so much as shed a tear for his wife.

As the films end, their evaluations of Macbeth leave viewers with a final impression of Macbeth's level of responsibility in the tragedy. Kurzel's Macbeth then emerges in battle as a redeemable figure who knows he has been resigned to death, resolving his character's struggle somewhat because he has learned to welcome fate rather than try to control it, as he has fought to do up until that point. Macbeth dies with his head bowed, providing the audience a reminder of his character in this adaptation: not an unforgivable fiend, but a deeply troubled man who

becomes humbled by his ultimate destiny. Goold, on the other hand, wants his audience to sympathize with the rage that Macduff feels in delivering justice to Macbeth. In the final scene Macbeth gets violently beheaded, as the play has scripted. The intensified humiliation of beheading in Goold's version suggests that his murder is justified, which Kurzel's *Macbeth* leaves out, having him stabbed instead. Kurzel seems almost to pardon Macbeth because he has already lost so much of himself.

Both versions, as evidenced, lead to the conclusion that Macbeth's role in tyranny is complicated by the multiplicity of other factors implicated in producing a tyrant. Kurzel and Goold's films encourage their audiences to sympathize with the various motivations of the *individual*, that work together to enable the operation of tyranny as a whole.

CHAPTER 4

Tyranny as a Result of Oppression

A more traditional rendering of Macbeth in Goold's film shows his use of fear and suppression to enable tyranny in the play. Rather than being shown as the more human figure that Michael Fassbender gives his audience, Patrick Stewart's Macbeth is frighteningly calculating. In his interview with Paula Zahn, Stewart describes "The Murderers' Scene," a key moment where Macbeth displays the fearsome characteristics that allow him to maintain control:

...it's when Macbeth corrupts two men into killing Banquo and Banquo's child; it's a savage and dark and unsettling scene but it's long and there's a lot of exposition. And one day in rehearsals I said, '...we stand here and we talk talk talk talk talk. I wish I had an action, something, something.' And he said, 'Why don't you make a sandwich?' the idea of taking something very everyday, commonplace...like buttering a slice of bread, putting on ham, and then sharing it with the murderers while the main objective of the scene being to corrupt them, seemed to give an added horror to what was happening.

(Stewart)

The setup of this scene is just one example of how Goold accentuates the coercion and repression that can lead to tyranny. Macbeth's convincing the murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance takes on a heightened sense of drama when this critical moment is juxtaposed with the mundane action of making a sandwich. It reveals Macbeth's disconnect from emotion, from any hesitation or misgivings about what he has ordered to be done. His instructions to the murderers are even more shocking because of the way the film treats them, by making this extreme measure more imaginable. The fact that he is able to perform such a basic task and still discuss *killing* a man and a young child is indicative of the true nature of Macbeth's character as Goold's adaptation

would have it. It is evident that he is not troubled because of his decisions, making him more fearsome to the viewer, and even to the murderers—men who are professional killers. Through the fear evoked in both the murderers and the audience, a sense of the submission that allows Macbeth to execute the power of instilling this fear comes to light. The murderer on the left reacts to Macbeth's command to kill Fleance: his face is strained, as if it were too much for him, even though the audience can assume that these men have been hired for being experienced killers. To elicit hesitation even from a man who works as a murderer indicates the level Macbeth's brutality has reached. Despite their ambivalence, the murderers try to obey what Macbeth has said, but the conclusion one can make is that they do so out of fear, enabling Macbeth to climb to ultimate power simply to avoid the risk of punishment in disobeying him.

Throughout the film, Stalinist Russian imagery shapes the picture of pervasive fear and suppressed resistance to the authority that has instilled that fear. Pictures of life in a dictatorship are stacked in a short span to powerfully drive the point home. A prisoner is aggressively pulled from confinement for questioning, and a grave is being dug for someone who remains faceless. The following image of silverware neatly arranged creates a haunting parallel between the people subordinate to Macbeth and the precise alignment of the utensils: both must stay in line. Macbeth's followers must follow and glorify Macbeth as a fortified mass rather than as individuals. The mixture of the two parallel scenes underlines the menacing tone of Macbeth's reign, which is laden with execution, torture and repression, much like Russia under Stalin. Also mimicking Stalin's leadership style is Macbeth's elevation above the citizens of Scotland and his subordinates, exemplified by the banquet scene that comes immediately after the aforementioned sequence of death and fear. His larger-than-life presence is supplemented by the minimization of those around him, which becomes clear in this scene. Macbeth's gigantic portrait behind his

guests, overlooking the entire room, immediately establishes his dominance over it. Next, the extreme belittlement and intimidation employed by Macbeth shows itself: when he pats and rubs the head of Ross, and then takes the cigarette directly from Lennox's mouth and drops its crushed pieces on his head. During both of these interactions, Macbeth is the only one standing, further enforcing the idea that he is on a superior level, not merely because of his position as king but because of the fear his fiercely dominant behavior inspires in everyone around him. Filming the play this way articulates Goold's message that Macbeth represents a very real character because his reign imitates Joseph Stalin's dictatorship in chilling ways, which bring his audience to realize their relation to the problem of tyranny. The adaptation serves as a caution that history must not repeat itself in the form of tyranny but be foreseen. Goold focuses on the disproportionate power dynamic that has made it possible for figures like Stalin to remain in an abusive position without being stopped. The concepts of Macbeth's superiority and omnipotence are enforced by those around him, who only submit and become the other half of the mutual relationship. Others' lack of resistance in response to the fear induced by their leaders represents the effectiveness of dictator-like tactics, which only become harder to resist the longer they go on.

Just as real regimes like Stalin's used scare tactics to keep them alive, fictional figures like Macbeth, as Goold interprets him, are shown to utilize fear to feed their ambition. This can only occur when the other side of the dynamic participates by enabling it. Goold reminds the audience of reality by reproducing recent history. Fear has been a key component in the rise of real tyrants, and *Macbeth* is used in this instance to evoke that, didactically representing the characteristics of real villainy.

CONCLUSION

Macbeth in the Contemporary Moment

Rather than make his Macbeth an over-the-top caricature of a man who has deliberately demeaned others to assert his superiority, Kurzel directs his Macbeth to relay an entirely different element of reality: the damaging manifestation of PTSD: “Kurzel’s Macbeth...speaks powerfully to and for the generation that just fought in Iraq and Afghanistan...combat veterans from those wars are troubled and tormented by rage-inducing memories of violence, loss, and guilt” (Anthony King). For Kurzel, the overall statement being made by the play the way he has arranged it is about the transformative and pervasive impact that war and trauma have on a person. Opening the audience up to the possibility of a human Macbeth who contradicts typical readings of the play sheds light upon the subject of mental health in a modern world. If society is to address violence, perhaps a good place to start would be with the acknowledgement of mental struggles often faced by its perpetrators, according to Kurzel’s view.

Kurzel’s adaptation could move beyond PTSD and address mental health problems more generally, in terms of their correlation with violence. Mass shootings have been at the forefront of the public eye in the last several years, at the center of an ongoing debate about gun laws. The question is about who should not be permitted to use a weapon, and the answer seems to come from the pattern of mental health diagnoses common among the perpetrators of mass violence. A 2015 article published in the American Journal of Public Health reports that “up to 60% of perpetrators of mass shootings in the United States since 1970 displayed symptoms including acute paranoia, delusions, and depression before committing their crimes” (*Mental Illness, Mass Shootings, and the Politics of American Firearms*). It seems clear that greater vigilance about who is struggling with mental illness should directly correspond with how a nation decides

whether to permit these people access to weapons. Kurzel's adaptation consistently suggests that the reason for Macbeth's crimes is partly the lack of awareness of the mental damages he has suffered, which make him unfit to handle the literal and figurative weapons thrust upon him by his wife.

Kurzel and Goold each connect Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with real tyranny and violence by using their adaptations to represent the role psychology and behavior play in the enactment of political plots. It is, therefore, helpful to consider these adaptations' statements as they apply to the current political moment. The play's political leader, Macbeth, shows eerily close similarities with the anomaly of a US leader, Donald Trump, who, much like Macbeth, rapidly rose to power out of nowhere.

Charles M. Blow's *New York Times* op ed on Trump's desperation describes a frighteningly large number of situations in which Trump's governing methods reflect one of Shakespeare's most infamous killers. The "unhinged rantings of a desperate man melting down, spiraling out of control and lashing out" echo Fassbender's Macbeth, whose desperation launches him into frenzied and uncontrollable violence. According to Blow, Trump's "anger [is] animated by panicked fear," which Kurzel's audience also knows to be true of Fassbender's Macbeth. His mental condition causes him the panic and fear from which he tries endlessly to escape using violence. But does Trump's fear warrant a sympathetic response from those affected by his desperate depravity? Donald Trump, to common knowledge, is no victim of PTSD, and beyond that, shows no grief over his cruel decisions. Parallels between the Trump presidency and Macbeth's reign, then, relate more closely to Goold's more traditional Macbeth. Stewart, like Trump, shows excessive pride and lack of deliberation over or remorse for his destructive decisions.

Blow wrote that “Trump is now on a warpath against everything that threatens him.” This statement is true of Macbeth as he is played by both Fassbender and Stewart. In both accounts Macbeth is determined to achieve some kind of goal, but for Fassbender this is to deal with his loss, and for Stewart it is to remain in his position of power. We see the latter in Trump’s case. The sort of delusion that goes into Macbeth’s actions applies to the way he is played in both adaptations as well. According to Blow’s op ed, “[Trump] has always believed that he could control the narrative even if he couldn’t control the facts...but the march toward impeachment is beyond his control...before Trump will allow himself to be chased from the temple, he’ll bring it down.” Just like Macbeth, Trump’s tirades are incited by the need to control the fate he knows he has coming to him, even if it means destroying the fate of others along the way. His rampages result from a desire to pull himself out of destruction and to maintain the status that he attained just by trying to enrich his brand. The presidency is ultimately an ego-trip for Trump, another way of linking him with Stewart’s Macbeth, whose motivations are inherently selfish.

Ultimately, Trump reflects the horrific and much more wicked version of Macbeth rendered by Stewart, which leads to the argument that his seizure of power can be attributed to the obsequious group behind him (as Goold’s *Macbeth* suggests): “he commands unending fidelity from those who have already abandoned all principle to stand with him” (Blow). Goold’s *Macbeth* evokes the same “abandon[ment] of all principle” in the way most of his subjects submissively respond rather than resist. The loss of individuality demanded by appeasement of such leaders as Macbeth and Trump is problematic for its inflation of toxic ideology. The wrongful seizure of power has been described as a result of buying into such ideology, rather than thinking for oneself. Dr. Grant Havers describes President Lincoln’s commentary on this as a contributor to tyranny: “In his Lyceum speech it was ‘mob law’ that facilitated the rise of

tyrants, in Lincoln's judgment. When mobs 'pray for nothing so much as its (government's) total annihilation,' the way is open for the tyrant" (137). Havers then compounds this summation of tyranny by using Macbeth's very words from the play, when he says to the murderers: "Ay, in the catalogue ye go for men / As hounds, and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs, / Shoughs, water-rugs, and demi-wolves, are clept / All by the name of dogs" (3.1.94-97). He explains the quote as an acknowledgement of the willingness exhibited by men like these to do the will of a tyrant, on which Macbeth thrives. By evoking Lincoln, Havers connects the idea of mass mentality with what happens in the play. Goold's adaptation employs the concept of mob mentality by setting his adaptation in Soviet Russia and placing Macbeth at its center as Stalin. The hesitation to resist his orders for fear of being killed assigns a certain responsibility to the enablers of a tyrannical leader, who have failed to see how damaging that leader's actions can be when given their power through the sensationalized mentality of the masses.

Using the psychological lens employed by Goold and Kurzel in their film adaptation of the play allows us to understand the way psychology is at play when considering the behavior and leadership style of the current United States president, who many argue is a tyrant himself. The conclusion to which studying these adaptations leads when looking at their application to Trump's presidency is that his manipulation of others makes him a figure whose actions parallel Goold's version, in which the tyrant's viciousness alone is not the sole source of his power. This viciousness is simply supplemented by the lack of resistance to wrongful behavior. Similarly, applying them to the enactment of gun violence parallels the ability the law gives the mentally ill to possess a weapon with the ability given Kurzel's Macbeth to become king. In both adaptations lies a reflection of the way society, then and now, will either place power in the hands of the unfit, or act to keep it from them. Viewing this content leaves modern audiences of Shakespeare

to ask how they will enact resistance to tyranny's catalysts, more specifically, how they will avoid being part of them. The way these films have adapted the play testifies that tyranny is not inevitable, but that through careful attention to what empowers the tyrant, modern viewers can change the course of the future by preventing history from repeating itself when they recognize a situation with the capacity for Shakespearean tragedy.

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ACADEMIC VITA FOR JORDAN BIBB

EDUCATION

BA Pennsylvania State University, English May 2020
Schreyer Honors College, Paterno Fellows
Minor in French

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

ESL Tutor Fall 2018
Tutored an adult English learner for a total of 40 hours, creating lesson plans each week that addressed the specific needs she expressed to me based on her goals with the language and culture, and building a rapport with her

Learning Assistant, Astronomy 005 Fall 2017
Was selected to be an assistant to a professor in a class I'd taken the previous semester, I was required to take a pedagogy course in addition to the full course load I already had, and every class I was designated a small group of students for whom I was responsible to answer questions. I and the other three L.A.s met with the professor every week to discuss the best strategies to improve learning in the class.

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Volé, Penn State dance company, choreographer Spring 2019-Spring 2020
Selected among my peers to lead a group of dancers, teaching them new choreography for an hour each week and guiding them through rehearsals of it, as well as being a role model in the club

Delta Phi Epsilon sorority, Delta Pi chapter, founding member Fall 2016
With the help of about 200 other college women, worked to petition for a charter of the Delta Phi Epsilon organization on Penn State's campus, working to write our constitution and officially gain recognition as an established Greek organization at the university

Delta Phi Epsilon sorority, Delta Pi chapter, active member Fall 2016-Spring 2020
Work to create a positive, empowering environment where women are recruited based on values, raise money for the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders and Cystic Fibrosis foundation, as well as connect with other Greek organizations to create a network and sense of community within the university

Panhellenic Sorority Recruitment Counselor Fall 2019-Spring 2020
Attend weekly training sessions in the fall semester so that we are prepared to lead a group of women who are going through sorority recruitment through the process, offering support and answers to their questions so that we can help produce a positive experience for them and ensure its rules are being enforced so that we can have the best possible women in our community.