Traditional and Non-traditional Masculine Representations

in *Macbeth* (Shakespeare's and Kurzel's)

Joe Montenegro Bonilla

In spite of the innumerable critical and academic commentaries written and published about William Shakespeare's literary legacy, his works, particularly his tragedies, continue to offer more questions than answers. His political motives and his philosophical agendas tend to be ambiguous at best and get lost in the innuendos of his characters' material and transcendental experiences. This is precisely the case in *Macbeth*, in which the protagonist is portrayed as both a meek husband and a tyrant, a victim and a perpetrator of his own calamities, a hero and an anti-hero. The image of Macbeth is, if anything, ambivalent, which accounts for the perplexity with which Shakespeare engages the audience and affects them with animosity and/or pity.

The enactments of the masculine in *Macbeth* are also conflicting. There is in the protagonist and in other male characters of the play a blend of what is traditionally masculine and what is not traditionally so, a questioning of the role of man but also an exploration of what it is to be a male human being. Stereotypical representations of manhood as violent, aggressive, and dominant permeate the play; however, so do portrayals of the boy and the father within the man, as well as a manifold search for a truer, more realistic masculine identity.

In an attempt to examine and recognize what it is that Shakespeare might be saying —or asking— about masculinity in *Macbeth*, this paper interrogates the play and some of its male characters as they shed light on the complexities of manhood. Nevertheless, since no presumption of expertise compels the author to take upon himself alone such a task, a conversation with the most recent film adaptation of the play will illuminate the discussion and fuel the analysis offered herein. The movie in question was released in 2015 and produced under the direction of Justin Kurzel and the performances of Michael Fassbender

and Marion Cotillard. The film explores many of the interpretive possibilities offered by the original text through a series of creative liberties that range from breathtaking re-imaginings of the setting to highly suggestive photographic displays against seemingly mismatching lines from the play. Furthermore, Kurzel also has some things to suggest about the portrayals of masculinity in Shakespeare's tragedy. Macbeth's sexuality and childlessness, for instance, are particularly exploited to that effect.

In sum, this paper uncovers expected and unexpected images of masculinity in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with the assistance of its latest film adaptation. The comparative approach allows no disregard for the distinctive languages with which both texts narrate and signify, yet the critical focus is that which pertains to the study of masculinities and masculine representations in literature and the arts. First, traditional stereotypical portrayals of martial violence, aggressive sexuality, and ruthless manliness are addressed. Second, some emphasis is laid on the relationship between manhood and boyhood, as both the play and the film express a preoccupation with it. Thirdly, the concepts of fatherhood and childlessness attend the analysis and add meaning to the question of masculinity. Lastly, the ultimate discussion centers on the contrast between manhood and humanhood and the ambivalent nature of masculinity as portrayed by both Shakespeare and Kurzel.

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Author's Biography

Joe Montenegro Bonilla holds a Bachelor's Degree in English and a Master's Degree in English Literature from Universidad de Costa Rica. He works as a literature professor at Universidad Nacional in Pérez Zeledón and at Universidad de Costa Rica in Golfito. Most of his work has been published since 2006 in Revista de Lenguas Modernas and in Revista Letras (UNA). He has explored various topics as a researcher, including the carnivalesque, the literary constructions of masculinity and the American Gothic, but his main area of academic interest is the relationship between literature and film.