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## **The Dialects of Sin**

### **in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* Trilogy**

Since its first performance in or around 1606, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* has been the target of a vast number of theatrical and cinematographic reproductions. This paper claims that, rather than giving its direct rereading, Coppola's *The Godfather* Trilogy applies the tragic mechanism of *Macbeth* and thus diverges from other types of gangster films. This is shown through the discussion of the consequences of sin and the problem of free will with respect to *Macbeth*, and the protagonist of the *Godfather*-saga, Michael Corleone. In both pieces, sin is interpreted as a work of art, which through its directive inspiration provides complete artistic freedom to the protagonists, yet at the same time heavily determines their action through that very work of art itself. Resulting from the differences of the two genres, in *Macbeth*'s case the dramatic portrayal of sin condenses into a single act of murder, while in the epic saga of Michael it is broken up into smaller episodes, manifesting themselves in different deeds, which one by one echo various aspects of *Macbeth*'s predicament. However, the two protagonists also create their respective worlds which enclose them more and more; their attempt to escape will prove to be an illusion, and what is most valuable for their lives is destroyed through their own actions.

“Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this  
blood clean from my hand?” (2.2.58–59)<sup>1</sup>

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* depicts fundamental human situations, conflicts, passions and sufferings: the rise and the tragic fall of a couple. *Macbeth* (1606) attracted masses of various taste not only in its own age; its popularity is still intact and in addition to various theatrical productions, numerous film adaptations have been born on the basis of the play. However, the basic patterns and working mechanism of Shakespeare's tragedy can survive in other forms than the various direct (theatrical or cinematographic) reproductions or rereading of the bard's plays. To make my point clear, I have chosen a work of art which today has a similar role in our “global

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1. All references to *Macbeth* are to the following edition: Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York & London: Norton, 2008).

culture” to that which *Macbeth* had in the Globe: a successful but already classic film, *The Godfather* Trilogy (1972; 1974; 1990; directed by Francis Ford Coppola), claiming that the “Macbeth tradition” powerfully survives in the figure of the trilogy’s protagonist, Michael Corleone.

This similarity does not mean that *The Godfather* films can be mentioned as artworks directly or indirectly feeding from the influence of Shakespeare’s plays. To my knowledge, the creators did not have *Macbeth* or even motifs from the play in mind while producing the film. What I wish to argue is that there is an inherent relationship between *Macbeth* and *The Godfather* Trilogy which ties them together while also differentiating them from other tragic plays and gangster films, respectively. That the audience may observe the internal changes of the protagonist is not a surprising feature of a Shakespeare play where especially monologues and soliloquies provide an insight into the “inside” of the characters; yet the very length of the film-trilogy helps the viewer to a “narrative” comprehension of the career of Michael Corleone, who from a shy and timid young man, having nothing to do with his father’s “business,” turns into a dreaded but broken mafia chief by the end of Part III. The most striking similarity between the two works, however, is that they have a villain figure in their focus. *Macbeth* is often said to be an atypical tragedy<sup>2</sup> as it puts a murderer on the stage as a protagonist, which eventually brings the plot closer to that of the gangster films. On the other hand, I would like to claim that *The Godfather* is at the same time an atypical gangster film as it places into its focus a vulnerable, conscience-tormented figure who is finally defeated by himself, this tragic pattern bringing the film closer to Shakespeare’s tragedy. In other words, the two works meet exactly via their atypical nature in their own genres. As it is primarily the field of sin and murder where the inherent similarity between *Macbeth* and Michael can be identified, I will provide an analysis from a special aspect, i.e. observing the significant aspects of sin in the drama and the films.

### Sin and Its Consequences

“I am in blood stepped in so far that . . .  
returning were as tedious as go o’er”  
(3.4.135–137)

*Macbeth* and *The Godfather* both lead the viewer into the world of sin: the protagonists are surrounded by wars, the fume of blood; treachery reaches into the remotest corners of former trust, friendship and love; and the main topic of both

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2. Cf. e.g. James Calderwood, *If It Were Done: Macbeth and Tragic Action* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1986) p. 50.

works is committing the sin of murder. Sin in both cases entails pangs of conscience and punishment, and heavily influences the flow of the protagonists' lives.

Macbeth is pushed forward towards a deed which, in turn, leaves him in a predicament he can never escape from. The seduction to murder king Duncan derives from the prediction of the Weïrd Sisters, who may of course be interpreted in various ways.<sup>3</sup> They are present all along, even if they are not visible;

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3. In the secondary literature on Macbeth the interpretation of the Weïrd Sisters seems to be one of the corner-stones of the understanding of the play, so divergent views are hardly surprising. As early as 1765, Whately claimed that Macbeth is "represented . . . as a man, whose natural temper would have deterred him from such a design [as the murdering of Duncan], if he had not been immediately tempted, and strongly impelled to it," since initially Macbeth does not lack "the milk of human kindness" (Thomas Whately, "Remarks on Some of the Characters of Shakespeare," in *Macbeth: Bloom's Shakespeare Through The Ages*, ed. Harold Bloom [New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008], 69–75. p. 70). According to August Wilhelm Schlegel's famous opinion, the witches undoubtedly are "the ignoble and vulgar instruments of hell"; their chief role is to embody the irrationality of dread. Thus it does not really matter whether the audience or Shakespeare himself believed in the existence of such creatures, since the poet's task is far from giving an anthropological, ethnographic, historical or even metaphysical interpretation of their "status"; it is to make their mystery even more mysterious and to "show them up" as an enigma for ever. (August Wilhelm Schlegel "Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature," in Bloom, 80–84. p. 81). For Coleridge the Weïrd Sisters are the creations of Shakespeare's own and they stand for "the lawless human nature." They are not necessarily "evil"; they do not do more than give voice to "a reasoning on a problem already discussed in his [Macbeth's] mind, – on a hope which he welcomes, and the doubts concerning the attainment of which he wishes to have cleared up" (Samuel Taylor Coleridge "Notes on Macbeth: *Shakespeare, with Introductory Remarks on Poetry, the Drama, and the Stage*" in Bloom, 91–94. pp. 93–94); thus Coleridge is of the opinion that the witches are the projections of Macbeth's mind. A. C. Bradley's view, which proved definitive for a long time, comes close to that of Coleridge: "The Witches, that is to say, are not goddesses, or fates, or, in any way whatever, supernatural beings. They are old women, poor and ragged, skinny and hideous, full of vulgar spite, occupied in killing their neighbours' swine." Not even Hecate is able to elect them to the status of "real" witches, since she "is herself a goddess, not a fate . . . the prophecies of the Witches are presented simply as dangerous circumstances with which Macbeth has to deal" (A. C. Bradley "Lecture IX: Macbeth," in Bloom, 172–195, p. 179). This opinion still prevailed, for example, in the highly successful 1976–78 performance of *Macbeth* by the Royal Shakespeare Company (director: Trevor Nunn; Macbeth: Ian McKellen; Lady Macbeth: Judi Dench), where the witches were not "the great instruments of Fate and witchcraft that they were in [Orson] Welles' 1936 production, but at most descend[ed] to malicious mischief" (Bernice W. Kliman, ed., *Macbeth: Shakespeare in Performance*, 2nd ed. [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004], p. 132). Thus interpretations have emphasized either the human, human-like or historical character of the Weïrd Sisters, or their transcendental nature, or even the inevitable ('fatal?') intermingling of all these and their interaction with Macbeth's desires. James Calderwood aptly remarks that when the witches appear for the

they surround the Macbeth couple and control them. They are present in the castle at the beginning and waiting for Macbeth to ‘do the deed.’ In the very moment the protagonist is knee-deep in sin, the world of the Weïrd Sisters is able to surface. Previously, the Macbeth castle was depicted as an idyllic sight: “This castle has a pleasant seat; the air / Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself / Unto our gentle senses” (Duncan, 1.6.1–3) or “This guest of summer, / The temple-haunting martlet, does approve, / By his loved mansionry, that the heaven’s breath / Smells wooingly here” (Banquo, 1.6.3–6); but after the murder it turns immediately into the castle of horrors, into Hell itself. This is much emphasized in the porter scene (2.3) (“If a man were Porter of Hell Gate”): the porter explicitly describes himself as being the porter of Hell.<sup>4</sup> This is his first (and also last) appearance; he enters right after the murder, as if sin itself had called him into existence; as if he were ‘one of the Weïrd Sisters’ who had been waiting so far and now is able to take control of the whole palace. From this time on the Weïrd Sisters can start their raving *danse macabre*, creating a whirlpool that will never release the protagonist. After murdering the king and becoming the new ruler, Macbeth will try to get rid of sin, he will try to reject the Weïrd Sisters themselves in order to escape from the castle of Hell; yet he sinks deeper and deeper into bloodshed, and ‘tomorrow,’ which may bring him relief, remains forever tomorrow, as the word *tomorrow* is itself context dependent, a deictic item of language: it does not denote any kind of individual substance,<sup>5</sup> therefore it will always refer to the future, the thus ‘never reachable.’

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first time “it is though we are looking at a painting in which one figure negates itself by pointing to a second which in turn points to a third. . . . This self-annulling aspect of the scene as an action mirrors the self-annulments of its verse – the semantic cross-cancellation of fair and foul and won and lost – and of the Witches’ appearance as men-women” (Calderwood, p. 34).

4. The significance of the porter is, of course, a matter of controversy, too. Coleridge’s infamous rejection of the whole porter scene is often quoted: “with the exception of the disgusting passage of the Porter (Act ii, sc. 3), which I dare pledge myself to demonstrate to be an interpolation of the actors, there is not, to the best of my remembrance, a single pun or play on words in the whole drama” (Coleridge, p. 91). Almost diametrically opposed to this, Thomas De Quincey argues that “the death-like stillness is broken up” by the very knocking on the gate and the porter’s appearance; “the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them.” The normal, ‘sober’ world returns precisely through the fact that the porter is drunk. (Thomas De Quincey “On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*,” in Bloom, 95–97, p. 96). The porter is both transitional ‘comic relief’ and, as the gate-keeper of Hell, the travesty of Saint Peter.

5. Cf. Géza Kállay, *A nyelv határai: Shakespeare-tanulmányok* [The borderlines of language: Essays on Shakespeare], 2nd ed. (Budapest: Liget, 2006), p. 376.

In the case of Michael, the tempting sin, represented by the Weïrd Sisters in *Macbeth*, is interiorized. At the beginning, Michael is determined to remain outside of the world of his father, but circumstances push him into the middle of the world he wanted to avoid. First, he wants to protect his father; therefore he takes over his position in the Family and becomes Don, i.e. a kind of “king.” One of his first deeds in his new position is to give orders to “settle the family business,” i.e. to massacre the heads of the opponent families and organizations. Just as in the case of Macbeth, this turns his world into a prison which never lets him escape. The family house, which was represented as a place of happiness at the beginning of Part I, hosting a wedding party (although, with the shadows of the mafia world also present in the study of old Vito Corleone), has already become a fortress, and this is even more emphasized at the beginning of Part II, after the attempt on Michael’s life. After agreeing to be the head of the Family, he undertakes the responsibility of protecting not only his father but the whole organization (kingdom), and also his family in the literal sense.<sup>6</sup> Escaping from this world always remains an illusion for him, it becomes his tomorrow, which never comes; although he believes that the next step will bring him relief, he does not know that, just as Macbeth, he is climbing an infinite staircase. His interiorized Weïrd Sisters are holding him fast, never letting him exit. Michael’s words in the middle of Part III are frighteningly relevant from this point of view: “Just when I thought I was out, they pulled me back in.”

An important aspect which closely connects the story of Macbeth with that of Michael Corleone is that while they both strive for greatness, neither of them is characterized by concentrating solely on his own benefit. Both characters sink deeper and deeper into the world of sin while keeping the sake of the *Other* in their perspective. Macbeth commits the murder of Duncan for the sake of Lady Macbeth, so that they can become king and queen together. Michael, although he too is characterized by personal ambition, takes his first step into the mafia world for the sake of his father and later on he acts on behalf of the Corleone Family, a large group of people for whom he has undertaken responsibility and wants to defend and take care of. The weight of the two protagonists’ acts and decisions is thus increased, as it is not only their own success which is at stake but also the ones they are responsible for and for whom they entered the world of sin. This is why their fall will be so effective and cruel.

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6. In *The Godfather*, the use of the word *family* is always ambiguous: besides meaning the circle of close relatives, it also denotes the organization of the mafia.

## Sin as a Work of Art

“Confusion now hath made his masterpiece. . .”  
(2.3.62)

Macbeth commits high treason: he murders his king and ‘kinsman’ in his sleep with his own hands, and with this sin he dips his hands in blood both literally and metaphorically. Thus a situation is created where one murder follows the other in the hope of escaping the torments of conscience and punishment; yet in this way the protagonist only sinks deeper and further from the desired relief. What leads Macbeth to the assassination of Duncan? There is no straightforward answer to this question: we may mention the Weïrd Sisters, his Lady, the war, his own ambitions, even his own safety; these can all be influencing factors and it would not be appropriate to emphasize the importance of one particular cause over the others. The reason, therefore, is complex, while the goal seems to be evident: to rule at all costs. But why rule? Wealth can hardly be the main appeal: Macbeth is Thane of Glamis and Cawdor, a great landlord and respected warrior, appreciated by the king and obviously without any financial problems. What are more seductive than money in Macbeth’s case is power and the accompanying freedom, which, at least seemingly, is always the king’s ‘lion share.’ Although Macbeth has won in battle and saved his king at the beginning of the play, Duncan names Malcolm as his successor, and the future king does not represent any guarantee concerning Macbeth’s position and freedom. Total freedom can only be expected if one can climb up to the highest step of the ladder and the only way there – as the Macbeth couple is convinced – leads through murder.

It is noteworthy that Macbeth immediately thinks about the murder on hearing the prophecy, and this is also referred to in his first monologue after the meeting with the Weïrd Sisters: “My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical” (1.3.138), whereas these words do not unambiguously state – and by no means determine – how he will get to the throne. Macbeth interprets the declaration “that shalt be King hereafter” (1.3.48) in the future tense, as an imperative, and wants to fulfill the promise as an active agent. This also supports the supposition that the characters of the Weïrd Sisters basically represent the projection of the inner desires of the main heroes: in the light of the bare prophecy, Macbeth could choose the position of the passive expectant (the role of ‘patient’ instead of ‘agent’) in the hope of the fulfillment of the promise (as he also formulates this idea: “If chance will have me King, why, Chance may crown me, without my stir,” 1.3.142–3).

In his article on free will, Roderick M. Chisolm claims that it is not important whether an act is done for outer or inner reasons, which means that he considers, from the perspective of committing the deed, the role of outside constraints and

inside desires to be on the same level.<sup>7</sup> This is wonderfully illustrated further by Macbeth's encounter with the Weïrd Sisters: they can be considered to be impulsive forces coming from the outside just as much as mere internal desires; and there is no point in strictly differentiating the two, as they mutually contribute to the deed. At the same time, however long the chain of causes and effects considered may be, at the beginning of the chain there is always an active agent who serves as the starting point of that chain.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, in committing a deed, internal and external forces are both equally relevant; yet, the acting agent, who is responsible for the deed itself, cannot be totally dismissed, either.

To resolve this somewhat paradoxical diagnosis presented by Chisolm, we should ask, considering the circumstances and his own desires, if Macbeth had any chances other than murder.<sup>9</sup> This, it seems, implies the further question whether somebody can be held responsible for his views and desires.<sup>10</sup> Did Macbeth himself cause his tragedy by committing the murder, or was he pushed towards his destiny as a helpless puppet of external forces? In his article on human will, Brand Blanshard argues for the *illusion* of free will:<sup>11</sup> a person during decision-making tends to turn towards his or her future (i.e. Macbeth towards the kingdom through the path of murder), and does not really reckon with the actual circumstances which have brought him or her to the actual deed; therefore, the person will not be aware of the fact that he or she is under very strong constraints. Here the constraints Blanshard's agent is unaware of might be translated into the 'magic strings' of the Weïrd Sisters dragging Macbeth towards the murder. On the other hand, by analyzing morally

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7. Roderick M. Chisolm "Human Freedom and the Self," in *Free Will*, ed. Gary Watson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 24–53. p. 25.

8. Chisolm, p. 25.

9. The problem of free will is closely related to the appearance of the Weïrd Sisters: those critics who attribute transcendental or fate-like power to them usually question Macbeth's free will, while those who interpret the witches as the projection of Macbeth's desire, or claim that they are not the manifestation of sin but temptation, or even that they are simply, 'ragged, poor women,' will put great emphasis on the freedom of Macbeth to act, thereby putting almost all the responsibility on his shoulders. Thus, for example Bradley remarks that "Macbeth is, in the ordinary sense, perfectly free in regard to them [the Witches]" (Bradley, p. 179); "not only was [Macbeth] completely free to accept or resist the temptation, but the temptation was already within him"; in fact he was "tempted only by himself," since "for all that appears, the natural death of [the] old man [i.e. Duncan] might have fulfilled the prophecy any day" (p. 180). Bradley sternly maintains that "Shakespeare nowhere shows . . . any interest in speculative problems concerning foreknowledge, predestination and freedom" (p. 181).

10. Cf. Chisolm, p. 25.

11. Brand Blanshard, "The Case for Determinism," in *Determinism and Freedom in the Age of Modern Science*, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: Collier, 1961), 19–30, p. 20.

benevolent deeds, Blanshard gets closer to the indeterminist pole, and although murder can obviously not be considered as something morally positive, Blanshard draws a parallel between morally approvable deeds and the arts; for him it is the artist who is liberated most from any kind of determinism.<sup>12</sup>

I wish to claim that Macbeth can be set free from the grip of the deterministic reading if we interpret his deed as an artistic one, and this interpretation of sin as a work of art can also be applied to Michael Corleone. Macbeth, as it were, caught inspiration to compose a heroic poem of his destiny and make himself king: his inspiration is manifested as the vision of the Weïrd Sisters, while the work of art itself is the murder, a deed acted out in a single moment. This view may be supported by the exclamation of Macduff, who, upon returning from the dead king's chamber, cries: "Confusion now hath made his masterpiece!" (2.3.62). When talking about the corpse of the king Macbeth himself also depicts the murder, his creation, as an artistic work:

Here lay Duncan,  
His silver skin laced with his golden blood,  
And his gashed stabs looked like a breach in nature  
For ruin's wasteful entrance. (2.3.108–111)

At the beginning of the play, the prophecies of the Weïrd Sisters planted a "horrid image" in Macbeth's mind (cf. "why do I yield to that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair," 1.3.133–134). It seems that through the murder, Macbeth has realized this image in order to get rid of it, just as an artist realizes his inspiration in his work. What primarily distinguishes a murder considered to be a work of art from other murders is its emotionally loaded creative feature. Macbeth's deed is not characterized primarily by the aim to destroy, to revenge or *solely* to gain something (e.g. the throne, as is the case in *Richard III*, for instance) but to create something with the act of murder. More specifically: to create, with his wife, a mythology of their own.

We have already touched upon the question of why the Macbeth couple is resolved to kill the king. The most obvious answer seems to be that they commit the murder to gain the crown. If it were so, then their deed could hardly be characterized as an artistic achievement, despite the picturesque, aesthetically loaded depiction of the dead Duncan. However, the crown – although undoubtedly a primary factor – can hardly be regarded as the couple's single motive. Before the murder takes place, the word *spur* appears twice in the text of *Macbeth*. In both cases, the word is part of a metaphor, and since its meaning often implies – also metaphorically – 'impulsive

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12. Blanshard, p. 29.



force' and 'motivation,' some textual hint might be gained as regards Macbeth's motives. In the first appearance ("his [i.e. Macbeth's] great love, sharp as his spur," Duncan, 1.6.23) *spur* is associated with Macbeth's love, while in the second ("I have no spur / To prick the sides of my intent, but only / Vaulting ambition," Macbeth, 1.7.25–27) it is related to his ambition. Although the two quotations originate from different persons, still, the *spur*-metaphor connects them on the textual level, and thus we may get closer to the motivation, i.e. 'love combined with ambition.' Macbeth wants Lady Macbeth to be queen and Lady Macbeth her husband to be king, or – more precisely – they want to become the royal couple *together*. In the first quotation Duncan is by no means wrong when he associates Macbeth's great haste with love, but it is not the love towards the ruler but towards the wife with whom Macbeth wants to share in deed and success. However, the murder (the deed) and the throne (the success) thus cannot be separated and Macbeth very well knows the consequences of their deed in advance, as he acknowledges in the "*If it were done*"-soliloquy: he is aware that damnation will come upon them on earth (cf. "But in these cases / We still have judgement here, that we but teach / Bloody instructions which, being taught, return / To plague th'inventor," 1.7.7–10). Yet the Macbeth couple commits the murder to create their own mythology, to strengthen their relationship; and afterwards they try the impossible, i.e. to enjoy what they gained, to reach happiness and disregard the cost. The zenith of this attempt will be the banquet scene, when they strive to maintain an idyllic surface, suggesting perfection (cf. "Both sides are *even*. Here I'll sit, i'th'midst," Macbeth, 3.4.9), but this attempt results in failure (cf. "What is the night?" Macbeth; "Almost at *odds* with morning, which is which," Lady Macbeth, 3.4.125–125). To conclude, this creative force of the murder, closely connected to the perspective of the *other*, can turn the deed into a work of art.

The act of murder, thus interpreted as a work of art, represents the paradox of the freedom realized within the artwork and the kind of determinism it still simultaneously implies. According to Blanshard's theory, the work of art takes "the pen away from the artist" and completes itself; this obviously binds the artist on the one hand; yet, it makes him or her free on the other, as it is being determined by the artistic achievement (and nothing else), which is the ultimate goal of the artist's desire.<sup>13</sup> Conducted by a higher vision, Macbeth commits the masterpiece of sin, of which he becomes a slave for the rest of his life, and which finally devours him. Symbolically, the play starts with the appearance of the inspiration, the first words of the Weïrd Sisters, and ends with the death of the protagonist,<sup>14</sup> in complete fu-

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13. Cf. Blanshard, pp. 20–29.

14. The play ends with the speech of Malcolm after the head of Macbeth is brought in; but I consider this part only as a 'follow-up' to the plot, giving the impression that order is restored.

sion with the play itself – which means that Macbeth is writing his own tragedy, painting himself on the stage; therefore he is free to the utmost, as he represents the purest form of the creator’s freedom. At the same time, he could not be more bound within his “masterpiece”: after the assassination, he continuously tries to escape primarily the implications evoked by his deed; he wishes to leave his tragedy, the play itself (i.e. his story, the situation he created with the murder); yet he tries to achieve this through repeated murders, sins, iterated “works of art”: in a way, he tries to pull himself up by his (military) bootstraps.<sup>15</sup>

The same questions may be asked in Michael Corleone’s case: were there any other possibilities than stepping on the given path, to govern and protect the Family with the instrument of sin? The protagonist asks the same from his wife, Kay, in the third part:

I loved my father. I swore I would never be a man like him. . . but I loved him. And he was in danger. What could I do? And then later, you were in danger. Our children were in danger. What could I do? You were all that I loved and valued most in the world. And I’m losing you. I lost you, anyway. You’re gone. And it was all for nothing. So. . . you have to understand, I had a whole different destiny planned.

So far it seems that the circumstances which have led him to this point can easily be reconstructed behind Michael’s destiny: the attempt on his father’s life by the other families; the protection of his own family (Michael had to kill Solozzo and the police captain, McCluskey); the death of his first wife, Apollonia, as well as the cruel and humiliating end of his eldest brother, etc. Yet, this is only Michael’s reading of his own life, emphasizing the role of the circumstances; and although it might be convenient for the protagonist to hide behind the excuse of the lack of alternatives when looking back on his life, one cannot as yet speak about clear determinism in the case of Michael, as Macbeth cannot be a case of pure determinism, either.

In the following I will argue that Michael’s sin can also be interpreted as a work of art, as in Macbeth’s case, and although it is more obscure and less obvious here, still it is a dominant characteristic of Michael’s tragedy. Just as Macbeth, Michael caught inspiration. Obviously, his deed is not described as aesthetically as it was in the poetic drama, but the creative force of the sin and the perspective of the *other*

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15. James Calderwood surveys the meta-theatrical elements in *Macbeth*; he claims that, as opposed to *Hamlet*, in *Macbeth* we do not witness word-play or mad-play but “role-playing,” which “enables the hero to perform an act he cannot manage in his own person” (Calderwood, p. 18). Macbeth “shapes his identity in the deeds he performs” (p. 23); “*Macbeth* almost seems to become a tragedy by taking for its subject the actional essence of the tragic genre” itself, constantly shifting “between done and un-done” (p. 33).

elevate the deed(s) to the artistic level and hence can be related to Duncan's murder. In the case of Michael, love and ambition are also very much connected. Ambition and struggle for power are common elements of gangster films, but the importance of love with which it is combined in *The Godfather* Trilogy differentiates Coppola's saga from other films of this genre and may relate it to the Shakespeare play in question. Michael's deeds are not feeding from entirely individual interests. His first steps into the world of the mafia are exclusively motivated by the love towards the father when he decides to defend him in the hospital, where he also kisses the hand of the sick Vito Corleone — a symbol of being involved in the "Family business." Later on, when his ambition rises (when he becomes the Don and starts to lead and reorganize the Family) it does so in the perspective of love and the desire for creation. Michael wants to finish his father's masterpiece, thus his case is the continuation (or even perfection) of a 'work in progress.' He struggles to become a good successor to his father and the films emphasize this atmosphere of comparison: in Part II, the double time line revealing the youth of Vito, while in Part III, the photos of the old Don observing his son from the walls of Michael's study suggest the constant and sometimes depressing omnipresence of the father figure. Michael wishes to create a well-organized empire from his father's work and in a way also a shared private mythology with his father; but with his methods he drifts further from the heritage of Vito Corleone and fails to unite with him. This is further emphasized by the double time lines of Part II when the two eras helplessly separate the two figures, and in the last flashback scene when in principle the grown-up Michael and Vito could finally reunite; yet, Michael remains seated and does not go over to the other room to greet his father. Thus, after Part I, the spectator can never see them together again.

As a result of the love towards the father and his family, which Michael wants to protect, Michael's deeds are thus emotionally loaded despite the characteristic poker-face with which he commits or orders the murders; and this emotional motivation also lends some artistic features to his work. The deeds he commits are usually pre-requisites or first steps in starting to build up something: for example an empire, but metaphorically also his own tragedy. And this productive work is, in a way, freely chosen,<sup>16</sup> although under the influence of several factors. It is not necessary that the control of the Family descend on the youngest son of the Don:<sup>17</sup> this is

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16. Anker emphasizes the significance of freedom in Michael's choice and rejects the idea of determinism (cf. Roy M. Anker, "Darkness Visible," in *Catching Light: Looking for God in the Movies* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 19–66, p. 45).

17. The problem of primogeniture is importantly present in *Macbeth*, too; that Duncan names his eldest son, Malcolm, as his immediate heir to the throne is in no way customary in the Scotland of the times; Duncan with this deed in fact establishes a tradition which is

further emphasized by the treachery of the Don's friend and former right hand, Tessio, after the death of Vito Corleone. Michael could have refused the leadership and passed it on to someone else, contrary to his father's decree. However, Michael realizes the possibilities and is determined to continue his father's dream,<sup>18</sup> and forge it according to his beliefs and his personality: in this way he also shares the freedom and determinism of the artist. Still, while in the case of Macbeth the self-capturing artistic work is drama, which is born in the moment of the murder, in *The Godfather* this 'moment' is stretched out in the form of the epic flow of film narrative. Michael continues the family-saga, and in his case there is no single deed which could be emphasized; there is no single act of sin with which Michael would give birth to the "masterpiece of confusion" in a given moment: he first takes part in the Family business by killing Solozzo and the police captain, then, already as a Don, he strengthens the position of the Family by eliminating the heads of the rival organizations; but murdering Fredo, his brother, also has outstanding significance. Here sin does not condense itself into a single dramatic occasion but is disseminated along the whole story-line. Macbeth's case is symbolic as, by this compression, the deed becomes so powerful that the stage can no longer endure it and it has to happen off stage: the audience cannot witness it, they just hear about the event.<sup>19</sup> And this cannot simply be attributed to the avoidance of brutality in a play where a small boy is slaughtered on stage.

Both protagonists hope to achieve complete freedom through sin. Macbeth desires the position of the king, the highest step on the ladder, where he expects to be independent from everybody and everything, as has been discussed above. The Corleone family has similar ambitions: Vito Corleone wishes to make himself independent from any kind of dependency; in his youth he murdered Don Fanucci because Fanucci was posing as a local king in the Italian-American neighborhood and supervised the business of the residents, who lacked any kind of protection. The old Vito explains explicitly his desires of independence to Michael in Part I:

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half-way towards the institution of primogeniture (cf. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], p. 16).

18. For the differences between Vito's and Michael's methods, see Anker, pp. 31–44.

19. Calderwood, considering *Macbeth* to be the "counter- or "inside-out"-version of *Hamlet*, not only emphasizes the swiftness of resolution and the rapidity of the deed as opposed to Hamlet's famous hesitation, pointing out that "action in *Macbeth* originates within the hero and issues onward" (Calderwood, p. 20), but he also calls attention to the fact that since the members of the audience are unable to witness Duncan's assassination directly, they are compelled to *imagine* Macbeth's deed and thus they are, as it were, "together with Macbeth" in Duncan's bedchamber, not only as on-lookers with their 'mind's eye' but as accomplices as well (cf. Calderwood, pp. 45–47).

And I refused to be a fool. . . dancing on the strings, held by all those big-shots. I don't apologize. That's my life. But I thought that when it was your time. . . that you would be the one to hold the strings. Senator Corleone. Governor Corleone, or something.

The Corleone Family shares the same goal as the Macbeth couple:<sup>20</sup> to arrive at a point where complete liberty can be enjoyed; however, they share the same destiny as well: they start on the road of sin but they come to a halt; Macbeth can never enjoy the royal freedom, as it is corrupted by the sense of guilt and external punishment, as Michael can never legitimize the Family either, to make his descendants senators or governors. They are driven to sin in the hope of freedom, and by turning it into an artistic masterpiece, they are in quest of the mirage of independence; but it is sin itself which turns them into pawns: after committing the crimes both Macbeth and Michael turn from active agents into passive figures ('patients'), to whom events 'just happen' but whose own human strength is insufficient to influence their destiny. Therefore, the promise of the agent-role leading to the desired freedom disappears precisely through that which seems to be the only possible way to it: sin. This is especially emphasized in *The Godfather*, when Michael shoots Solozzo and the police captain in the restaurant, and immediately after the deed he is put into a car and then on a plane to Sicily, just like a helpless package which got among the cogwheels of an unstoppable machine.

The meta-theatricality dominating *Macbeth* and being connected with sin has already been discussed. Macbeth judges his own play, called *Macbeth*, to be meaningless, "signifying nothing," since for him it seems no longer possible to arrange the events in a logical-metaphorical way that might help in understanding what really happened; it cannot even be known whether the "story" exists at all. In *The Godfather*, besides sin becoming a work of art, it is the theatre itself, in its own physical reality, which becomes the zenith of Michael's tragedy.<sup>21</sup>

At the end of Part III, in Palermo's Teatro Massimo, the Corleone Family watches an opera, called *Cavalleria Rusticana*, in which Michael's son, Anthony Corleone, plays the protagonist, Turiddu. Previously, there have already been traces

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20. In this respect Bradley's remark is interesting: "We observe in them [Lady Macbeth and Macbeth] no love of the country, and no interest in welfare of anyone outside of their family" (Bradley, p. 183).

21. According to the general public opinion, the third part of the film is not coherently connected to the previous films and does not reach their artistic level. In my interpretation, however, the third part is a necessary and from a narrative point of view an essential continuation of *The Godfather*-films, as it makes the story and the tragedy of Michael Corleone complete and authentic. Due to the limits of the present paper, I will not discuss this question in detail here.

of reality and theatrical fiction reflecting each other, when for example in Part III, walking on the streets of Corleone, Michael and Kay peep into an Italian puppet performance which depicts a scene where a father kills his daughter as punishment for a forbidden relationship with her cousin. This is not only a clear foreshadowing of the death of Michael's only daughter, Mary, but also of its ultimate cause, since in the puppet show it is the father who executes his daughter with his own hands. This short scene serves as a kind of prologue to the monumental opera scene: here the family members, as members of the Corleone Family, are simultaneously put into the role of the audience watching the performance, while at the same time – as the montage-technique applied by the director again allows us to witness it<sup>22</sup> – commissioned men liquidate the Family enemies on orders. In the film, the theatre symbolizes and emphasizes how the masterpiece created by sin devours and consumes the sinner. The music of Pietro Mascagni replaces the film's score and attaches itself to the events taking place outside of the opera, in a way pervading them. Taking place in Sicily, the opera's plot contains many of the trilogy's motifs. The incensed and sanguine Turiddu bites the ear of his enemy, the village teamster Alfio, just as at the beginning of Part III, in Michael's study, Vincent Mancini bit Joey Zasa's ear, indicating that Zasa was challenged to a duel. In the opera, during the celebratory chants of the Easter choir, the same hooded figures carry the statue of Jesus as at the street-celebration during which Joey Zasa is killed, or when young Vito murders Don Fanucci; in various ways we may witness a recounting of the history of the Corleone mafia-family. In the opera performance, where the principles of honor and revenge are just as important as in the life of the mafia, one may not only see the reflection of Michael's world but in fact the opera enters into a much closer relationship with it. In the Easter scene mentioned above, during the uncovering of the crucifix of Jesus Christ, the hooded figures flee, covering their faces, and in the very same moment Michael's secret enemy, the poisoned Don Altobello, dies in his box – as if the image of God appearing on the stage were chasing him out of the world of mortals. The most important connection between theatrical fiction and Michael's destiny, however, does not reflect the past or the present but the immediate future; and this is the most cardinal aspect of Michael Corleone's tragedy. At the end of the opera Alfio, behind the scenes, kills Turiddu, that is, the character played by Anthony Corleone. In this way Michael's son dies in the world of the play, but his 'death' is

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22. This montage, simultaneously showing the family enjoying the opera and the vendettas is an unambiguous back-reference to the end of Part I, when Michael's men massacre the enemies of the family during the baptismal ceremony in church. The motif of vendettas during an opera performance is taken over in the film *The Untouchables* (1987), where a policeman (Sean Connery) is murdered on the orders of Al Capone (Robert de Niro), while the mafia-chief is listening to the famous *Vesti Giubba* aria from Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*.

not followed by tears but applause: the performance, the theatrical illusion has ended; the audience withdraws the willing suspension of disbelief and qualifies the plot for what it is: fiction; parents, relatives and friends leave the auditorium and greet the 'newly risen' actor personally, who is, of course, fit as a fiddle. Not long after Michael regains his son from the world of fiction, his other child, Mary, is fatally wounded in reality on the stairs of the Opera house by the hired assassin who in fact wishes to kill Michael.<sup>23</sup> Mary's death, in turn, evokes unbearable pain, animal-like yelling on Michael's part and bitter, helpless tears instead of applause, as Michael is unable to leave *this* theatre and resurrect his daughter: all this happens in *his own* reality. This reality is enclosed by the opera house and the music of the opera in multiple ways: the mourning of the dead Mary and the last pictures of the trilogy are accompanied by the *Intermezzo* theme of *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Michael is unable to escape the epic artwork of his sin,<sup>24</sup> which, by writing 'itself,' demanded the loss of Mary Corleone, just as Macbeth is not capable of breaking out from the masterpiece of his sin, either.

### The Aspects of Sin

"From hence to Inverness, and bind us  
further to you. . ." (1.4.42–43)

So far the topic has been sin as determining the destiny of the protagonists and its perception as a work of art, which provides a kind of (pseudo-)freedom and real bondage simultaneously. In what follows, I will especially focus on the deed that in both *Macbeth* and *The Godfather* gives birth to sin. As has already been discussed, the tragedy of Macbeth squeezes everything into one single deed, which, in turn, is disseminated along the lines of various episodes in *The Godfather*-saga. This somewhat perhaps boldly-stated claim may also mean that we can gain a deeper insight into some aspects of Duncan's murder if we consider Michael's sins one by one. In the following, I will argue that the assassination of Duncan corresponds to three very important moments in *The Godfather*: first, the murder of Solozzo and the police captain McCluskey; secondly, the slaughter of the heads

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23. Naomi Greene connects *The Godfather* also with Verdi's *Rigoletto* because of the motif of a daughter killed because of the sins of the father (cf. Naomi Greene, "Family Ceremonies: or, Opera in *The Godfather* Trilogy," in *Francis Ford Coppola's Godfather Trilogy*, ed. Nick Browne [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 133–155, p. 146).

24. The claim that Michael's world is 'devoured' by an 'artwork' which is the symbol of slavery brought about by sin and also mirrored in *Cavalleria Rusticana* is further supported by Naomi Greene in her already quoted essay "Family Ceremonies." Greene emphasizes the opera-like qualities of the whole film-trilogy (Greene, pp. 133–135).

of the other New York mafia families; and finally, the assassination of Michael's brother, Fredo Corleone.

It is the murder of Solozzo and the police captain through which Michael first gets involved in the Family's "dirty business." Solozzo's hired men make an attempt on old Vito's life, and the protection of the father and maintaining the powerful position of the Family seems to be possible in only one way: if an outsider like Michael, freshly returned from World War II and so far not engaged in the affairs of the Family, gets close to the targets and in a restaurant shoots them in the head. Michael voluntarily accepts this role and liquidates the two men; then he flees to Sicily, while at home, the Family ties up loose ends. Accordingly, for Michael this is the first step into the world of the mafia and on the road of sin: the inimical families and the law start chasing him from this moment on and make his position more and more precarious. Macbeth stains his hand with the murder of Duncan when he murders the unprotected King in his sleep. Michael also attacks his victims from a sort of ambush; he takes them by surprise and shoots them from no distance at all. It is noteworthy that Macbeth and Michael are both soldiers; Macbeth is the best general of the king, while Michael is a war hero of the navy: in the former case this is abundantly reported by Macbeth's fellow-soldiers, while in the latter case it is equally likely that the horrors of the war made the two protagonists accustomed to seeing and causing death. However, killing in war in the service of the country differs greatly from murders, and the consequences of the latter, regarding the entire lives of the protagonists, are monumental. In Macbeth's case, the blood staining his hands symbolizes how sin is corrupting his soul and remains stuck to it (cf. Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene as well); while Michael is warned of the consequences by his brothers: "What do you think this is the Army, where you shoot'em a mile away? You've gotta get up close like this and bada-bing! You blow their brains all over your nice Ivy League suit." For one it is the blood, for the other it is the brain blown out which symbolizes the infection of sin.

In Shakespeare's time the word *deed* also meant sexual intercourse,<sup>25</sup> hence Macbeth's words, "I have done the deed" (2.2.14), connect the murder with the sexual act.<sup>26</sup> Macbeth, the man of glory, returning to his wife after his long absence on

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25. Cf. Alexander Leggatt, "Macbeth: A Deed Without a Name," *Shakespeare's Tragedies: Violation and Identity*, in Bloom, 358–383, p. 372.

26. As Calderwood remarks, Macbeth "falls in evil" as other men fall in love" (Calderwood, p. 49) and "in the present case, the metaphorizing of murder as coition deconstructs coition no less than murder, leaving the audience with an unnamable monster." (p. 138). William Hazlitt emphasized the sexual side of Duncan's assassination as early as 1817 (William Hazlitt, "Macbeth" in *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, in Bloom, 84–91, p. 87); according to King-Kok Chung, Macbeth "is ready to prove his virility by translating his procreative



the battlefield, does not go to their bedroom with the Lady but to Duncan's bedchamber, so that out of their "nuptials" sin itself might be conceived and born, simultaneously. After the murder, Macbeth identifies the otherwise nameless (and therefore even more frightening) sin, giving it a name, a name of his own, thus standing as 'godfather' to the deed of crime: "Methought, I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more! / Macbeth does murder sleep,' – the innocent sleep" (2.2.33–34). This "Macbeth," who is born in the moment of the murder, can be connected with the Macbeth couple's never-born child, whose perspective and motive is present throughout the play,<sup>27</sup> and who is metaphorically born in the bedchamber of Duncan: birth is identified with death. (Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth return with their hands dipped in blood, which also makes them resemble 'midwives' who have helped in the process of childbirth.) Their child can not be a 'real' boy, he can only come to existence metaphorically; becoming one with the notion of sin, to which Macbeth is father and godfather at the same time.

Similarly, by accepting the responsibility for leading the Family, Michael gains the title "Godfather." In the Sicilian culture he comes from, this is a highly honorable title, which denotes a sacred relationship between the Godfather and the person

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impulse into a destructive one, his fear of female domination into masculine aggression" (King-Kok Chung, "Shakespeare and Kierkegaard: 'Dread' in *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35, No. 4, Winter [1984] 432–451, p. 438). For Denis Biggins, Duncan's assassination is tantamount to a rape (Dennis Biggins, "Sexuality, Witchcraft, and Violence in *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare Studies* 8 [1975] 255–277, p. 266), since Macbeth, in the second half of the dagger-monologue, compares the approach of death (so, ultimately, his steps towards Duncan's bedchamber) to "Tarquin's ravishing strides" (2.1.55), and the story of the Roman Prince raping Lucrece is the subject-matter of a separate narrative poem by Shakespeare (*The Rape of Lucrece*, 1594).

27. There has been a long controversy over Lady Macbeth's enigmatic confession: "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 sworn / As you have done to this" (1.7.54–59). Where does this sudden impulse of inhumanity come from, and, especially, where is the child, if the Macbeth couple is so emphatically childless? Goethe tried to suppress the query by claiming that Lady Macbeth's words have "rhetorical purposes"; she only wishes to give more emphasis to her locution and the "real Poet," and Shakespeare especially always knows what is right and effective to say in a given dramatic situation, even if content-wise he contradicts himself. (J. W. Goethe, "Conversations with Goethe by Peter Eckermann," in Bloom, 113–114). The problem has become almost symbolic since L. C. Knights' famous essay, "How many children had Lady Macbeth?" in *Explorations: Essays in Criticism, Mainly on the Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946), 1–39; cf. also Michael D. Bristol, "How Many Children Did She Have?" in *Philosophical Shakespeares*, ed. John Joughin (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 18–33, pp. 20–26.

under his protection. At the end of Part I, Michael stands godfather to his nephew in a church in the selfsame hour in which the execution of the Family's enemies is carried out at his command. Consequently, he becomes Godfather both in the church and at the very venues of the murder-scenes, so both in the literal (and holy) and in the metonymical (and symbolic) meaning of the word. Just like Macbeth, Michael Corleone becomes Godfather of sin; naming sin in a certain sense, "Michael Corleone."

Therefore, both of them baptize sin which, in the case of Macbeth, can be connected with the phenomenon discussed above: the protagonist evokes and constructs his own drama by committing the deed of sin, which gains his name: "Macbeth." At the same time, being the Godfather of sin and getting united with it provide both protagonists with the possibility of becoming, in a certain sense, 'immaterial' and thus able to be at various places simultaneously. With Macbeth, this is not solely connected to the murder of Duncan but to the assassination of Banquo as well. While the two murderers are waiting for Banquo and Fleance, to cut their throats, a Third Murderer makes his appearance and claims to have been sent by Macbeth, bringing orders from him (cf. 3.3). According to some interpretations, this Third Murderer is Macbeth himself, who is thus present at his friend's liquidation, while exactly in that hour feasting at the banquet with his wife and other thanes in the castle (where Banquo's ghost will appear).<sup>28</sup> Michael goes through a similar 'multiplication': he renounces Satan at the baptismal ceremony in church, while he is simultaneously present in thought and through his orders at every murder committed in that moment, expertly represented by the montage technique made possible by the medium of film.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, the murder of Duncan initiates the everlasting torture of Macbeth's soul. From this aspect, the killing of the king can be connected with the later assassination of Banquo: the memory of both men will haunt Macbeth forever. Analyzing Hegel's concept of sin, László Tengelyi points out that the sinner is deluded when

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28. Henry Irving devoted an article to the identity of the Third Murderer. According to Irving the idea that Macbeth might be the third one was brought up in the September 11 and November 13 issue of *Notes and Queries*, but he fails to name the author. Irving finds it more likely that the Third Murderer is one of the servants (Henry Irving, "The Third Murderer in *Macbeth*," in Bloom, 147–150, p. 147). As Goddard notes, Macbeth tells the two murderers, in various ways, four times that he would soon be "with them," so it is very likely that he is the man, if not so much in the physical sense (since he is at the banquet throughout) but, in line with the logic of poetic drama, "virtually" (Harold C. Goddard "Macbeth" from *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, in Bloom, 254–292, p. 280).

29. Anker calls this scene one of the most brilliant montage-constructions in the history of American film (Anker, p. 48).

committing the deed, as they believe that they harm the life of a stranger, whereas they poison, and kill part of, their own life, too. “The dead spirit of the harmed life rebels, ‘takes arms against’ the deed, just like Banquo, who came to Macbeth as a friend and was not erased by the murder, but soon occupies Macbeth’s place – not as a dinner guest but as an evil ghost.”<sup>30</sup> Through his crimes, Macbeth will be eternally linked to Duncan and Banquo, just as Richard III is to his own victims, who haunt him in his dreams. Moreover, both Duncan and Banquo emphasize this ominous link before their respective deaths. At the beginning of the play, Duncan says to Macbeth: “From hence to Inverness, / And bind us further to you” (1.4.42–43), and Macbeth takes this frighteningly seriously and binds Duncan’s haunting memory to himself in the strongest possible way: by sin itself. Banquo similarly declares in Act 3 during his last conversation with Macbeth: “Let your Highness / Command upon me, to the which my duties / Are with a most indissoluble tie / For ever knit” (3.1.15–18), which soon gains an ominous content, too.

This aspect of murdering Duncan corresponds in Michael’s case to the assassination of Fredo. Although Michael does not commit the deed personally,<sup>31</sup> but through one of his body-guards, this does not alleviate his burden of sin, just as the fact that the murder is, after all, to take revenge for Fredo’s treachery does not

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30. László Tengelyi, *A bűn mint sorseseemény* [Sin as an event of fate] (Budapest: Atlantisz, 1992), pp. 45–46 (my translation).

31. According to Cowie, as opposed to his son, Michael, “Vito possesses the courage to carry out his own executions. Michael never soils his hands with blood [except for the assassination of Solozzo and McCluskey! –Sz. B.]. He issues orders, condemns his victims with a nod to his bodyguard, until even his brother Fredo must be killed in the remote expanse of Lake Tahoe, while Michael waits firmly in the boat house.” (Peter Cowie, *Coppola* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1990) p. 102). This, however, is a highly reductive view: Vito is seen to commit murder twice; once to ensure that his family has enough to eat (Don Fanucci) and once to revenge the death of his parents and brother (Don Ciccio) and in both cases there are favourable circumstances to carry out the deed personally. Michael does not remain in the background because he is a coward; this may be proved by the very fact that when it was inevitable, he did shoot Solozzo and McCluskey himself. In fact, after World War II, the position of the mafia was more precarious than before the war and the possibility to carry out deeds of crime personally came to an end: increased security measures and state surveillance made it well-nigh impossible for the heads of the mafia-families to take action into their hands directly. It is by no means accidental that both of Vito’s personal criminal arrangements take place in the retrospective scenes (in Part II). Even further, in two of the murder-cases Michael settles his bill with two close family-members, motivated by his own resolute desire to ‘clean up,’ and this cannot be considered on the same level as the murdering of Don Ciccio, motivated by revenge and anger. Thus we may conclude that Michael’s staying in the background is not a sign of cowardice at all.

ease his conscience, either. Moreover, just as Macbeth, he kills his relative; even further, a much closer one: his own brother; while the similarity is even greater in both victims supposedly being under the protection of the murderers: Duncan as a guest under Macbeth's roof (Macbeth being "his host, / Who should against his murderer shut the door, / Not bear the knife myself," 1.7.14–16) and Fredo as a brother and member of the Family headed by Michael Corleone. Fredo is taken fishing on a boat on Lake Tahoe by Michael's bodyguard, while Michael himself is watching the sad scene from the boathouse on the shore. Fredo is shot in the head from behind after reciting the *Hail Mary* (mainly out of superstition, to catch more fish), while the prayer itself frighteningly refers to Michael's daughter, Mary. The verb *hail* appearing in the first line of the prayer may mean greeting (saluting) and calling somebody to a certain spot at the same time;<sup>32</sup> an example for the latter is a kind of pun spontaneously coined by Michael's sister, Connie, in Part III. When searching for her niece, she cries out: "Where's Mary? Would somebody please hail Mary?" – thus symbolically connecting the girl with Fredo's prayer immediately before his death. And through this connection it seems as if Fredo in his last minute had called precisely Mary to death, preparing the girl as a sacrifice for Michael's sins.

The memory of Fredo also haunts Michael until his death and binds him with a link equally as strong as Duncan or Banquo is bound to Macbeth. In Part III, this connection is constantly emphasized, and underlines the reappearing conscience of guilt. At the very beginning of the third part, a retrospective camera-shot of Fredo's death can be seen, and then the abandoned family house on the shores of Lake Tahoe. The house stands barren, with only some leftover, telltale objects indicating a sudden moving from the house or even an escape. At a certain point the water of the lake penetrated the ranch: the very water Fredo Corleone was executed on and his body thrown into. The image of the house can be interpreted as a symbol, the symbol of Michael's personality, which is penetrated by water: the memory of Fredo has taken almost complete control over Michael's mind. Somewhere in the desolated house, which rather resembles a haunted castle than a once family home, an abandoned doll is lying on the floor, delicately referring to Mary's future death on the stairs of the opera house. Fredo's spirit reappears several times during the film: Michael cries out his brother's name while a diabetic stroke overcomes him, and he is literally weeping while confessing his sins to Cardinal Lamberto in the Vatican.

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32. In *Macbeth*, the *hail* of the Weïrd Sisters is of course a greeting, yet ambiguity does play a role here, too: not only is the full sentence (Hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter) both a greeting and a prophecy at the same time but the *hail* part can be taken as a call, a hint at the directions towards reaching the positions of Thane of Cawdor and King.

For Michael, the murder of Fredo is a symbol of another important aspect: Michael's involuntary divergence from his father's, Vito Corleone's, values.<sup>33</sup> Michael does not realize how far he traveled from the world of his father, whose values he wanted to protect and yet destroys. However, as I have already mentioned, the guarding spirit of Don Vito is constantly present: in Part II in the flashbacks showing the young Vito building his 'kingdom,' while in Part III Vito's photos keep reappearing at various places in Michael's house. Michael drifts far from his father's mentality and stabs the knife in the sacrosanct Family he wanted to protect by liquidating his own brother. The blindness of the protagonist in this respect is further emphasized by his monologue at the catafalque of Don Tommasino, when he tries to understand the differences between his own and the world of his father, the old scale of values represented by old Tommasino.<sup>34</sup> His words could be directly addressed to Don Vito as well, while they also become the motto of Michael's tragedy. "Why was I so feared, and you so loved? What was it? I was no less honorable. I wanted to do good." These few sentences are probably the purest annunciation of the failure of Michael's life and work. He does not have Fredo killed on sudden impulse but well after the betrayal; for Michael, Fredo's death is an uncomfortable but unavoidable necessity. It is not the desire to avenge himself; however, Michael firmly believes that it is his obligation to do so. His stubborn idea is that he has to protect the Family, even through internal liquidation,<sup>35</sup> if necessary. However,

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33. Marlon Brando analyzed his role of the old Vito Corleone (in Part I) by emphasizing how much he respected the character of Don Vito. Brando claims that he imagined the character as a highly honest and distinguished gentleman, a man of great integrity, who accepts tradition with reverence, and whose natural instincts never break down, but he happened to be born in a world of violence where he is forced to protect himself and his family. Brando defines Vito as an honorable man, in spite of all he had to do; a man who firmly believed in the saving power of the family and who was shaped by events and circumstances as we all are. Vito Corleone was compelled to act the way he did, and meanwhile he put his foot on the road of sin. Cf. Marlon Brando & Robert Lindsey, *Songs my mother taught me* (New York: Random House, 1994).

34. Cowie, focusing on the differences between Vito and Michael, notes: "Both Corleones are withdrawn, watchful, and cautious with their words. Vito, however, could never be so harsh as Michael is in his Family relationships. The Michael who drinks only club soda and who strikes his wife with terrible force, as well as eliminating his older brother, remains light years away from Vito Corleone. Their methods may be similar, but their fundamental approach to life differs according to their circumstances and their epoch." (Cowie, p. 102).

35. This explains Michael's giving orders for the assassination of his brother-in-law, Carlo, too: Michael painfully wishes to maintain the purity of the family and for him the goal justifies the means. His behaviour is the same in both cases: he observes Carlo's death from a distance (at the end of Part I), just as he will Fredo's (at the very end of Part II).

against his will, he precisely destroys part of the *Family*, the very thing to whose protection he devoted his whole life.<sup>36</sup> Macbeth similarly destroys what was the most precious to him: by his deed, he drives Lady Macbeth, his beloved wife mad and brings about her death (which is most probably by suicide<sup>37</sup>).

Hence, Michael Corleone experiences the different aspects of his sin separately, while they are squeezed together for Macbeth in the moment of murdering Duncan. In the first place, Macbeth's sin means the first step on the road of sin, the one-way-street leading to the tragic destiny he can never escape from, by which the deed stains the sinner forever and evokes the constant danger of external punishment. Michael experiences the same by killing Solozzo and McCluskey. Secondly, the murder of Duncan provides Macbeth with the title "king" and the position of the leader, and he ritualistically identifies himself and becomes one with sin in the deed, also becoming its father and godfather at the same time. It is this that makes him able to be present everywhere in all the following scenes where sin is given birth at his command. Michael gains the power (the title "Don") and the title of the Godfather of sin during the baptism in the church and by the help of the murders taking place simultaneously in the distance. In the third place, Macbeth binds the ghost of his victims to himself forever by his sin, in a way becoming its slave; and the deed will eternally haunt his conscience, just as the execution of Fredo means the same for Michael. Both protagonists share the deed and the destiny evoked by creating the artistic masterpiece of sin, and this 'work of art' devours them in a similar way and makes them prisoners of that sin, a sin which stained their hands forever with effused blood.

In the present essay, I wished to demonstrate that *The Godfather*-films adopt the tragic pattern which can be reconstructed from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and thus they diverge from other gangster films. Since the tragedy of both characters unfolds

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36. Anker's insight is noteworthy in this respect: Michael "joins a distinguished company of American literary evildoers, ranging from Hawthorne's malefactors and Melville's Ahab to Faulkner's Snopes family and Updike's Harry Angstrom: all are characters who have done evil and should have known better in the midst of doing what they thought was the good or the necessary." (Anker, p. 30).

37. Mrs. Sarah Siddons, the famous actress, who played Lady Macbeth several times in the 19th century, was convinced that Lady Macbeth was not the victim of an accident (which is also possible, since from the play it is not clear how the Lady dies) but committed suicide. Mrs. Siddons interpreted the sleep-walking scene as an occasion for the guilty feeling, suppressed all the time, to come to the surface with so much vehemence and devastating force in the end that the Lady collapses under its weight; while Macbeth's reaction to the all-engulfing horror is in overwhelmingly magnificent poetic images, continuously flowing from his mouth, his wife tries "not to think of the crime" and that takes revenge on her (cf. Mrs. Sarah Siddons, Mrs. Siddons Acts Lady Macbeth – Her Own Remarks on the Character and Observations on Mrs. Siddons [*sic*] Estimate by Thomas Campbell," in Bloom, 114–131, p. 125).

in front of the viewer quite perspicuously, Macbeth and Michael Corleone – despite their cruelty and dreadful nature – are able to become even amiable in the eyes of the spectator, since they both depict something from the very tragic nature of the human being: they appear as flesh-and-blood, vulnerable characters for whom innocence is simply an impossibility. Michael Corleone stands in the storm of destructive forces in constant disharmony with himself: his mafia world is characterized by strict moral rules which go against not only the law but his private life as well. By emphasizing this strong moral aspect of the mafia in which Michael is locked up and, in general, by applying the *Macbeth* pattern to the Coppola-films, *The Godfather* Trilogy secedes from the genre of gangster films and in a way creates the genre of the mafia film. While in a gangster film the greatest enemy of the protagonist is the law and he easily washes the blood off his hands so that he may be able to deceive the authorities, the protagonist of the mafia film is defeated by himself with the force of necessity and the blood on his hand can never be washed off, not even by Neptune's vast ocean.