THE PORTER, LADY MACBETH, AND THE THEME OF SPOILED HOSPITALITY

by

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Dedication

To my mother who first introduced me to Shakespeare and to Erick, my love, who had to

listen to me speak on many occasions about my thesis despite having no interest in the

bard.

Abstract

This thesis analyzes how scholarship has treated Act 2, scene 3 in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and posits that the scene has significance with respect to the theme of hospitality. To prove this thesis, we first review the relevant scholarship about the scene. Next we explore the theme of hospitality in the play with a focus on the historical context. Finally we show how Lady Macbeth and the porter are connected as faces of hospitality. We find that throughout the play not only does Lady Macbeth remain interested in preserving the semblance of hospitality, but also by convincing her husband to break the laws of hospitality, she has severed them from the peace that good hospitality was meant to foster. This finding shows that Act 2, scene 3 is more than the comic relief scene in an otherwise solemn play.

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I. Introduction

Tragically overlooked by many critics and often cut from productions, Act 2,
scene 3 of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is much more than a scene providing comic relief in
an otherwise solemn play. The scene and its main character, the porter, contribute to
another overlooked element of the play-- the theme of hospitality. Throughout the play
Lady Macbeth and the porter mirror each other as the faces of hospitality. They both talk
of alcohol and act in roles traditionally linked with giving hospitality. Together they
evolve the theme of hospitality and sins against hospitality, while also adding nuance to
Macbeth's fall from grace. This thesis argues that the Porter scene is more than just
comic relief and the roles of both Lady Macbeth and the porter were purposefully written
to evoke the horrors of hospitality gone awry in a period when hospitable duties were
both basic and elaborate. In order to show the originality of my thesis, I first summarize
important scholarship concerning the Porter scene. Next I show how important hospitality
was in early modern England and how a porter functioned in this system of hospitality.
Then I discuss the theme of hospitality in the wider context of the play. In this section, I
focus on Lady Macbeth and her role as hostess, especially during the banquet scene. The
banquet scene is crucial to the understanding of hospitality in the play because it shows
how hospitality fails in the face of betrayal.

Act 2, scene 3 is commonly referred to as the Porter scene by most scholars,
though some have dubbed it the Devil Porter scene because of the Porter's references to
hell and sinners. The scene follows directly from Macbeth's murder of King Duncan. The
scene is a little over 170 lines. The first forty-five make up the Porter scene, beginning

when the porter enters and ending once he exits. The other 125 are often referred to as the discovery scene with the public revelation of Duncan's murder uttered by Macduff: "Oh, horror, horror, horror! / Tongue nor heart cannot conceive nor name thee!" (*Macbeth* 2.3.58-9).

In the Porter scene, a hungover porter answers the knocking at the gate that startled the Macbeths at the end of the scene prior to it. The scene takes place in pre-dawn hours after a night of entertaining the king at Macbeth's castle. The porter remarks on the insistence of the knocking and suggests that the porter serving at hell's gates would never rest due to constant knocking: "Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were porter of hell gate, he should have old turning the key" (*Macbeth* 2.3.1-3). Before actually opening the door, the porter pretends to be the devil's porter and mimics admitting three sinners into hell. He admits a "farmer that hanged himself on th' expectation of plenty," an "equivocator that could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed treason enough for God's sake yet could not equivocate to heaven," and an "English tailor come hither for stealing out of a French hose" (*Macbeth* 2.3.4-14). The farmer, equivocator, and English tailor's sins would be familiar to an early modern audience, but they require some explanation today. The farmer's sin is hoarding grain with the expectation that he could sell it for a high profit in times of drought. The equivocator may either imply a lawyer or witness who lied in court, but may also refer to the Jesuit practice of equivocating. The English tailor was caught stealing fabric from his clients--in the period, clients would buy bolts of fabric for the tailor to use with the expectation that scraps would be returned to the client.

Only the chill of the morning air breaks the porter's mime: "But this place is too cold for hell. I'll devil-porter it no further" (*Macbeth* 2.3.16-17). He notes that he "had thought to have let in some of all professions that go the primrose way to th' everlasting bonfire," but he returns to being the Macbeths' porter and not the devil's (*Macbeth* 2.3.18-19). He opens the gate to Macduff and Lennox who have arrived at the king's earlier request. Macduff, a thane and equal of Macbeth, wonders why the porter was not at his station. The porter responds by talking about the party the Macbeths held the preceding night to receive the king: "Faith, sir, we were carousing till the second cock" *Macbeth* 2.3.24). This offers an explanation for why the porter was not at his station and is still presumably hungover. The porter waxes poetic about the properties of drink, which he claims is a "great provoker of three things" (*Macbeth* 2.3.25). Macduff humors him by asking "what three things does drink especially provoke?" (*Macbeth* 2.3.27). The porter answers that drink provokes a runny nose, sleep, and urine and "lechery, sir, it provokes and unprovokes" (*Macbeth* 2.3.30). Then Macduff asks if Macbeth is awake.

The porter exits the stage as Macbeth, himself, comes to greet the guests at his gate. Macbeth takes the men into the castle where Macduff discovers the gruesome body of the murdered king. As the other nobles react to the death of their king, the Macbeths try to tie up loose ends and conceal their deed. Macbeth confesses that in his fury at the discovery of the body he killed the guards. The other nobles agree that the guards murdered Duncan: "Those of his chamber, as it seemed, had done't" (*Macbeth* 2.3.11). The scene ends with Malcolm and Donalbain, the two sons of Duncan, agreeing to flee Scotland in order to avoid falling to the same hands that murdered their father.

II. Scholarship about the Porter Scene

Most scholarship about the scene focuses on the last part of the action-- the aftermath of Duncan's murder--and gives little attention to the porter's game of pretend. I first became interested in the scene because I noticed that there was not a lot of scholarship written about it at all and not all the scholarship adequately grasped the core themes of the scene. There are three distinct schools of thought surrounding the scene: 1) scholars debate about the authenticity of the scene; 2) scholars use the scene to humanize Macbeth; and 3) scholars use the scene as commentary on events contemporary with the play. However, few theories put the scene into context with the rest of the play, and only one that I am aware of attempts to put the play into the context of its time. However, all of these theories tend to view the scene as a moment separate and isolated from the context of the play at large. Scholars have isolated the first half of the scene so thoroughly that it is really only mentioned in articles dedicated to defending the scene's integrity. This can be seen as the true tragedy of *Macbeth* because there are many little elements in the first and second half of the scene which, when recognized as woven into the tapestry of the work, show the true genius of the play.

Five important scholars have shaped the interpretation of the Porter scene: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John B.Harcourt, Frederic B. Tromly, Michael J.B. Allen, and H. L. Rogers. Each scholar attempted to explain the scene outside of the context of the play in his own way. It is important to examine these theories in order to show how and why so many have tried to isolate the scene from the rest of the play and to how important it is to view the scene in the context of the play.

One reason why scholars under-appreciate this scene is because it does not seem to fit in the overall mood of the rest of the play. Samuel Taylor Coleridge has made the argument that when the words used in the scene are compared with other works of Shakespeare, the scene does not belong in the play at all. He claims that in an otherwise solemn play, a comedic scene should not exist. He asserts that the Porter's scene might not be Shakespeare's work at all because the phrasing of certain words is inconsistent with the rest of Shakespeare's canon (154).

However, in his article titled "The Use of Comic Material in the Tragedy of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries," Raymond Macdonald Alden provides ample excuse for this scene to be counter to what Coleridge expects from tragedy. Alden discusses the different ways Shakespeare and his contemporaries combine comedic scenes and dialogue with tragedies. He shows that the Porter's scene is in tradition with the rest of Shakespeare's work. Alden distinguishes four types of comedic elements in Shakespeare's play, but *Macbeth*, he says, "might form an intermediate type: the Porter scene could be excised without affecting the action, yet despite Coleridge's objection few critics would call it gratuitous" (292). It could be that in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare was experimenting with form and trying out new phrases. Alden also finds that three of Shakespeare's tragedies "are free from outstanding comic details except for the single interlude scene" (294). *Macbeth*, of course, fits this category, since Act 2, scene 3 is considered to be the only comedic scene in the work.

Alden, like the others after Coleridge, objects to the idea that comedic scenes are only there to evoke laughter. Alden questions whether "the presence of comic detail in tragedy is for the purpose of relief" at all (296). Many claim that the addition of comedic

scenes into tragedy is meant to alleviate the tension and give the audience a break from the tragic feeling. And as Alden says, "the standard example for this view is the porter scene in *Macbeth*," yet at the same time, as Alden notes, the scene does not make audiences laugh (297). Perhaps when the play was performed for its original Jacobean audience, the Porter's Scene elicited laughs. But if one's only knowledge of the scene came from scholarship, one would assume the scene is only included to provide a cushion between the murder of the king and the discovery of his body. The scene would only exist as a brief respite between the horror of the murder and the horror of the rest of the play.

Alden, like other critics, implies that the scene can be omitted from stage and film adaptations without detracting from the work. However, the scene does have a practical function in stage productions. The actors playing Lord and Lady Macbeth need time to change out of their bloody clothes and clean their hands before they return to the stage in the second half of the scene. Without the time taken by Macduff and the Porter, the two would arrive to the murder scene covered in blood and their lies would become almost comedic in themselves. Lord Macbeth claims that "all great Neptune's ocean" will not be able to "wash this blood clean from [his] hand" and Lady Macbeth says her hands are of the same color but she would be ashamed to "wear a heart so white" (*Macbeth* 2.2.78-79;2.2.83). This is the same blood that inspires Lady Macbeth's later "Out, damned spot" speech in Act 5, scene 1. Without the addition of the Porter scene, there is no time for the actors to change and wash-- "will these hands ne'er be clean" (*Macbeth* 5.1.45).

Scholars must also note that the Porter's scene need not necessarily be the only humorous scene of the play. For example, In Act 1, scene 5, Lady Macbeth, who would

have been played by a boy actor, asks the "spirits that tend on mortal thoughts" to take away her womanly attribute(s) (*Macbeth* 1.5.47-48). If an actor chose to do so, this could be played as quite humorous. In many ways, we rely on the theater of our own time to inform ourselves how the theater of the past might have looked. Modern-day audiences tend to expect certain tones from Shakespearean tragedy which may not actually be the intention of the author. The first scene in *Romeo and Juliet* provides another example, when Sampson and Gregory talk about how they intend to handle the Montagues. The discussion begins with a boast to "thrust the maids to the wall" and ends with "draw thy tool," which works as a double entendre for sword (*Romeo and Juliet* 1.1.19;1.1.32). This scene can be acted in such a way that emphasizes all of the penis jokes or in a serious vein. It can be difficult to decide when and where to emphasize the comedic elements of Shakespeare, but the choice is in the hands of the director who must decide which themes to emphasize in his or her adaptation.

As scholars and readers we should be aware of the choices directors make. Justin Kurzel's 2015 movie adaptation of the script, for example, chooses to emphasize a feeling of hopeless despair with the austere color palate and the inclusion of the phantom dead soldier that haunts Macbeth throughout. The score from this production does a particularly good job of making the audience feel that something is off even when the camera is only showing Macbeth in his bedroom (Kurzel 2015). There are no humorous interludes in this version, and significantly the first half of the Porter's scene has been cut. For a modern audience, *Macbeth* has been adapted into a psychological horror movie. But just because the productions of our time paint Macbeth in desaturated color, does not mean that the original script of *Macbeth* is not awash with moments of levity.

After Coleridge's ideas were rejected, other scholars, such as John B. Harcourt, Frederic B. Tromly, and Michael J.B. Allen, suggested that the scene was originally written as a commentary on Macbeth, himself. The problem with the way many scholars handle the scene is that they tend to view it as separate from the other scenes. This scene is considered to be something of a pantomime of the rest of the play where the audience is told how to interpret the actions of Macbeth. When scholars who ascribe to this theory do include lines from other parts of the play, it is done with the intent to show how the Porter's scene is a kind of set-piece or standalone scene.

John B. Harcourt, in his article "I Pray You, Remember the Porter," collects into one place many of the relevant theories about the Porter's scene and expounds on the idea of the scene as separate from the rest of the action of the play. He finds the critical analysis of the scene somewhat lacking and despairs at the fact that even college freshmen are taught the "thought-paralyzing concept" that the scene is only comic relief (393). Harcourt, who wrote this article in 1961, would be sad to know that not much has changed. But he provided an excellent base to build from.

Harcourt, like many, takes special interest in the three sinners the Porter lets into hell. He is interested in the figure of the farmer in particular. In the Folio edition, the line reads "Come in time, haue Napkins enow about you, here you'le sweat for't" (*Macbeth* 2.3.5-6). While some scholars have suggested that "time" is meant to be read as "time-server," which would be a reference both to *server* as in *waiter* and a farmer's interest in almanacs. Others suggest "time-pleaser," which appears in both *Twelfth Night* and *Coriolanus*. Whatever the case, Harcourt is interested in the figure of Time. This farmer, with his harvesting scythe could be "easily established through pantomime" as the

symbol of personified Time (Harcourt 394). "Sweating and mopping of brows with napkins" is often associated with reapers, Harcourt claims (394). This leads Harcourt to his examination of all three sinners together.

Harcourt builds his theory on the idea that the sins of the sinners are Macbeth's sins. The farmer's sin is acting "detrimentally to the well-being of society: private gain had prevailed over the public interest" (394). The "equivocator has committed treason" and "the tailor has stolen from clothing that properly belongs to another" (Harcourt, 394). These three sinners, Harcourt claims, were not chosen at random and instead reflect the nature of Macbeth's crimes: Macbeth has "committed the ultimate treason, regicide," "has seized the crown and royal robes that were not is by right," and is "driven by ruthless ambition" (394). In Harcourt's theory, Shakespeare seeks to humanize Macbeth to his audience by presenting the more easily reconcilable criminals who share Macbeth's sins. This is why, according to Harcourt, the scene takes place after Macbeth is seen with bloody hands. Harcourt calls this a "deglamorization of Macbeth" (394). Whereas some scholars claim that this comparison of Macbeth's crimes to the crimes of the imaginary sinners is meant to create a moral hierarchy in which Macbeth is so far removed from the lay people that he exists on another level of scrutiny, Harcourt claims that the comparison both humanizes Macbeth and foreshadows his ultimate demise in the figure of Time with his scythe, who can be taken as a figure of reaping-- a grim reaper.

Harcourt is right in thinking that the Porter's scene is meant to say something about Macbeth. But his inspection of the scene is too narrow. Frederic B. Tromly, in his 1975 article titled "Macbeth and His Porter," builds off of Harcourt and suggests that the purpose of the Porter's scene can be found in its location in the play. According to

Tromly, "its placement immediately after the murder of Duncan suggests that its primary purpose is to adjust and clarify the audience's response to Macbeth's "murder of Duncan (151). Tromly suggests that the scene should be viewed as a "truncated subplot" which comments on Macbeth, the man (151).

While using the scene to explore Lord Macbeth is something that Tromly, Harcourt, and Allen have in common, Tromly rejects Harcout's ideas that "the simpler vices of the Porter serve to establish an ethical distance between the failings of ordinary humanity and the monstrous evil now within the castle walls" (Tromly 151; Harcourt 397). This rejection is due to Tromly's belief that the Porter and Macbeth are not meant to be contrasted with one another, but to emphasize the similarities between the two characters. The porter "shakily stands as a metaphor or figure for Macbeth… in order to humanize the murderer by forcing us to recognize him in the ordinary" (Tromly 151). Tromly suggests that this may be an invitation to recognize Macbeth in ourselves as well.

In Tromly's argument the three sinners represent various aspects of Macbeth's crimes and hint at his future punishment. Tromly considers Harcourt's article to be sufficient in pointing out the significance of each sinner, but disagrees with Harcourt's conclusions on the effect of these sinners on the audience's perception of Macbeth. Whereas Harcourt thinks that the low comedy of the Porter serves to scale down Macbeth's heroic dimensions, Tromly thinks that the comparison is meant to evoke sympathy.

As noted, the Porter scene begins when Macbeth leaves the stage covered in Duncan's blood. This image is a horrifying one because it shows the betrayal of vassal to

king, the greatest sin against hospitality, and the murder of an unarmed, sleeping man.

Tromly reflects that "the danger which the author faces is not that spectators will

sentimentally excuse Macbeth, but rather that they will self-indulgently brand him as a

villain different from themselves and beyond sympathetic understanding" (152). Unlike

Harcourt, Tromly argues that the audience is not likely to sympathize with Macbeth

naturally. Instead, the audience must be coaxed into feeling for Macbeth by feeling they

are like Macbeth.

This is done, Tromly posits, through the three sinners let into Hell's gates in the

Porter's fantasy. The Porter suggests that one would be extremely busy as the porter at

Hell's gate, which "suggests the commonness, the frequency, of human criminality"

(Tromly 152). In other words, "the path is well-trodden because it is not reserved for

spectacular crimes like regicide " (Tromly 152). Tromly notes that the porter admits to

desiring to let in "some of all professions, that go the primrose way to th' everlasting

bonfire" (*Macbeth* 2.3.18-19). In contrast to H. L. Roger's theory, Tromly suggests that

the equivocation of the scene may translate "Macbeth's crime from the distant, larger-

than-life world of chronicle to the familiar realm of diminished moral expectation" (153).

Even the Porter's last remark at the gate ("I pray you, remember the Porter") can be taken

as an insinuation "that each member of the audience would do well to prepare for his own

arrival at Hell Gate" (Tromly 153). In other words, the Porter's scene has a rhetorical

purpose of lowering "the horizon of behavior against which Macbeth's crimes are to be

judged" (Zitner 16).

Tromly suggests that the second half of the Porter's lines, namely, the

conversation with Macduff about drink and lechery, also "stand in metaphorical

relationship to Macbeth himself" (153). Since lechery and drunkenness are not Macbeth's

own sins in the theory where the sinners share Macbeth's vices, it is difficult to see this

connection. However, Tromly argues that there is a similarity "between the state of mind

created by the conjunction of drink and lechery in the Porter and the one created by the

interplay of good and evil impulses in Macbeth" (153). Further evidence for this claim,

for Tromly, is that Lady Macbeth predicts the Porter in her words in Act 1, scene 7:

> Was the hope drunk,
> Wherein you dress'd yourself? Hath it slept since?
> And wake it now, to look so green and pale
> At what it did so freely? From this time
> Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
> To be the same in thine own act and valour
> As thou art in desire? (*Macbeth* 1.7.39-45)

The Porter literally embodies this speech; he is intoxicated, has overslept, and is "green

and pale" (*Macbeth* 1.7.41). The Porter points out the separation between desire and

gratification. Tromly notes that this parallels Lord and Lady Macbeth's struggles: "the

more they seem to win, the more they lose" (154). The fruitless Macbeth is doomed to

fail and the Porter's words predict the arc of his fall. In addition to all this, it seems that

while Macbeth does not engage in drunkenness, the witches' equivocations serve the

same function as alcohol in the Porter's speech (Tromly 154). In this way, the Porter with

his drink and Macbeth with his evil ambitions mirror each other. Even the Porter's game

of pretend in some ways mirrors Macbeth's hallucinations in the caldron.

     H. L. Rogers attempts to put the scene into the context of its time by excusing the

scene from having any bearing on the rest of the action of the play in his Father Garnet

theory. In this theory, H. L. Rogers argues that the Porter's scene in *Macbeth* is a reference to the Jesuit doctrine of equivocation and the execution of one Father Henry Garnet. Rogers attempts to date *Macbeth* based on this theory. In Rogers' argument, since "Garnet was hanged on 3 May 1606," the Porter's scene must be written after this date (44). Rogers is also interested in the three characters the porter pretends to invite into Inverness while acting as the porter of Hell: the farmer, the equivocator, and the English tailor. The second character-- the equivocator--, Rogers says, is almost certainly Father Garnet. Garnet was involved in the Gunpowder Plot and was a member of the Jesuits who were known to hold equivocation lawful only when it was "for God's sake" (45). When the porter says the equivocator "committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven," Rogers takes this as a joke against Garnet (45). Garnet was not only a traitor to the crown, but he was "hanged without equivocation"; Rogers reports that the Recorder at the execution asked Garnet not to equivocate with his last breath (45).

But Rogers says that the farmer and the English tailor may also allude to Father Garnet. "Farmer" was an alias of Father Garnet; thus the phrase "here's a farmer, that hang'd himself on th' expectation of plenty" could be an allusion to the man (45). The English tailor, while not an allusion to Garnet himself, could be an allusion to a miracle attributed to Father Garnet. It is said that "a head of straw stained with Garnet's blood at his execution" was obtained and brought to a tailor's house (Rogers 45). Later it was reputed that the straw had Garnet's portrait on it. For Catholics of the time, this was considered to be a miracle and Garnet was considered to be a martyr. Rogers reports that "English ecclesiastical authorities were concerned" that what they considered to be a

traitor, tried and executed, was being lauded like a saint (45). The authorities interrogated one Hugh Griffin, who happened to be the tailor the straw was brought to; later reports on the incident would call Griffin a "gooseman" which be referenced by Shakespeare when the porter says "here you may roast your goose" (Rogers 46). Thus Rogers connects the farmer, the equivocator, and the tailor to Father Henry Garnet.

Rogers also posits that the witches' chant in the cauldron scene can be taken as equivocation-- "fair is foul" and etc. However, it seems unlikely that Shakespeare was so interested in recalling the affairs of Father Garnet to attention in two scenes of the play. More than once seems a bit gratuitous. And while this theory is certainly fun, it ignores the significance of the porter in history.

III. The Theme of Hospitality

Tromly's analysis manages to tie the scene to the rest of the play, and Rogers attends to historical context, but I do not think these arguments go far enough. Rather than just "predicting" the porter, I think Lady Macbeth is in dialogue with him. Rather than just being a method of "humanizing" Macbeth, I think the porter is meant to show just how horrific Macbeth's deeds are. And rather than isolating one potential historical reference like Father Garnet, greater historical context opens the play more. For early modern viewers of the play, this would clearly be a play about hospitality gone wrong. Modern audiences may not fully understand the importance of a porter to a household in early modern England, but earlier audiences would not be able to see this scene as

anything other than the immediate repercussions of sins against hospitality- especially since the main actor in the scene is the porter.

Great houses in England and Scotland in Shakespeare's time were deeply tied to the culture of hospitality, and the porter was an essential piece of the elite house's ability to function. Felicity Heal's *Hospitality in Early Modern England* not only explains the importance of hospitality culture to maintaining the peace within and among noble households, but also provides an excellent resource for us to uncover the significance of the porter's role in *Macbeth*. By understanding the importance of hospitality culture and the role of the porter, we are able to see nuances in the scene in question. Macbeth's porter provides a commentary on how hospitality has gone wrong and shows how grievous the sin is.

The importance of hospitality to great houses in early modern England cannot be overstated. There were two reasons for great houses to participate in this culture. The first was for the honor of both the realm and the host. The second was to maintain the order which was integral to the keeping of peace in the kingdom. Hospitality was just as essential to the nobility of early modern England as it was to the ancient Greeks. For example, the story of Baucis and Philemon emphasizes the importance of hospitality to strangers. In the story, Baucis and Philemon are a poor, old married couple who please the gods through the practice of good hospitality when Jupiter and Mercury, disguised as beggars, descend from Olympus. And Euripedes' *Hecuba* can be read as a play concerning the breach of the contract of hospitality. When Polydorus is murdered by the man who is hosting him, the Greeks find they cannot sail home for Troy until this injustice is resolved. Both cultures were concerned both by the disruption of hospitality

and with maintaining its rules. And the English prided themselves on their warm welcomes to strangers and foreigners alike. But Felicity Heal writes that "it is unlikely that the nobility and gentry were moved to generosity by any fear of aliens, but there was both a contractual sentiment, the hope that giving would be returned, and an awareness that the collective honor of the realm was at stake" (11). In sum, while on the surface, many nobles might have claimed that expressions of hospitality stemmed from honorable intentions, for most, it became a strategy for political means.

For many heads of great houses, according to Heal, hospitality became a language through which they could communicate their allegiance and alliances. Even hosting strangers could be taken as a sign of political maneuvering as "true influence depended on subtle management of the honor community" (Heal 12). Heal relays an example of a nobleman who fell afoul of the local community by being a Puritan man of intense ambition in a Catholic dominated area. In order to punish him, another group of nobles visited his house as an uninvited, raucous hunting party and behaved as deliberately bad guests in order to shame him. This case ended up before the English courts, where both parties accused the other of being inhospitable and besmirching the honor of the local community (Heal 13). This case reveals the shaming power in the abuse of hospitality.

But the ability to use hospitality as a weapon was possible because the notion of hospitality in early modern England was one tied with reciprocity. When one great house gave hospitality to another, it was expected that there would be payment in kind in both the form of hospitality and in political action. One would be expected to host the other and provide support in political action. This became an important means of unifying local areas and establishing power in the countryside of early modern England. Hosting

became "linked increasingly to displays of political loyalty" as in the reception of the king when he was traveling through the area or holding a feast for a judge or a returning noble who was away on the business of the king (Heal 87). Hospitality and all its rules became a language great houses used to communicate with each other.

The porter was perhaps the most important servant who had hospitality under his purview. The porter was stationed at the gate in front of the great house. He was both the first person a guest would meet and was in charge of overseeing the transition of visitors from being strangers (even if known) to being guests (Heal 8). The porter was "placed to filter into the courtyard only those outsiders who were considered of suitable status, or were on appropriate business" (Heal 30). The porter and the gate became discerners, dispensers, and symbols of hospitality. In fact, many elaborate gatehouses were built "to display the arms and heraldic devices of the family" which only emphasizes the importance of the porter's role (Heal 30). The porter himself was a necessary member of any great household: "it was the usual practice to maintain an open gate, guarded by a porter, in the noble household" (Heal 9). Nobles also began to use the gate as a symbolic form of communication; for example, an open gate was the norm, but during meals or prayers the gate was closed. The closure "reiterated the message that the household was an integral unit, and emphasized that the lord retained the crucial freedom to dictate the terms of his generosity" (Heal 9). The porter was also in charge of determining what degree of respect each guest deserved.

Heal reports that "men of honor and title were always to be met at the gate by the senior officers, even if they appeared when a meal was in progress and the porter was denying general entrance" (32). Certain rank meant that the gate must be opened, while

most guests could enter through the wicket gate; the porter had to be aware of each guest and greet him properly. Thus, the porter and hospitality in early modern England were inextricably tied to each other. The porter greeted guests, gave them a welcome befitting their class, and was in charge of representing the general hospitality (and wealth and status) of his master until the guest entered into the great house and met the steward, the indoor dispenser of hospitality.

Given this stress on the porter as literal and figurative gatekeeper and the outward face of a nobleman's hospitality, Macbeth's porter reflects poorly on his master. His interaction with Macduff shows a substandard image of hospitality because the Porter is neither prepared in advance nor very inviting, despite the guests' high station. Macduff is made aware of the fact that no one in the castle seems to be awake since the inhabitants were "carousing till the second cock" as part of a banquet for the king (*Macbeth* 2.3.24). And he seems to not take too much offense at not being treated to the correct honors as an equal of Macbeth, since both are thanes. In many productions of *Macbeth*, Macduff is played as a gruff man who is lawful to the point of banality. Many Macduffs have responded to the porter in an aggressive or judgmental tone, but there is nothing in the dialogue that dictates Macduff is not also having a laugh at the porter's expense. Maduff's line, "I believe drink gave thee the lie last night," could be read as a quip about the porter's presumably hungover state (*Macbeth* 2.3.39). And why else would Macduff humor the porter enough to buy into his joke by asking, "what three things does drink especially provoke?" (*Macbeth* 2.3.27). The text could be taken to show that while Macduff has been shown a disservice in not being treated as Macbeth's equal, he does not take this treatment as an insult. It would be more in character for actors who play

Macduff to be merry with the porter, than to be short with the porter. Recall that at this point in the play, Macduff believes that all is well in Scotland. His king has just led a successful campaign to end a revolt and it is the morning after a big party. But, even though Macduff may be good-natured about it, the porter is not in good shape to receive guests.

The porter persists in being bad at his job in other ways. In his first line to Macduff and Lennox he subverts the hospitality of the gate by begging for a tip: "I pray you, remember the porter" (*Macbeth* 2.3.21). This one line, instead of welcoming strangers as guests, asks that the guests put him first. It is fitting that the scene directly after the death of Duncan, which was the ultimate betrayal of the laws of hospitality, would show how order is already breaking down in Macbeth's household.

Harcourt, Allen, Tromly, and Rogers have all analyzed the implications of the devil portering. And while the porter literally pretending his master's house is hell is a moment ripe for analysis, there is another theory about the scene that I think has been overlooked. For many servants and workers, perhaps this would have been a humorous moment where each could imagine himself or herself as the porter complaining about a horrible boss. In a play populated by many nobles, this character could provide a moment of reprieve from the dramatic tension. Though I have said before that it would be wrong to write off the scene as "comic relief," I also do not want to imply that comedic elements cannot carry deeper meaning.

The Porter's scene is meant to alert the audience to the theme of hospitality and hospitality gone awry in *Macbeth*. Once one begins to explore that theme, supporting

evidence is found throughout the play and especially in Lady Macbeth's speaking lines and actions. In fact, the practice of hospitality in the play is reserved almost entirely for the Macbeths. From the banquet scene to Lady Macbeth's descent into madness, hospitality is a great concern of the Macbeths from the first act of the play. The Porter's scene acts as a moment of focus, but the words and ideas of the scene reverberate throughout.

IV. The Lady as Hostess

If the porter had an important role in hospitality in early modern England, so too did the lady of the house. Heal relates an example of one Lady Paget sitting at the head of the table in her husband's absence as an example of just how important the hostess was (43). But the lady of the house had other roles. She was expected to stay at home while the lord was away and maintain hospitality (Heal 120). Heal suggests that women in England "exercised greater control over domestic affairs… than elsewhere in Europe" (179). This is in part due to the fact that "a man had to pursue his business elsewhere" (Heal 179). Thus the lady of the house had to entertain all guests, conduct guests to their rooms, preside over all breakfasts, entertain guests with cards, and etc. (Heal 179). Women's active role in hospitality afforded them social power and Lady Macbeth makes the most of the power she wields.

Lady Macbeth is intimately tied to the way hospitality is portrayed in this play and to the way hospitality is betrayed. From Act 1, Lady Macbeth joins the Porter in being the face of hospitality. In Act 1, scene 6, Duncan, when he arrives at her castle the evening before his murder, calls her "our honored hostess" and "fair and noble hostess"

(*Macbeth* 1.6.13;1.6.30). He invokes the rules of hospitality and expects to be let into the castle for the night, not because of his kingly status, but because of the expectation of generosity. Lady Macbeth assures Duncan he is welcome and performs the part of the host while Macbeth is inside. Lady Macbeth promises "all our service" to Duncan (*Macbeth* 1.6.18). A line which reminds the audience that all she and her husband have is theirs to "audit at [Duncan's] pleasure, still to return your own" (*Macbeth* 1.6.34). This reminds the audience that the hosting of the king on campaign is a sign of loyalty and subservience to the king as well as a sign that the Macbeths are favored by the king. This scene begins to lay the groundwork for the great offense against the rules of hospitality orchestrated by Lady Macbeth.

In the next scene, Act 1, scene 7, Macbeth has decided not to murder Duncan. But Lady Macbeth convinces him to follow her plan. Other scholars, such as Janet Adleman, have discussed the scene and Lady Macbeth's role in coercing Macbeth into murder. But rather than Lady Macbeth's role, the hostess' plan is of particular interest to me. Lady Macbeth suggests that she can "with wine and wassail" put the two guards of Duncan's chambers to sleep and frame them for the murder (*Macbeth* 1.7.74). Later she tells us that she has "drugged their possets" (*Macbeth* 2.1.9). The use of drink to poison is a perversion of hospitality. Lady Macbeth uses her role as hostess to set a trap for Duncan and his guards and does so through something so innocuous as offering drink like a good hostess.

In her chapter "Escaping the Matrix: The Construction of Masculinity in *Macbeth* and *Coriolanus*," Janet Adleman explores the idea of the fantasy of escaping maternal power in two of Shakepeare's works. Her argument is that both plays hinge on the theme

of escaping feminine power and control. She suggests that Lady Macbeth is the dominant female figure in *Macbeth*, even when the witches are accounted for (137). I suspect that this has to do with the fact that the witches are outsiders who never enter the domicile where most of the crimes in the play are committed. Lady Macbeth is the threat which lies next to Macbeth and not the one which lies beyond his gates.

Adleman explains Lady Macbeth's persuasion of Macbeth into committing the murder as "the test of Macbeth's virility" (138). In this chapter and in the words of the play, Lady Macbeth *is* the main instigator of the murder. But while Adleman focuses on the struggle between the two for power, I think she overlooks an important facet of the murder. It is done in a traditionally womanly fashion. In a world where manliness depends on "bloody prowess," the murder of a sleeping man cannot be masculine (Adleman 141). And in order for the plan to work, Duncan and the two guards must be lured into a false sense of security. This is accomplished through the act of hospitality.

The next time Lady Macbeth speaks of hospitality is after the discovery of Duncan's body in Act 2, scene 3- the Porter's scene. She asks what has made the men so upset to "parley the sleepers of the house?" (*Macbeth* 2.3.95). She is focused on maintaining her image as hostess and thus acts concerned about her guests' comfort. When she is told that the king has been murdered, she responds in shock: "what, in our own house?" which prompts Banquo to retort, "too cruel anywhere" (*Macbeth* 2.3.103-104). For the lords who do not know of the murder, she seems a hostess concerned with both the guests still sleeping and the fact that a murder has occured under her own roof where she has a responsibility to protect those under her care. Her preoccupation with the

guests of her house is exactly what would be expected of a noble hostess and it becomes

the perfect disguise for masking her involvement in the recent killing.

Throughout the play Lady Macbeth feels that the honor of her household and the

honor of the realm are at risk. She desperately tries to project a good sense of cheer when

Macbeth begins to appear mad and hence inhospitable at the banquet in Act 3, scene 4.

She is both concerned with concealing the regicide and with making the lords feel at ease.

For the Macbeths, this is an important political dinner. When Lady Macbeth reproaches

Macbeth, she first attacks his manhood, as Adelman shows, but quickly turns to

accusations against his skill as a host: "You have displaced the mirth, broke the good

meeting" (*Macbeth* 3.4.133). Even Banquo's ghost dares not to miss the banquet; he is

practicing the rules of hospitality by faithfully playing the good guest even in death.

(Note that Macbeth says that there are not enough seats when the ghost arrives which

means that a place was not set out for Banquo in the first place [*Macbeth* 3.4.54]) And

even in her own madness, in Act 5 before her suicide, she is interested in the knocking at

the gate. Throughout the play she remains not only interested in preserving the semblance

of hospitality, but it seems that by convincing her husband to break the laws of

hospitality, she has severed them from the peace that good hospitality was meant to

foster. The Macbeths can no longer trust Macduff, who does not host them and is not

hosted by them as mentioned in Act 3, scene 4. They can no longer sleep:- "Glamis hath

murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor shall sleep no more" (*Macbeth* 2.2.55-56). And

Scotland at large has become a dangerous place; both Lennox and Macduff remark on the

state of the physical land in Act 2, directly after Duncan is murdered in the second half of

Porter's scene. The disruption of the rules of hospitality leads to or at least mirrors a

greater disruption in the land. As in Euripides' *Hecuba*, when hospitality is betrayed, order breaks down.[1]

In fact, Act 3, scene 4, more than the Porter scene, functions as a "truncated subplot" as Tromly phrases it (151). The scene begins with Macbeth greeting his guests with reference to order: "You know your own degrees; sit down" (*Macbeth* 3.4.1). Then it displays a serious breach of hospitality both in not setting a space for Banquo, despite having invited him, and in the murder of a guest. Though Banquo dies outside of the Macbeths' castle, one could argue that as the king and queen of the realm they take on the realm as domicile and property. Nevertheless, Banquo should not have been murdered by the man who invited him to dinner that night-- this is still a breach of hospitality. Like the end of the play, the scene ends with the Macbeths retiring to sleep after upsetting "the good meeting with most admired disorder" (*Macbeth* 3.4.133-134). Lady Macbeth's line to the thanes--"stand not upon the order of your going, but go at once"-- is the inverse of the first lines of the scene and shows how order has broken down in the banquet (*Macbeth* 3.4.146-147). For the Macbeths the inability to show hospitality is a sign that they are not beneficial rulers. For Lady Macbeth, this is a blow she cannot recover from since she all but disappears from the play-- only returning to the stage once before she dies.

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[1] In *Hecuba*, Euripedes suggests that maintaining the rules of hospitality is so fundamental to the ancient Greek world that even nature and the gods protest when hospitality is betrayed. When Hecuba's son is murdered, she has no legal means of getting justice since she is a slave(Euripedes 812-855). But the gods refuse to send a wind to let the Greeks set sail from Troy for home until after she has gone outside of the law to receive restitution for the betrayal of hospitality (Euripedes 1285-1290).

Adleman suggests that the disappearance of Lady Macduff, the only other noblewoman in the play, and Lady Macbeth's "cooperatively dying off stage" is an excision of female power that allows for the masculine forces to fully emerge as victors in the struggle (144-145). But the disappearance of Lady Macduff and Lady Macbeth's death, I think, serve another purpose. Lady Macduff, who is murdered in Act 2, scene 4 with her son, serves as an example of how important maintaining hospitality is to maintaining peace in the realm. Her death signifies that the rules of hospitality have been bastardized not just within the Macbeths' household, but throughout Scotland. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, has served as the most active face of hospitality throughout the play. But she is also the instigator of the great crime against hospitality that set into motion the destruction of peace, order, and hospitality in the realm. In order for hospitality to be reestablished, she has to pay for that crime just as Macbeth does. In a sense, it mirrors Euripedes' *Hecuba*: Polymestor must die for all to be set right again.

V. Conclusions: The Porter, Lady Macbeth, and The Theme of Spoiled Hospitality

Both Lord and Lady Macbeth are connected to the Porter through the ongoing discussion of drink and drunkenness in the play. The word "drink" is used only seven times in the script with the majority of the usage in Act 2, scene 3. Variations on drink are used only twice and only by Lady Macbeth, the porter, and Macbeth. One should note that when Malcolm confesses his vices to Macduff in Act 4, he claims he is a victim of lust and avarice. But drunkenness is reserved for the Macbeths and their household. Likewise, the word "wine" is only used three times in the play. Only Macbeth and Lady Macbeth use the word and only when a murder is about to occur or has just occured--

once before the murder of Duncan and twice during the banquet scene. There seems to be a link between drinking and spirits. The connection between wine and Duncan's murder and Banquo's ghost's arival at the banquet suggests that breaches of hospitality is intimately connected to murder in this play. Tromly has already remarked on the similarity of drunkenness with the interplay of good and evil in Macbeth's mind. This observation serves to further illustrate both the connection between the Macbeths and their porter.

Throughout the play, Lady Macbeth and the Porter remind the audience time and again to "remember the porter" (*Macbeth* 2.3.21). Through his game of pretend at the gate, his words to Macduff, his lack of hospitality, the Porter begs the audience to see his bad hospitality as a reflection of the state of hospitality in the Macbeth's household. This one scene shows how quickly order falls apart when hospitality is rejected.

And Lady Macbeth extends this theme by showing how hospitality is breaking down and eventually disappearing entirely. As she contemplates the murder of Duncan, she can find no rest. As she tries to be a good hostess at the banquet, she faces her co-host's madness and the chaos that follows. As the two faces of hospitality in the play, the Porter and Lady Macbeth use the importance of hospitality in early modern England to show just how bad things are under Macbeth's rule.

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