

STUDY MANUAL FOR ENGLISH HONOURS SEM 2

Porter Scene, *Macbeth* (2,i)

- This scene was long regarded as an interpolation. The drunken mumblings of the Porter in prose seem to be a misfit in such a crucial situation- just after Duncan's murder in the previous scene.
- Most scholars however regard the scene as highly relevant and effective
- Theatrically, a scene was necessary to allow the actors playing the roles of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to wash their hands and change their costumes.
- There was a necessity to alleviate the tension built by the Murder Scene, to allow the audience a breathing space, so as to push the play forward to its natural CLIMAX (to come much later in the Banquet Scene- 3,iv)
- Shakespeare had never adhered strictly to the Classical Unities; comic interludes are often used by him in the midst of gruesome tragedies [eg. Gravediggers' scene, *Hamlet*]
- The Porter Scene functions as a COMIC RELIEF to allow the keyed up emotions of the audience natural outlet, so as to achieve a state of equilibrium.
- The Porter by imagining himself to be the porter of Hell Gate , transports Inverness to Hell. The spatial transportation automatically make Macbeth and his Lady analogous to the devils themselves . The allowed to forget for a moment the horrible murder that has taken place , though everything remains normal in the foreground . Hell is synonymous with evil and evil has entered the souls of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.
- The key themes of the play resonate through the monologue. The "farmer" who speculates and hangs himself represents Macbeth's overreaching ambition which triggers his downfall. "Farmer" was also the nickname of Father Garnet, the Jesuit priest implicated in the Gunpowder plot of 1605 . The themes of TREACHERY and DECEPTION encircle the practices of both the farmer and the English tailor .
- The "equivocator" refers directly to Father Garnet's lies in the name of god in the court of law . Macbeth, Lady Macbeth and the Witches use ambiguities of speech throughout the play to hide their real motives. Equivocation becomes a permanent

part of Macbeth's speeches. For instance later in the scene when Macduff discovers Duncan's murder, Macbeth becomes the arch hypocrite.

- "Who's there I' the name of Beelzebub?" This is directly lifted from one of the medieval miracle plays on "Christ's Harrowing of Hell", familiar to the Elizabethan audience. It sets the scene within a continuous dramatic tradition which explores the archetypal conflict between GOOD and EVIL. The line is reminiscent of Christ entering Hell to bring about salvation. Macduff who enters immediately after is equated with Christ in the role of the archetypal Saviour.
- The knocking sound in the background and the repeated incantation of the word "Knock" by the Porter- reinforce the sense of life itself pulsating in the background and waiting to resume its natural rhythm. The counter movement against evil in the shape of Macduff is about to initiate the process of RESURRECTION in the Hell of Inverness.
- The Porter's monologue parallels the use of soliloquies by Macbeth himself. The Porter's dynamic imagination which peoples his own Hell is ironically a reflection of the imaginative power of Macbeth himself. Rhetorical phrases like "primrose way to the everlasting bonfire" too echoes Macbeth's ornate phraseology. Thus the Porter is a ludicrous alter ego of Macbeth himself. The interlude offers an alternative perspective to analyze the theme of evil. Evil is examined from the comical standpoint of the Porter and appears to be grotesque and repulsive.
- At long last the Porter becomes tired of the unreal space of his imagination and decides to "devil porter it no further". This contrasts with Macbeth's inability to let go of the evil even though he feels uneasy with it. Thus the Porter and Macbeth each carves his own destiny – the Porter can return to the mainstream of life but Macbeth will be doomed to his TRAGIC DOWNFALL.

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