**The importance and dramatic purpose of the "Porter Episode" (Act II, Sc. iii) in *Macbeth***

In Act II, Scene ii, Lady Macbeth and Macbeth after assassinating Duncan had heard a knocking at the south entry of their castle. With scarcely a break the drunken Porter appears in Act II, Scene iii. The scene begins with repeated knocking and finally he opens the door and allows Macduff and Lenox to enter.

The Porter Scene provides the much needed dramatic relief in *Macbeth*. It follows the breath-taking and awe-inspiring murder scene of Duncan’s murder which marks the crisis of the play. Though the murder takes play off stage the horror of the deed is effectively brought to the audience by a succession of tension bound scenes the appearance of the witches, the report of Macdonald’s execution, the instigations of Lady Macbeth to her husband and the appearance of the bloody dagger and Macbeths intense soliloquies. So, without the relaxation afforded by the comically sententious Porter, the audience would feel jaded by the horror which the discovery of the murder evokes.

To examine the Porter's theatrical necessity and effectiveness, it might be better to start off with Capell's comment on the scene. The first point Capell remarked that without this scene Macbeth's dress cannot be changed nor his hands washed. The arrival of the Porter follows immediately after the murder of Duncan, so something must be inserted here to delay the discovery of the deed to buy time for changing clothes.

The opinions of the critics are sharply divided on the authenticity of this scene. Critics like Pope, Coleridge, Clark and Wright consider the scene as spurious. Coleridge considers only the ‘primrose path to the everlasting bonfire’ as truly Shakespearean. On the other hand Professor Hales defended the scene and gave reasons for justifying its genuineness. Bradley pointed out resemblances between Pompeys soliloquy on the inhabitants of the prison in *Measure for Measure* (Act IV, Scene iii. L 1-18) and the Porters soliloquy. De Quincey and Dr. Sengupta also spoke for the originality of this scene.

The words of the drunken Porter are charged with dramatic irony. He compares himself with the Porter of Hell gate without knowing that the castle of Macbeth has now been turned into a Hell due to the ghastly assassination of Duncan. In *Macbeth*, the Porters first question is, “Whos there, ith name of Belzebub” (L 4). He should have said in the name of my master or possibly in the name of Macbeth. Unknowingly he compares Macbeth with Belzebub and Macbeth has now, indeed, become a devil after murdering Duncan. The Porters remarks on equivocation are also ironical. The three professions which the Porter has said about, has topical allusion. The images are all well knitted in the theme of the play. The commentary by Hunter suggested that the Porters word-play based on the tradition of Estates-Satire, in which some of all professions were surveyed and condemned. Harcourts remarked that the Porter's three examples were chosen, not at random, but precisely because of their relevance to the dramatic situation.

Among those three, the equivocator, the second one, may be the most important figure in terms of dramatic image. The reason why the equivocator is so important is that it can be understood as a reference to Father Garnet, the principal culprit of the Gunpowder plot of 1605. The reference to the Gunpowder plot is not only useful as a main resource to decide the date of the text, but also dramatically relevant because it might work upon audience's mind with strongly suggestive images. Father Garnet, after equivocating so much in the trial, was hanged as plotter of regicide. Equivocation, hanging and regicide - these three words can directly apply to Macbeth. The motif of equivocation runs through the play. The speech of the Porter remind us of this important concept of equivocation.

The other two professions, farmer and tailor, are less significant, but still have considerable meaning. According to Wills, the farmer has been often connected with Henry Garnet because his widely publicized indictment included Farmer among his pseudonym. Added to this, this can be taken as a reference to the steep drop of price in England around 1605. About the tailor, his thieving might imply the parallel to Macbeth's usurp, throne-thief, and some sexual connotations in it are pointed out by Rosenberg interestingly. The tailor also has his place in the scheme of the play, because of the clothing imagery which is so abundant in *Macbeth*.

The Porters words on lechery are written in a series of antitheses: *provokes unprovokes; provokes takes away; desire performance; makes mars; sets on takes off; persuades disheartens; stand to not stand to*. Thus the Porter episode is a heightened personification of the antithesis of the entire play, for the play is constantly developing in contrasting concepts like order –disorder.

Thus, the Porter scene has wide range of functions from buying time for changing clothes to comic-relief to allusion to mystery plays to the major themes of the play, but there is no need to discuss the necessity of the scene. The knocking comes at the time when heart beats are increased and the stage is filled with hashed silence. In terms of style and content, better character than the Porter cannot be thought of, and thus it is impossible to regard this scene as being interpolated.