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'Carousing Till the Second Cock': The Macbeths, the Porter, and 'Slaves of Drink.'

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[essay date 2003] *In the following essay, Stafford interprets the thematic function of the drunken Porter's scene (Act II, scene iii) in Macbeth, principally noting its suggestion of Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's own consumption of wine and several related motifs.]*

So jarring, so seemingly incongruous appears the drunken Porter scene in *Macbeth*, following immediately as it does on the murder scene, that early critics and editors rejected it as being the work of Shakespeare. In his 1725 edition of the *Works*, Alexander Pope omitted the scene from the text and inserted it in a footnote; Sir Thomas Hanmer, in his *Shakespeare* (1743-44) followed Pope's practice (Schoenbaum 248); and Coleridge thought that the scene was written "for the mob by some other hand" (Coleridge 249). In more recent history, however, critics no longer summarily dismiss it as not belonging to Shakespeare. Harcourt says that "twentieth-century authorities are virtually unanimous in accepting it as authentically Shakespeare's and as thematically relevant to the larger meanings of the play" (393), and Tromly asserts that "the integrity of the Porter Scene can no longer be questioned" (151). Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, the eighteenth-century German scholar who said that "not every critic is a genius, but every genius is a critic[; for] he has the proof of all rules within himself" (*Hamburg Dramaturgy*, 1767-68), and thereby giving birth to the concept of organic unity, is vindicated by the modern critical history of this scene. Once critics accepted the fact that Shakespeare authored the scene, its purpose needed then to be determined. Early commentators tended to see it as containing contemporary references, which seemingly it does. Traditionally, the farmer "that hanged himself on th' expectation of plenty" refers to the agricultural situation in 1606; the "equivocator" alludes to the Gunpowder Plot and the subsequent trial of the Jesuit Henry Garnet for treason in the spring of 1606; and the "English tailor" reference satirizes a contemporary practice among tailors of cheating customers. As helpful as these identifications are in dating the play, they do nothing, however, to lead to a deeper understanding of the relationship of the scene to the play itself. As Hartwig says, "there is a tighter connection between [...] what precedes and follows [the Porter's] remarks than merely topical reference indicates" (43).

A comic scene of only some forty lines and appearing immediately after a brutal murder, the Porter's scene has challenged readers to find its purpose in the play. One logical assumption sees it as a concession to the demands of the stage. Schoenbaum quotes from Edward Cappell's early work, *Notes and Various Readings to Shakespeare* (1779-83) who correctly observed that the scene allows the actor playing Macbeth "time to get rid of the blood on his clothes and hands" and that the scene provides a "rational space for discharge of" washing hands and changing clothes (Schoenbaum 249). But this still fails to address the question of its real purpose, for we know Shakespeare to be a writer, a "genius who has all the rules within him" as Lessing would have it, who, as Schoenbaum puts it, made "theatrical necessity serve the purposes of dramatic art" (250).

Other authorities have tried to make deeper connections. One traditional explanation invokes the principle of contrast, but Tromly states flatly that "the relationship between Macbeth and the Porter is *not* based on contrast" (151), and some (DeQuincey et al) who have argued for comic relief are countered by such as Kenneth Muir who, in the Arden edition of 1962, avers that "comic relief is a convenient, but question-begging, term" (xvi), and Schoenbaum labels it "a wonderful convenience for evading interpretative complexities" (247). Rosenberg, disputing John Coleman's view that it is a "safety valve for the pent-up hysteria of the audience," asserts instead that "the Porter bridges us from one moment of tragedy to another" (353) and that he "is a kind of live image of the Dionysian in man [...] that seethes beneath the masks of the play" (353).

Other critics have sought to establish some type of innate linkage between the scene and certain motifs of the play. Hartwig states that the Porter's speech comments "in parodic terms" on the play's central themes (43); Rosenberg notes that the Porter's "language and action exploits central motifs of the play" (352); and Tromly approaches the scene "as a truncated subplot which reflects certain concerns of the main action" and as it "comments on Macbeth" (151), and he states that the Porter's "significance resides in his similarities to his master" and how he functions "as a metaphor or figure for Macbeth" (151).

The scene itself basically divides into two parts: before the Porter opens the door and after he opens the door. Most of the analytical efforts have, however, focused on the "sundry damned callers who knock on Hell Gate as imagined by the Porter" (Schoenbaum 250)

in the first part of the scene. Harcourt, for example, says that the Porter provides a "three-fold organizational pattern" with the farmer, the equivocator, and the tailor whereby he establishes this structure "through the repetition of the equivocation theme" (393); Tromly states that the three imaginary sinners "are to be understood as metaphors for Macbeth himself" (152); Schoenbaum connects the first half of the Porter's scene to Dante's *Inferno*.

The second half of the scene, after the Porter has admitted Macduff and Lennox, consists of his discourse on wine and lechery, and few critics have attempted to relate this speech to the rest of the play, or, as Tromly puts it, "the second half of the Porter Scene, his conversation with Macduff about drink and lechery, has always puzzled readers," and "the thematic significance [...] is not immediately apparent" (153). Most attempts tend to justify it on the basis of its being some type of moral or ethical framing device. Harcourt contends that

the very context of the Porter's allusions to the festivities of the night reinforces the idea of calculated evil, of a cold-blooded manipulation of the warmer human failing[...]. The simple vices of the Porter therefore serve to establish an ethical distance between the failings of ordinary humanity and the monstrous evil now within the castle walls.(397)

The present study would like to suggest that the second half of the Porter scene points directly and factually at the Macbeths as well as several persistent motifs in the play. The scene does not serve as a time filler, a contrast, comic relief, satire, nor a moral framework. The Porter may be said to be a demonstrating chorus of the happenings in the Macbeth castle and that a oneness exists between the drunken Porter, his dissertation on wine and its effects, and the drinking habits of the Macbeths, who, it will be seen, are given to a significant amount of imbibing themselves.

Heretofore, critics have overlooked this aspect of the Macbeths' conduct and have even tended to puritanize them and their habits. In fact, Tromly attempts to avoid any connection between Macbeth and the Porter when he asserts that "the thematic significance of drink and lechery (especially in regard to the *abstemious* [italics mine] Macbeth) is not immediately apparent" and then declares that "clearly enough, lechery and drunkenness are *not* [italics mine] Macbeth's vices" (153). Harcourt, too, states that the themes of drink and sex "might seem incongruous in this, the *purest* [italics mine] of Shakespeare's tragedies [...]; Macbeth, by contrast [with Claudius, a drunk and lecher] seems almost *ascetic* [italics mine] in his private life," and he says again that "the simple vices of the Porter [...] are [...] specifically *not* Macbeth's vices" (397). Evidence from the text contradicts these statements.

When Macduff asks the Porter why it took him so long to answer the gate, the Porter explains the situation to Macduff, and the Porter's explanation provides an insight into what has been going on in the Macbeths' castle. First, he says that "Faith, sir, we [italics mine] were carousing till the second cock" (2.3.23-4). The Porter was not drinking alone. With whom was he drinking? Some scholars feel that there was a great celebration the night before. Harcourt says that the carouse "was after all a smokescreen, a diversionary tactic so that the murderers might proceed with their business with less chance of detection (and, in the drunken grooms, with a better alibi)" (397). It defies logic to think that the murderers would have gone about their evil business while the carousing was going on in their house; common sense dictates that they would have done the deed after everyone in the castle was in a drunken stupor. Indeed, would not the Macbeths' themselves have participated, even led the way, in the drinking in order to encourage everyone to participate? Later evidence will show that, in all likelihood, there was a state dinner that night in honor of the presence of the King of Scotland.

Meanwhile, would the Macbeths have "caroused" with someone as lowly as a Porter? The astute director, Glen Byam Shaw, in his detailed prompt book, raises an intriguing question:

One wonders why Macbeth and Lady Macbeth should have such a man as this for the Porter of their Castle, but I believe one should think of him as an old soldier--an old sweat--who is past fighting & whose coarse barrack room humour amuses the General. He has a strange imagination, too, which would appeal to Macbeth.(91)

Would Macbeth be adverse to having a drink with an old battlefield comrade-in-arms?

It would not be unreasonable to assume that the Macbeths were part of the "great celebration the night before" (Rosenberg 352) and are suffering the effects the next day just as much as the Porter is. Harcourt adds a thoughtful observation when he points out that a "drunken orgy often symbolizes in Shakespeare some flaw in the very citadel of civil power [as in *Hamlet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*], " which would certainly apply to the situation in the Macbeths' castle, and Tromly casts more light on the issue by noting that "in various plays the drunkenness of some character is an essential feature of the plot, and in most of these cases one feels a distinct note of disapproval" (84). The Porter's disquisition on the effects of wine may include the Macbeths.

That Macbeth and Lady Macbeth drink, whether a little or a lot, appears in subtle but real ways in the text. They themselves make direct references to the fact of their drinking.

When Macbeth vacillates over performing the murderous deed, Lady Macbeth scolds him with,

Was the hope drunk

Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since?

And wakes it now, to look so green and pale

At what it did so freely?

(1.7.36-9)

Cleanth Brooks wrongly considered the metaphor "hopelessly mixed" (*The Well-Wrought Urn* 1947) while Hartwig thinks of "hope" as a "description of a person" who "has overimbibed, then slept, only to wake up with the effects of a hangover" (50). Tromly too agrees that "green and pale" refers to a hangover (153). However, Hartwig says that it is the Porter who is "now feeling several effects of drink" (50), and Tromly says that the "figure of the impaired Porter literalizes the images" (153). The problem with these readings is that Lady Macbeth is not talking to the Porter, and the Porter has nothing to do with the scene. She is directly addressing her

husband, and she is applying the image to the person whom she is chiding, and it could well be, not a metaphor, but a literal statement. What is confusing is that Shakespeare, as is his wont to do, has, in taking poetic license, compressed the sentence. In pulling the image apart, one can see that what Lady Macbeth is saying to her husband is, "Was the hope, or courage, when you were first getting ready to do the deed ("dressed yourself") the result of your drunken condition at the time, (i.e., were you inspired by alcohol), and then after sleeping it off and waking up with a hangover ("green and pale") can you not recapture the courage which drink so freely had given you originally?" In other words, to paraphrase, she is asking, "Were you drunk when you first agreed to do it and now that you have slept it off and in your hangover you can not do it as freely as when you were drunk?" Even if it is not a literal statement, one wonders if she, in searching for persuasive rhetoric, turns to a drinking metaphor because of its appeal to her husband?

When it comes to the actual murder of Duncan, Lady Macbeth turns naturally to that which forms an integral part of her daily life, wine, whose effects she obviously knows well. Her plan uses wine in two ways: one, to inebriate the king's grooms in order to put them into a stupor, and, two, to fortify herself and give herself courage. She shares her plan with her husband:

His two chamberlains

Will I with wine and wassail so convince
That memory, the warder of the brain,
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
A limbeck only. When in swinish sleep
Their drenched natures lie as in a death,
What cannot you and I perform upon
Th' unguarded Duncan. What not put upon
His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt
Of our great quell?
(1.7.62-73)

Clearly, Lady Macbeth intends that a great quantity of wine will be consumed, so much so that the memory will be a "fume," reason will be a "limbeck," i.e., a distilled liquid (*OED*), their natures will be "drenched," and they will become "spongy officers." Her strategy, obviously, does not involve bringing them a single drink each to their post; there is to be a "great celebration" with late "carousing," as attested to by the Porter, and the more "measures" they consume, the more "fumed," i.e., drunk, their memory will be. As hosts, the Macbeths, of course, would set the example.

While we do not know how much time passes between each scene through this part of the play on the eve of the murder, clearly, the scenes shown on stage through this sequence are mere brief moments out of a whole evening and leap over many hours and other off-stage action in the household. In 1.5., Lady Macbeth receives the letter from her husband about the witches' prophecy and that "the King comes here tonight"; in 1.6., Duncan and Banquo arrive outside the Macbeth's castle; in 1.7., Lady Macbeth reveals her plan to her husband to get the grooms drunk; and in 2.1., Banquo has retired to his room for the night. Between the scene in which Lady Macbeth shares her plan with her husband to stupefy the grooms with wine and the following on-stage scene in which Duncan has gone to his room, the Macbeths would likely have had a great celebration, a state dinner, with much carousal, playing the perfect hosts over a great feast, with many "measures" of toasting with wine to celebrate the presence in their house of their honorable guest, his Majesty, the King of Scotland, and his distinguished noble companion Banquo. As a matter of fact, Lady Macbeth enters in 1.7. to inform her husband that the King has almost finished dinner ("he has almost supped") and, as evidence that it was a general dinner, wants to know why he, Macbeth, left the dinner early: "why have you left the chamber?" (30). This could have been the occasion of the "carousing" of which the Porter speaks.

More evidence presents itself when Banquo informs Macbeth that "the King's abed" and that "he hath been in unusual pleasure" (2.1.12-3). Banquo then informs Macbeth that Duncan has been pleased with their hospitality and has

Sent forth great largess to your offices.
This diamond he greets your wife withal,
By the name of most kind hostess.
(14-6)

The King's generosity, as sometimes happens to those in a state of alcohol-induced well-being, could be the by-product of the evening's carousal. Banquo then tells Macbeth that the King has now shut himself up in his room "in measureless content" (16-7). The choice of the words "measureless content" may imply a feeling of contentment as a result of many "measures" of wine.

In this same scene, after Banquo departs, Macbeth gives instructions to his servant to "Go bid my mistress, when my drink is ready, / She strike upon the bell" (2.1.32.-3).¹ Macbeth, rather than having just a "night cap" to help him sleep, is actually bracing himself for what he is about to do in the next few lines, which is to murder the king. At the end of the ensuing speech in which Macbeth hallucinates a dagger before his eyes, the stage directions say that "*a bell rings*," signaling that his drink is ready, and Macbeth says, perhaps eagerly anticipating his "drink," "The bell invites me" (2.1.63). But, he says,

Hear it not, Duncan, for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven or to hell.
(2.1.64-5)

Lady Macbeth opens the next scene by approaching the two unconscious grooms sprawled out on the floor in front of Duncan's bedroom door. She confesses, noting their condition, her own participation in the night's revelry and imbibing of wine:

That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold;
What hath quenched them hath given me fire.
(2.2.1-2)

Hartwig assumes that, as part of the contrast between her and the grooms, "excessive drink 'unmans' the grooms and Porter,

whereas a *small amount* [italics mine] encourages her in her manlike pursuits" (50). One wonders what evidence supports this assertion. Lady Macbeth's statement, "what hath made them [...] hath made me [...]," basically means "the *same amount* that made them ... hath made me," which, taken in its strictest sense, means that she and the grooms have consumed the same amount. Moreover, the *amount* consumed by the grooms is removed from the contrast by the fact that she has "drugged their posset"² so that regardless of how much ("excessive drink") or how little the grooms have drunk, they would have passed out anyway. Thus, even though she had said earlier that she would with "wine and wassail" drench their natures, no basis for assuming that Lady Macbeth has drunk only a "small amount" exists, although ample evidence suggests the possibility that everyone has consumed a considerable amount. Moreover, Lady Macbeth, in spite of her bold talk and brave front, is a weak person who has no stomach for the murdering of Duncan. The very fact she has to buttress herself with wine before attempting the deed confirms that 1) she does not have the courage she pretends to have, and 2) she readily turns to wine to help her conquer her weaknesses. And, in spite of the fortification of drink, she excuses herself from the deed by saying that "had he not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done 't" (2.2.12-3).

One who drinks heavily often seeks to be alone in order to hide his drinking. On the afternoon before the banquet, Macbeth announces, "Let every man be master of his time / Till seven at night. To make society / The sweeter welcome, we keep ourself / Till supertime alone" (3.1.43-5). Then, alone and perhaps with more re-enforcement, he initiates his plan for his next murder by engaging the murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance. In the next scene, when he comes to his wife, Lady Macbeth asks him, "why do you keep alone?" (3.2.10).

At the banquet that evening, the main activity of the occasion is drinking wine, for the meal is never eaten. As the pre-dinner ceremony begins, Macbeth says,

Be large in mirth; anon we'll drink a measure
The table round.
(3.4.11-2)

The technical definition of a "measure" is a "cup filled to the brim for a toast" (Bevington 1239), which is a considerable amount of wine. Furthermore, Macbeth says that they will drink "the table round," which means in the strictest sense that they will go around the table drinking a "measure" to each person seated there, which includes Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, "Ross, Lennox, [and] Lords," which would be at least five full glasses of wine. Little wonder then that as they are about to sit down, Macbeth "sees" a ghost seated in his seat, which, judging by the lack of reaction from the guests, does not really exist but is only a figment of Macbeth's "soaked" imagination. As Lady Macbeth says, "when all's done, / You look but upon a stool" (67-8). Macbeth recovers momentarily, and then, in attempting to regain his courage, says, "Come, love and health to all! / Then I'll sit down. Give me some wine. Fill full" (88-9), whereupon he sees the ghost again and tries to wash it away with wine:

I drink to the general joy o' th' whole table,
And to our dear friend Banquo, whom we miss.
Would he were here! To all, and him, we thirst.
(90-2)

Lady Macbeth tries to excuse her husband's behavior by describing it as a momentary spell, and Macbeth says that "I have a strange infirmity, which is nothing to those that know me" (87-8).³ Is it possible that his "infirmity" is a tendency to overindulge in wine? After the guests have departed and the scene closes, Lady Macbeth notes that the night is "almost at odds with morning" (128), which indicate that the "festivities" have gone on for most of the night, in spite of only drinking toasts and, according to textual evidence, never eating dinner.

The figures of speech which the Macbeths use to express their thoughts, as happens in most cases, reveal something about their thought processes, and a number of their references involve terms associated with wine and drinking. For example, when Lady Macbeth prays to the "spirits that tend on mortal thoughts," she expresses her passionate thought in terms related to a wine goblet: "fill me from the crown to the toe top-full of direst cruelty" (1.5.42). Later when Macbeth is deciding whether or not to commit the deed, he thinks about the severe consequences, the "judgment here" and the "bloody instructions" (lessons), and expresses his horror with a drinking figure of speech: "this evenhanded justice / Commends th' ingredience of our poisoned chalice / To our own lips" (1.7.10-2). Another instance occurs when, immediately upon the discovery of Duncan's murder, Macbeth, wrapped in the terror of his own guilt but pretending innocence, says, "the wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees [wine dregs] / Is left this vault ["wine-vault" (Bevington 1234)] to brag of" (2.3.97-8), being yet another example of wine and blood coming together in Macbeth's imagination.

Scattered throughout the speeches of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth appear a number of references and terms which can be associated with wine and the act of drinking, such as "vessel," "drain," "bubbles," "drops," "drenched," "spongy," "measureless," "steeped," "distilled," "teems," "devour," "swallow," "empty," "pour," (some three or four times), and "full" or "fill" (some five or six times), to name but a few.

In addition to the scenes of drinking bouts, to the overt references to the Macbeths' drinking, and to the use of wine terminology as a means of self-expression, other subtle hints of their drinking appear as well. Malcolm describes Macbeth as "luxurious," which would probably include a taste for fine wine, and notes that he smacks of "every sin / That has a name" (4.3.61-2), which would obviously include drunkenness. After referring to Macbeth's "evil" (58), Macduff notes that "boundless intemperance" ("immoderate indulgence in intoxicating drink" *OED* and a possible inference directed at Macbeth) has been responsible for the "fall of many kings," Macbeth hopefully included, whose overthrow Malcolm and Macduff are at the moment plotting. Malcolm then praises the "king-becoming graces," among which he names "temperance," with perhaps a slur at Macbeth's lack thereof.

Thus, the Porter's statement that "we were carousing till the second cock" is explicated. The second part of the Porter's response to Macduff's question about his tardiness in answering the door is, "and drink, sir, is a great provoker of three things." Macduff, serving as straight man, asks him, what does "drink especially provoke?" "Marry, sir," says the Porter, "nose-painting, sleep, and urine"

(2.3.27), and then he explains that

Lechery, sir, it provokes and unprovokes: it provokes the desire but it takes away the performance. Therefore much drink may be said to be an equivocator with lechery; it makes him and it mars him; it sets him on and it takes him off; it persuades him and disheartens him, makes him stand to and not stand to; in conclusion, equivocates him in a sleep and, giving him the lie, leaves him.(2.3.27-35)

In establishing the four effects of wine--nose-painting, sleep, urine, and the ambivalent nature of desire--the Porter's speech thus provides an organizing principle in the play, curious but constant points of reference throughout.

The first effect which the Porter mentions, nose-painting, appears throughout the play in the guise of "paintings"--or "coating over"--in general and specifically as face-paintings. The painted-face image describes a variety of conditions such as fear, hypocrisy, mockery, devils, masks, and other conditions, and the colors with which faces are painted are generally red and/or white. For example, when Macbeth confesses to Lady Macbeth that he can not go back into Duncan's room and look at him again, she scolds him with "'Tis the eye of childhood / that fears a *painted* devil" (2.2.59-60), and then she makes the connection with, "if he do bleed, / I'll *gild the faces* of the grooms withall, / For it must seem their guilt" (2.2.58-61).⁴ Later, Macbeth, in describing the murder scene, depicts Duncan with "his silver *skin laced* with his golden blood" and "the murderers / *Steeped in the colors* of their trade" (2.3.114; 116-7). And again, when Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost, Lady Macbeth tells him that "this is the very *painting* of your fear" (3.4.61), like the dagger, just a figment of his imagination. At the end, Macduff insinuates that Macbeth will himself, literally, be painted: "We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are, / *Painted* upon a pole, and underwrit, / 'Here may you see the tyrant'" (5.8.27). In other words, the image of Macbeth's *face* will be "*painted* on a board or cloth and suspended on a pole" (Bevington 1254). As Shakespeare sometimes does, a metaphor is translated into a literal fact (Bottom, et al). Perhaps Macbeth has indulged in much wine drinking which has resulted in "nose-painting," and by the end he is destined to have his face literally "painted on a pole." (All italics in this paragraph are mine.)

The painted face idea occurs in other ways as well. As Duncan approaches the Macbeth castle early in the play, he says, in speaking of Cawdor's treason and in establishing a major motif, "there's no art / To find the mind's construction in the *face*" (1.4.11-2), which ironically applies to Macbeth's face as well since he, Macbeth, is planning Duncan's murder even as the king approaches the castle in which he will be a guest. The Macbeths present faces painted with trust and loyalty while all the time planning Duncan's death. In point of fact, Macbeth says, "False *face* must hide what the false heart doth know" (1.7.83). Lady Macbeth encourages Macbeth to paint his face by "sleek[ing] o'er your rugged *looks*, / Be bright and jovial among your guests tonight" (3.2.30-1), and Macbeth complains that they have to "make our *faces vizards* to our hearts, / Disguising what they are" (37-8). The painted red face appears again when Macbeth wonders to Lady Macbeth how she can behold "such sights / And keep the natural *ruby* of your cheeks / When mine is *blanched* with fear" (3.4.116-7), and toward the end, when the soldiers are advancing on Dunsinane, Macbeth tells the frightened Servant, who has turned pale with fear, "the devil damn thee *black*, thou *cream-faced* loon / Where got'st thou that *goose look*" and then instructs him to "go prick thy *face and over-red* thy fear / Thou lily-livered boy," whom he also calls "*why-face*" and "*linen cheeks*" (5.3.11-7). (All italics in this paragraph are mine.)

The second effect of wine-drinking, as the Porter tells us, induces sleep. Critics have long recognized that sleep, both literal and metaphorical, forms a major subject in the play. It emanates from the horrible moment when Macbeth stabs Duncan in his sleep and hears a voice cry out "sleep no more! / Macbeth does murder sleep" with his repetitive echoing of the word "sleep" and ending with the promise that "Macbeth shall sleep no more" (2.2.39-47) and his envying the fact that Duncan, in his grave, "sleeps well" (3.2.25) to Lady Macbeth's telling him that "you lack the season of all natures, sleep" (3.4.143). Sleep as an effect of wine functions paradoxically with Macbeth, since, clearly, Macbeth's conscience will not let him sleep, in spite of the fact that he continues to drink wine to chase sleep. It may be added that the fact that Macbeth talks so much about sleep may almost be a warranty that he is also embibing wine since the Porter has already linked the two together.

Sleep and wine converge in a number of other passages. As noted before, Lady Macbeth gives Duncan's grooms "wine" so that they will repose in a "swinish sleep" (1.7.68-9), and later she remarks that the "[wine]-surfeited grooms" mock their guard duty "with snores" (2.2.5-6). Lennox too observes that the chamberlains became "slaves of drink and thralls of sleep" (3.6.13). To repeat one key usage of wine and sleep, Lady Macbeth scolds Macbeth for vacillating by wondering if the hope was "drunk" when he first got his courage up and then it too went to sleep, i.e., "slept since" (1.7.36-8).

The third effect of wine, as the Porter enumerates, is "urine," and when Macduff tells the Porter that "I believe drink gave thee the lie last night" (i.e., put him to sleep), the Porter admits "that it did [...]. But I requited him for his lie, and [...], though he took up my legs sometimes [i.e., he lifted his leg to urinate], yet I made a shift to cast him" (2.3.37-40). While "cast" here is sometimes glossed as "to vomit," greater consistency resides within the Porter's own diatribe by reading it as a reference to diagnosing disease by the inspection of urine, what is called "casting one's water." While the urine motif may not form a major presence, it appears in one of the most emotionally charged moments in the play when Macbeth, upon learning that Malcolm, Siward, Macduff, and the English army are approaching Dunsinane, expresses his desperation with

If thou couldst, Doctor, cast

The water of my land, find her disease,
And purge it to a sound and pristine health,
I would applaud thee to the very echo.

(5.3.52-5)

For the fourth effect of wine, the Porter names lechery, but the relationship with lechery is an ambivalent one, and this ambivalence motif appears elsewhere in the play. As the Porter points out, the effect of wine on lechery is that it "provokes and unprovokes: it provokes the desire but it takes away the performance" (2.3.27-8), and then he proceeds to elaborate on the equivocal nature of drink. Interestingly, of the four effects of wine which the Porter enumerates, the critics apply only this one to the Macbeths. Hartwig believes that, like the equivocator "drink," Macbeth undoes "manhood in the very attempt to achieve his and Lady Macbeth's vision of manliness" (52), and Tromly feels that the Porter's awareness of the gap between desire and fulfillment "should prepare the audience

for the ironies which increasingly attend the Macbeths' strivings" (154). Hartwig takes it one step further. Lady Macbeth's words, "From this time / Such I account thy love" (39-40), contain a "sexual challenge: if you cannot carry out this plan, you are not a man, nor can you perform what you desire sexually" (Hartwig 51). At the very least, when Macbeth expresses doubt to his wife about murdering Duncan, she uses the ambivalence of drink to scold him. After asking if the hope was "drunk / Wherein you dressed yourself" and drawing on the known equivocal effect of wine for her admonition,

Art thou afeared

To be the same in thine own act and valor
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem.
(1.7.36-40)

In other words, wine equivocates with Macbeth too, giving him the courage and desire on the one hand to think about murdering Duncan, but on the other taking away the ability to act on that desire. To go one step further, wine aids Macbeth in his effort to become king, but as king, and still imbibing, e.g., at the dinner party where they are drinking "measures" "the table round," he is totally impotent, for we do not see him take one action nor make one decision in his role as King of Scotland.

To bring it full circle with an added motif, when Macbeth was first trying to muster up his courage to murder Duncan, he did so by resorting to drink. He gives the instructions that "when my drink is ready, / She strike upon the bell" (2.1.32-3), and at the end of the scene, when his drink is ready, *A bell rings*, and Macbeth says,

The bell invites me.

Hear it not Duncan, for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven or to hell.
(2.1.63-5)

This bell, here associated with drink, murder, and the bellman's death knell, rings on through the play. In the next scene, Lady Macbeth hears an owl shriek and calls it "the fatal bellman, / Which gives the stern'st good-night" (2.2.3-4). When Duncan's murdered body is discovered, Macduff comes in crying out, "Ring the alarum bell. Murder and treason! [...] Ring the bell," and the original stage directions read, "*Bell rings*" (2.3.75-81). Toward the end of the play, when Macbeth knows that the advancing army is moving against him, he rushes in, crying out, "Ring the alarum bell! [...] At least we'll die with harness on our back" (5.5.51-2), and that bell provides Macbeth with his own death knell, which was first heard when the bell rang to call him to his drink which gave him the courage to commit murder. After Macbeth's death and the battle is over, Siward learns that his own young son has died honorably in battle, at the hands of Macbeth, and observes that "his knell is knolled" (5.8.50), but ironically, Macbeth, who had originally ordered a bell to summon him to his drink and to murder, has no knell knoll for him at the end, and drink finally brings him to oblivion.

The drunken Porter's scene, while it may provide the actor time to change and clean up after the murder, while it may contain topical allusions, and while it may provide comic relief, contrast, a "safety valve," a moral framework, and any other number of mechanical functions and linkages, ultimately relates directly to the Macbeths and several significant motifs--"nose-painting, sleep, urine," and the ambivalent nature of desire--which are developed more fully throughout the play in connection with the Macbeths.

Notes

1. Because Macbeth uses the singular form, "drink," one may assume that he intends to have just one drink, but drinkers always talk in terms of "a drink."
2. According to the *OED*, a posset is a "drink composed of hot milk curdled with ale, wine, or other liquor, often with sugar, spices, or other ingredients." A number of references to milk exist in the play. Lady Macbeth fears that her husband's nature is "too full o' the milk of human kindness" (1.5.17); she prays that the spirits that tend on mortal thoughts will come to her breasts and "take my milk for gall" (1.5.48); she knows how "tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me" (1.7.56); and Malcolm wishes that he could "pour the sweet milk of concord into hell" (4.3.99). Possets are usually taken at night to help one sleep better, and in this reference sleep, milk, and wine all come together.
3. Several references to Macbeth's addled brain appear elsewhere. Earlier, Macbeth apologizes to Banquo for not paying attention to what Banquo was saying: "my dull brain was wrought / With things forgotten" (1.3.151-2), and Lady Macbeth admonishes him not to "think so brainsickly of things" (2.2.49). Are his mental problems the result of excessive consumption of alcohol, which is known to occur in heavy drinkers, also known as "wet brained"? Lady Macbeth's mental troubles we well know too. Macbeth asks the doctor if he can not minister to her "mind diseased," if he can not raze out the "troubles of the brain," and, still thinking in terms of a narcotic, cleanse with an "oblivious antidote" the "perilous stuff" from her heart (5.3.41-7). Of course guilt exists at the bottom of both's mental states, but is it possible that their emotional condition is exacerbated by the mentally debilitating effects of alcohol?
4. Bevington points out that to gild is to "coat, as if with a thin layer of gold" and "gold was ordinarily spoken of as red" (1232).

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