

Knocking within. Enter a Porter.

In Act 2 Scene 2 Macbeth declares "Wake Duncan with thy knocking, I would thou couldst", meaning that he wishes that the knocking could wake Duncan from death. This knocking has punctuated the latter part of this scene, being heard several times by both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. It was a source of tension and filled Macbeth with dread – this is ironic as it is then revealed that the source of the mysterious knocking is Macduff, the person who will eventually cause Macbeth's downfall.

The Porter pretends that there is a farmer who committed suicide at the gates of hell. According to the Catholic faith, suicide is a sin as it breaks the commandment "thou shall not kill". It is believed by many that God is the only person who can decide when to end a person's life and, due to this, the Orthodox Church normally denies a Christian burial to a person who has committed suicide. The Jacobean audience would have been strongly religious and therefore would have understood this implicitly.

It appears that the tailor was robbing his clients—maybe over-charging for the amount of material that was actually used. The tailor signifies stealing and the sin of greed.

Porter
Here's a knocking indeed! If a
man were porter of hell-gate, he should have
old turning the key.

It is important to note that Macbeth has just committed a sin of regicide and has therefore subverted the natural order. This is one of the direst sins and the highly religious Christian audience would have an understanding that these actions mean that Macbeth shall suffer eternal damnation in Hell. It is therefore an example of dramatic irony, as we as any audience are aware of Duncan's murder but the Porter is not.

Knocking within
Knock,
knock, knock! Who's there, i' the name of
Beelzebub? Here's a farmer, that hanged
himself on the expectation of plenty: come in
time; have napkins enow about you; here
you'll sweat for't.

The Porter imagines letting in an "equivocator" who has committed a sin by swearing to half-truths. This is a direct link to the trial of Henry Garnet, who the authorities believed was directly involved in The Gun Powder Plot, along with the 'sin' committed by Catholics of equivocating under oath in order to save themselves or their fellow Catholics. Equivocation is the act of the use of ambiguous language to conceal the truth or to avoid committing oneself. Jesuits felt that it was acceptable to lie under oath if it was in order to protect their own lives or the lives of other Catholics. The English authorities were very distrustful of equivocation as they saw it as sinful.

Knocking within
Knock,
knock! Who's there, in the other devil's
name? Faith, here's 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: O, come
in, equivocator.

Knocking within
Knock,
knock, knock! Who's there? Faith, here's an
English tailor come hither, for stealing out of
a French hose: come in, tailor; here you may
roast your goose.

The Porter intended to let one person in to Hell from every profession. This links to the themes of responsibility and religion. One of the key morals from the play is that everyone, even kings, have to answer for their sins in death and that no one is able to evade judgement. This is shown through the characters of Macbeth (who is beheaded by Macduff) Lady Macbeth (who is eventually driven mad by guilt and dies very shortly after) and the Thane of Cawdor (who is beheaded for treason).

Knocking within

Knock,

knock; never at quiet! What are you? But
this place is too cold for hell. I'll devil-porter
it no further: I had thought to have let in
some of all professions that go the primrose
way to the everlasting bonfire.

Knocking within

Anon, anon! I pray you, remember the porter.

Opens the gate

Enter MACDUFF and LENNOX

MACDUFF

Was it so late, friend, ere you went to bed,
That you do lie so late?

Porter

'Faith sir, we were carousing till the
second cock: and drink, sir, is a great
provoker of three things.

MACDUFF

What three things does drink especially provoke?

Porter

Marry, sir, nose-painting, sleep, and
urine. 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

The Porter talks of how alcohol provokes lust in a man, but "takes away the performance;" it "makes him stand to, and/ Not stand to." This is another example of the theme of duality.

Macduff plays along with the drunken Porter and the nonsense that he is saying. Shakespeare has deliberately done this to increase the comedy of this section, so that the audience is relieved from the tension of the previous scene. This creates a light-hearted mood for both the characters and the audience. This juxtaposes heavily with the grave nature of the scene that follows, in which Duncan's body is discovered.

not stand to; in conclusion, equivocates him
in a sleep, and, giving him the lie, leaves him.

MACDUFF

I believe drink gave thee the lie last night.

Porter

That it did, sir, i' the very throat on
me: but I requited him for his lie; and, I
think, being too strong for him, though he took
up my legs sometime, yet I made a shift to cast
him.

MACDUFF

Is thy master stirring?

Enter MACBETH

Our knocking has awaked him; here he comes.

LENNOX

Good morrow, noble sir.

MACBETH

Good morrow, both.

MACDUFF

Irony: he is not really "worthy"
as he has committed treason

Is the king stirring, worthy thane?

MACBETH

Not yet.

MACDUFF

He did command me to call timely on him:

I have almost slipp'd the hour.

This implies that Macduff is
dedicated to his duties with
King Duncan and feels that
he's failing to do his duties by
running late. Duncan has put
his trust in Macduff who is
shown to embody the
characteristics of honour and
virtue in contrast to Macbeth.

MACBETH

I'll bring you to him.

MACDUFF

I know this is a joyful trouble to you;

But yet 'tis one.

MACBETH

The labour we delight in physics pain.

This is the door.

MACDUFF

I'll make so bold to call,
For 'tis my limited service.

Exit

LENNOX

Goes the king hence to-day?

MACBETH

He does: he did appoint so.

LENNOX

We learn that disaster has struck their building on the same night as the king was killed. The bad weather reflects how Duncan's murder has caused nature to be unbalanced as his death has disrupted the natural order. Shakespeare is demonstrating the power of evil and promoting one of the key themes of the play: superstition. This may have been caused by supernatural forces or even the Witches.

The night has been unruly: where we lay,
Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death,
And prophesying with accents terrible
Of dire combustion and confused events
New hatch'd to the woeful time: the obscure bird
Clamour'd the livelong night: some say, the earth
Was feverous and did shake.

An example of pathetic fallacy – it seems that on the night on Duncan's murder unnatural and frightening noises were heard, again revealing how the natural order has been disrupted.

The earth shaking implies an earthquake, so shows the detrimental effects Duncan's death has, and will continue to cause.

MACBETH

'Twas a rough night.

LENNOX

My young remembrance cannot parallel

A fellow to it.

Re-enter MACDUFF

MACDUFF

The repetition of horror mirrors the pattern of the Witches' speech, showing how the Witches' chaos has begun to permeate the castle.

O horror, horror, horror! Tongue nor heart
Cannot conceive nor name thee!

MACBETH LENNOX

What's the matter.

MACDUFF

Confusion now hath made his masterpiece!

Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope

The Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence

The life o' the building!

MACBETH

What is 't you say? the life?

LENNOX

Mean you his majesty?

MACDUFF

Approach the chamber, and destroy your sight

With a new Gorgon: do not bid me speak;

See, and then speak yourselves.

Exeunt MACBETH and LENNOX

Awake, awake!

Ring the alarum-bell. Murder and treason!

Banquo and Donalbain! Malcolm! awake!

Shake off this downy sleep, death's counterfeit,

And look on death itself! up, up, and see

The great doom's image! Malcolm! Banquo!

As from your graves rise up, and walk like sprites,

To countenance this horror! Ring the bell.

Bell rings

Enter LADY MACBETH

LADY MACBETH

What's the business,

That such a hideous trumpet calls to parley

The sleepers of the house? speak, speak!

MACDUFF

O gentle lady,

'Tis not for you to hear what I can speak:

The repetition, in a woman's ear,

Would murder as it fell.

Enter BANQUO

Sacrilegious refers to the Divine Right of Kings as Duncan's death was against nature – of unnatural cause, and also against God, as the King is godly and holily appointed. "The Lords anointed temple" could refer to not only Duncan's chamber as he was killed in his bedroom, but also to the fact that his death has caused a stir in heaven – the Lords' actual anointed temple because it disrupts the great chain of being.

When Macduff calls for everyone to wake up from their sleep he describes it as a counterfeit, that sleeping is an imitation of death itself, and he wants everyone to come over and witness real death.

In ancient Greece, Gorgons are female creatures that have the ability to turn to stone anyone that looks directly into their eyes. However, in comparison to Medusa, they're immortal. Macduff is saying that if you look at the murdered body of Duncan, you will be so shocked with horror, that you will "turn to stone".

Macduff demonstrates Jacobean attitudes towards women, namely that they were not emotionally strong enough to deal with anything shocking or upsetting and should be protected from this. This is deeply ironic as Lady Macbeth is far from innocent.

O Banquo, Banquo,
Our royal master 's murder'd!

LADY MACBETH

Woe, alas!

What, in our house?

BANQUO

Too cruel any where.

Dear Duff, I prithee, contradict thyself,

And say it is not so.

Re-enter MACBETH and LENNOX, with ROSS

MACBETH

Had I but died an hour before this chance,

I had lived a blessed time; for, from this instant,

There 's nothing serious in mortality:

All is but toys: renown and grace is dead;

The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees

Is left this vault to brag of.

Enter MALCOLM and DONALBAIN

DONALBAIN

What is amiss?

MACBETH

You are, and do not know't:

The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood

Is stopp'd; the very source of it is stopp'd.

MACDUFF

Your royal father 's murder'd.

MALCOLM

O, by whom?

LENNOX

Macbeth muses that had he only died an hour before this event he could say he had lived a blessed life. Because from this moment on, there is nothing worth living for. The graceful and renowned King is dead.

Macbeth expresses intense guilt as a result of his sinful actions and says his life has lost its meaning. This is echoed in Act 3, Scene 1 when Macbeth says: 'on my head they have placed a fruitless crown.' Macbeth feels he has strayed from the righteous path he was once on and is trapped by his sin, to live a less meaningful life in twisted and bloody ambition.

Macbeth says to Donalbain that the source of their life has been killed. Duncan gave blood to Malcolm and Donalbain but now that source has stopped. The use of natural imagery contrasts harshly with the idea of murder and blood and shows how Macbeth has interrupted the bountiful and kind rule of Duncan.

Those of his chamber, as it seem'd, had done 't:
 Their hands and faces were an badged with blood;
 So were their daggers, which unwiped we found
 Upon their pillows:
 They stared, and were distracted; no man's life

Was to be trusted with them.

MACBETH

O, yet I do repent me of my fury,

That I did kill them.

MACDUFF

Wherefore did you so?

MACBETH

Who can be wise, amazed, temperate and furious,

Loyal and neutral, in a moment? No man:

The expedition my violent love

Outrun the pauser, reason. Here lay Duncan,

His silver skin laced with his golden blood;

And his gash'd stabs look'd like a breach in nature

For ruin's wasteful entrance: there, the murderers,

Steep'd in the colours of their trade, their daggers

Unmannerly breach'd with gore: who could refrain,

That had a heart to love, and in that heart

Courage to make 's love known?

LADY MACBETH

Help me hence, ho!

MACDUFF

Look to the lady.

MALCOLM

[Aside to DONALBAIN] Why do we hold our tongues,

That most may claim this argument for ours?

DONALBAIN

[Aside to MALCOLM] What should be spoken here,

where our fate,

Hid in an auger-hole, may rush, and seize us?

Macbeth Killed the Chamberlains when he went into to the king's chamber with Lennox and Ross. He did this to cover his own part in Duncan's murder, but it was not part of the plan and it seems to strike Macduff as strange "Wherefore did you so?"

This colour imagery is a reference to Duncan's royal status as the true king chosen by God.

Macbeth's reasoning here has a double meaning. Everyone listening assumes he means that he had to murder the men because he loved Duncan, but the lines could also mean that he had to murder them because he loves his wife. The double meaning hints at Macbeth's motivation, as well as his internal conflict.

Donalbain is suggesting their fate may be ready to spring out on them nearby and overwhelm them without warning, (i.e.. the person who killed their father may be wanting to hurt them next putting them in danger). This becomes further evident when they decide to flee as a result.

Macbeth blames becoming overtaken with fury for killing Duncan, attempting to hide his guilt by portraying himself by avenging the death of the King.

The simile refers to breaching the walls of a besieged city, through which the invading army causes ruin. The homophonic pun on 'breach' connects the enormous hole in the fabric of existence created by Duncan's murder.

Lady Macbeth pretends to faint to distract the others from Macbeth's strange actions and speech. This links to the theme of appearances V reality and is an example of dramatic irony as we the audience know that she is not the innocent she pretends to be.

Let 's away;

Our tears are not yet brew'd.

MALCOLM

[Aside to DONALBAIN] Nor our strong sorrow

Upon the foot of motion.

BANQUO

Look to the lady:

LADY MACBETH is carried out

Interestingly Banquo takes the lead here and says they have to put grief aside and figure who is behind the treasonous murder of King Duncan. His reference to God suggests that Banquo, a highly moralistic character, feels that discovering the identity of the criminal is the right thing to do.

And when we have our naked frailties hid,

That suffer in exposure, let us meet,

And question this most bloody piece of work,

To know it further. Fears and scruples shake us:

In the great hand of God I stand; and thence

Against the undivulged pretence I fight

Of treasonous malice.

MACDUFF

And so do I.

ALL

So all.

MACBETH

Let's briefly put on manly readiness,

And meet i' the hall together.

ALL

Well contented.

Exeunt all but Malcolm and Donalbain.

MALCOLM

What will you do? Let's not consort with them:

To show an unfelt sorrow is an office

Which the false man does easy. I'll to England.

DONALBAIN

To Ireland, I; our separated fortune

Shall keep us both the safer: where we are,

This line indicates how easy it is to fake emotion and sympathy; it can also be compared with Act 1, Scene 4, when Macbeth states in his soliloquy: "Stars, hide your fires: / Let not light see my black and deep desires". It also implies that Malcolm knows that someone in the castle is responsible for regicide and is capable of showing "unfelt sorrow". This links to the theme of appearances v reality.

“Daggers in men’s smiles” is also a continuation of the theme of deception and can be easily compared with “To show an unfelt sorrow is an office / Which the false man does easy”.

He notes that facial expressions and emotions, such as smiles and sympathy can easily mask the truth of a person’s nature i.e. Macbeth’s.

Donalbain realises that family ties don’t necessarily guarantee safety. Sometimes the friends that you keep close are close enough to strike you before you see it coming. A common theme in Shakespeare’s work is the idea of family murder.

There's daggers in men's smiles: the near in blood,

The nearer bloody.

MALCOLM

This murderous shaft that's shot

Hath not yet lighted, and our safest way

Is to avoid the aim. Therefore, to horse;

And let us not be dainty of leave-taking,

But shift away: there's warrant in that theft

Which steals itself, when there's no mercy left.

Exeunt

Malcolm states that the safest thing to do right now is to leave to “avoid aim” of the murderer.