

## Scene 24 (V ii)

Some time later, somewhere not far from Birnam wood

At last, the thanes are revolting. Banquo's murder was still not quite enough to turn them against Macbeth: they suspected him, but had no proof. The massacre of Macduff's family was the final provocation. They have raised an army and are aiming to meet up with Malcolm and the English.

(V ii 2) *Drum and colours*. This formula means that an army comes marching onto the stage and stops to take a breather: while they are waiting, the staff officers exchange a few remarks, to let the audience know what is going on. Folio uses this notation at the beginning of five scenes. In three places it is needed; in the other two it is not. It is needed here (the rebel Scots are on the move), at the beginning of scene 26 (they are joining forces with the English), and at the beginning of scene 28 (the combined armies are advancing on Dunsinane). It is not needed at the beginning of scene 27 (Macbeth's army is hunkered down inside his castle) nor at the beginning of scene 33 (the battle is over and everyone is relaxing).

So I suppose. But Rowe understood things in exactly the opposite way. For some reason that I fail to see, he deleted the formula in the places where I think that it is needed, retained it in the places (scenes 27 and 33) where I think that it is not (with "Drums" instead of "Drum" at the beginning of scene 27, an error picked up from F4, which has "Drums" both here and at the beginning of scene 28).

(Subsequent editors followed Rowe's lead, from Pope till Johnson. Capell, copying from F1, reproduced all five instances of "Drum and Colours". Steevens, copying the stage-directions from Johnson (including the error "Drums") but glancing sideways at Capell, reinstated the three instances which Rowe had chosen to omit. Reed replaced "Drum" with "Drums" at the beginning of scene 28, and that is how things stand in Boswell's edition. Delius, copying from Collier (who had copied from Boswell) corrected both instances of "Drums" to "Drum"; so did Dyce (who was copying directly from Boswell).)

(V ii 2-3) *Enter ...* The scene is scripted for four characters. Two of them, Angus and Lennox, have had lines assigned to them in previous scenes. The other two, Menteith and Caithness, have not said anything before, though presumably we must have seen them (at the banquet,

for instance). But all four are mere ciphers: it makes not the slightest difference who says what. (The dialogue could be redistributed among three characters, if there were a need to economize.)

Three of the lords have gone on ahead to make contact with the English army. Now they return with their news. They report to Caithness: he seems to have been put in command of the rebel forces.

(V ii 5) *His uncle Seyward, ...* We heard about Seyward in the previous scene: now we learn that he is Malcolm's uncle -- his mother's brother, by implication. (That is how Shakespeare tells it. In Holinshed Siward is Malcolm's grandfather, not his uncle: Duncan's wife was Siward's daughter (1587:171).)

(V ii 9) *Near Birnam wood ...* A reminder aimed at us of the Third Apparition's promise (IV i 111). Birnam wood is going to have some significance -- but as yet we have no idea what.

(V ii 11) *Who knows if Donalbain ...* In case we remember that Malcolm has a brother (also grown up by now), this is to tell us that we should not expect to see him again -- possibly because there is no actor to spare. (In Davenant's version, Donalbain and Fleance both reappear (Chetwin 1674:57), to participate in the finale.)

(V ii 14) *And many unrough youths ...* Folio's "unruffe" was deciphered as "unrough" by Theobald (1733:460). The meaning is that these youths have not started shaving.

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