

Scene 29 (V vii 1-21)

A little later, somewhere on the battlefield.

Even though Macbeth has been abandoned by all the lords, there is still a battle. Some of his soldiers are ready to make a fight of it. We can hear the battle going on -- competing trumpets and other noises -- but apparently Shakespeare did not intend us to see any of the action. However, if the actors want to show us companies of soldiers fighting with each other, advancing and retreating across the stage, no one will complain.

(V vii 2) Enter ... Macbeth appears -- all by himself, it seems -- roaming the battlefield in search of somebody to fight with.

(V vii 4) What's he ... So Folio has it; but "Where's he" seems to me to make better sense. Even after the promise of invincibility has proved deceptive, Macbeth still wants to believe in the promise of invulnerability. There is a condition attached to that promise too -- but how can there possibly exist a man who was not born of woman?

(V vii 7-21) Enter ... Is there any point in this encounter between Seyward's son and Macbeth? Acting editions generally chose to omit it, and that would be my preference too. When we are told of Seyward's son's death, in scene 33, we are given to understand that he died in the thick of the battle, not in single combat with Macbeth or anyone else. But the lines are here, and I do not question their authenticity (except for the last two). If a young actor wishes to show off his skill with a sword, if his colleagues are willing to indulge him, let him get himself killed by Macbeth.

If this passage is omitted, Young Seyward is not a speaking part. We saw him in scene 26; we saw him again in scene 28; but he never had anything to say. He exists for one purpose only -- so that his death can be reported to his father in the final scene.

If this passage is omitted, furthermore, the scene is only four lines long. But that is perfectly allowable, caught up as we are in the to-and-fro of a battle.