

No Exit for a Dead Body: What to do with a Scripted Corpse?

Homer Swander

Macbeth kills young Seyward on the field of battle, and Shakespeare gives us no stage direction telling us when or how to dispose of the body (5.7.11). If he has left us suggestions of any kind, they must reside entirely in dialogue that does not openly solve the problem or in stage directions that seem not to address it. The resulting mystery has not attracted much attention from the critics; and, in the past, modern editions have unanimously declined to intervene textually where Shakespeare is silent, though a few of the editors have, briefly, in notes to the passage, offered their advice. But the 1986 Wells-and-Taylor editions from Oxford (both *The Complete Works* and *The Complete Works: Original Spelling Edition*) break new editorial ground: in the text itself, Macbeth exits "with the body" (5.7.14), and a note pointedly explains that previous editors have failed to provide the apparently necessary intervention.¹

Directors, of course, have not been free, like the rest of us, to ignore the mystery. A corpse on stage demands attention. Yet in most productions the company manages to minimize the difficulty: the body disappears with as little fuss as possible, most members of the audience hardly noticing at the time and, later, not remembering at all. Thus young Seyward plays his part fully by dying bravely--with his wounds "on the Front," as Rosse puts it (5.8.13). But his role is thus limited only if directors and editors ignore the signals of the sole original text, the Folio, the text that dwells most intimately with Shakespeare's script. Theory and practice, however--whether in the theatre or in editorial texts--currently provide very little protection for Shakespearean characters living or dead. Without undertaking in any full sense to explore new theoretical possibilities, I mean here, simply by taking the Folio text seriously *as a script*, to point a direction for the thorough exploration that is, I believe, the greatest single need in Shakespearean studies and performance.

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When, in the Folio, the young man enters alone to challenge Macbeth, we are in the last scene of the play, "*Scena Septima*," about one hundred lines from the end. Macbeth takes only seven lines to kill him, but we may be surprised to notice that, more than fifty lines later, as the play moves to its conclusion, the nineteen lines prior to the last twenty-two are devoted entirely to responses to his death--from old Seyward (his father), Rosse, and Malcolm--slowing the action when one would perhaps least expect a delay. Except for Macduff's six-line speech as he enters with Macbeth's head and Malcolm's sixteen-line concluding speech, these responses define the last matter for which our attention is demanded. The attention, first, of the acting company: how are we to play the lines in almost the last moment of the play? And the attention, second, of the audience: why are we pausing over young Seyward's death at such a time?

It does seem strange, and is certainly unnecessary. With Macbeth dead and Malcolm entering victoriously, any audience knows that but for some brief formalities the play is over. A director who simply cuts the discussion of young Seyward--moving, after an appropriately spectacular staging of "*Retreat. Flourish. Enter, with drum and colors, Malcolm, Old Seyward, Rosse, Thanes and Soldiers*," directly to Macduff's entrance with Macbeth's head on a pole--would hear no cries of anger or confusion from the audience. It would make a splendidly theatrical and satisfying complete conclusion. Only a scholar or two, remembering the text, might leave the theater with a sense of something missing.

Yet the text insists. Sandwiched in between the two great, climactic events--killing Macbeth and declaring Malcolm King of Scotland--stands this passage in which the audience learns what they already know because they have seen it: young Seyward died bravely. Nineteen apparently superfluous lines devoted, at such a moment, to a young man who, in all the rest of the play, claims our attention hardly at all. He is mentioned twice, each time very briefly (5.2.9 and 6.3); he speaks only in the seven-line exchange with Macbeth (5.7.5-11); and the most notable comment made about him is that he was (like most of us) "born of woman." Why is he suddenly, in the response to his death, so important?

The question urges itself upon us even more forcefully, I think, if his body has unobtrusively disappeared soon after his death: the last opportunity to make him visually memorable has disappeared with it. Yet the Oxford editors, and the other editors who confront the problem in their notes, all agree that we must get rid of him quickly. After all, only twelve lines after Macbeth kills him his father enters and does not mention him: in editorial logic, he must not be there. And as Malcolm later reports that the young man is "missing" in action, and Rosse says he has been "brought off the field" (5.9.4, 10), for those editors who comment the only question is whether the body is taken off before or after the Macduff soliloquy that follows the death by three lines; whether

it is taken by Macbeth himself, by servants, or by soldiers is a matter on which they mildly disagree.²

I suggest that we think the problem through again, relying on textual-theatrical assumptions (and therefore on a theoretical foundation) quite different from those of the editors and (even) most directors. Let us assume that:

1. The absence of an expected stage direction in the Folio may be Shakespeare's deliberate scripting, and we are likely to profit from trusting the text over our own expectations.
2. On stage, all bodies are there to contribute to the play, and--even when they fall silent or dead--we should seek out not how to get rid of them but how best to free each one to make its own contribution.
3. Structure in a Shakespearean script functions as a performance signal to the actors, delivering to the stage through them the visual poetry of action and spectacle.

Such assumptions lead to a procedure in which the details of the Folio-as-script can most effectively discipline and enrich the play, protecting both script and play against the comparatively ordinary preconceptions that most of us share. That is: as the Folio brings the body "off the field" but not, explicitly, off the stage, we will leave it there in order to find out what we could conceivably do with it in the service of the play; and we will accept the structural signal of those surprisingly placed, oddly delaying nineteen lines as a demand for visual poetry of a power consistent with the surprise.

With the body suddenly lying dead on the stage (5.7.11), Macbeth speaks two-and-a-half lines and exits. "*Alarums. Enter Macduff,*" who speaks ten lines and exits. "*Alarums. Enter Malcolm and [Old] Seyward,*" who share six lines and exeunt. "*Alarums. Enter Macbeth,*" who speaks two-and-a-half lines; and "*Enter Macduff*" for their exchange of speeches and their fight: "*Exeunt fighting. Alarums. Enter Fighting, and Macbeth slaine.*" With Macbeth presumably carried or dragged off stage by Macduff, the next line of dialogue, from Malcolm, begins the response to young Seyward's death (5.9.1).

Through the presence of a corpse, the staged events are alive with new possibilities. Every presence, nearly every speech is richer. First, Macduff: though there is nothing in his soliloquy that tells the actor to see the body, there is, equally, nothing to prevent it; and suppose he does, the instant that he enters. He is fast in the pursuit of Macbeth--"That way the noise is: Tyrant show thy face" (5.7.14). Why should he stop to talk for ten lines? But if he sees and recognizes young Seyward, we know why. He now has a reason to stop, a reason to speak--a reason as of this minute, in this place, something the audience can see and feel a part of, intimately, for they have just seen and

felt the killing. Both the pause in his headlong pursuit of Macbeth and the words he speaks about it become an integral part of what is happening on the stage, tied to the specific, visual flow of life and death, and preventing Macbeth's slaughter of the young man from being, theatrically, an isolated event. It remains, instead, a vital, driving force in the play.

As the audience watches Macduff experience part of what they have experienced, they will understand, deeply, when he says:

Tyrant show thy face,
If thou beest slain, and with no stroke of mine,
My Wife and Children's Ghosts will haunt me still:

If he holds the body in his arms, looking at the young face with love and grief, the emotional impact in simple, local, narrative terms will be very great. But the intellectual, thematic content of the moment is also enriched. The Seywards' function in the play stands revealed precisely in that they are distinguished from one another by no given name: in dialogue, stage directions, and speech assignments they are simply "old" and "young," father and son, uncle and cousin to Malcolm; and they of course represent the deeply Christian and generous King of England. More than anything else in the play, they bring the sense of noble generosity, of courage, of family and God into the last scenes. The actor playing young Seyward must have a vividly young face and noble bearing. Lennox says:

there is Seywards Sonne,
And many unruffe youths, that even now
Protest their first of Manhood. (5.2.9-11)

And Rosse says, "He onely liv'd but till he was a man . . ." (5.9.6). Macbeth's last act before meeting Macduff and death is to kill a soldier who is little more than a boy, a courageous boy-man in his first battle. Macbeth, the old professional, will kill him with ridiculous, gruesome ease. More a murder than a fair fight, it should not be nice to watch. And the boyish face of "Seywards Sonne" in Macduff's arms carries a terrible reminder of Macduff's own children.

The soliloquy ends with a five-syllable line that must be completed with action:

Let me finde hime Fortune,
And more I begge not. (5.7.22-23)

There is action, of course, in Macduff's exit, the "Alarums," and the entrance of Malcolm and old Seyward; and most actors would probably choose to make the exit loud and on the run, the rising vocal sound blending excitingly with the

alarums. I would not have thought to question such a choice were the staged presence of the body not keeping thought alive. But upon reflection, one perhaps sees a suggestion--a hint if not a signal--in the anti-climactic nature of "And more I begge not." If Shakespeare were scripting loud upbeat energy for the exit, those words seem not only superfluous but difficult. After "Let me finde hime Fortune," it seems hard to shout them; and the full value of their sense does not appear to reside in a rising line of energetic sound.

The words are both a prayer and a promise, to Fortune. They might profit deeply from a quiet, intense delivery, from a Macduff still kneeling, his body and the corpse forming a Father-Son *pietà*. His prayer is thus grounded in all that the young Seyward suggests of courage, goodness, family, children; and in that one moment the stage presents both the vulnerability and the survival of such values. The audience would then watch as a quiet, freshly dedicated Macduff gently releases the corpse, stands, takes, perhaps, a last look, and walks off, more determined than ever, to the only action that, he believes, can give meaning to his life. He will be walking toward the warlike "noise," the "great clatter," against which, his soliloquy informs us, the *pietà* and the quiet prayer have asserted themselves. The contrast with the man who entered running only moments earlier can be made to register with great power. He has not stopped simply to pour out his need for personal revenge. In a staging that uses to the full what a generous script offers, that need has been touched by values that the audience now experiences as communal even while those values retain their intensely personal force and focus.

The editors are right about Malcolm and old Seyward, who, entering next, do not see the body. The proof (oddly ignored by every editor) is simply that, later, neither man knows what has happened to young Seyward. Malcolm worries about those who are "missing"--Macduff and Seyward's "Noble Sonne." Seyward himself asks, "Then is he dead?" And it is Rosse who knows: "I, and brought off the field . . ." (5.9.4-10).

Only from the literary perspective of Shakespearean editors does any of this mean that the body has disappeared. Its continuing presence can be powerfully evocative in the simple fact that, almost at once, we now have on stage both father and son (5.7.24). The experience of the audience will be shaped largely by the suspense--will the father see his dead son?--and by the emotional conflict: do we want him to? Old Seyward's speech as he enters makes the moment even more painful. The castle, he says, has been "gently rendred," the "Tyrants people" have fought against him, the "day almost [by] itself professes" to be Malcolm's, and "little is to do." Malcolm adds, "We have met with Foes / That strike beside us." The two men clearly think the battle is already over--"Enter, Sir the Castle"--and are rejoicing in how little has been the effort and the cost. But the stage shows a heavy cost of which they as yet know nothing: were they only to look "over there," as the audience might say, their joy would cease.

The irony that lurks in the dialogue of the brief moment--because the audience knows that the castle has not been rendered as gently as old Seyward believes--comes into its full theatrical power when the body of his son is visible to the audience and could, with the tiniest turn of the father's head, be visible to him as well. An acting company that works to find such power is likely to discover that this particular irony is so pervasive as almost to define Act Five. If, with exploratory zeal and a more-than-ordinary faith in the script, we follow some of the strongest signals from the dialogue and stage directions, we will find ourselves staging a very strange battle. That is: let us assume that Shakespeare not only knew what he was doing but that he has given us, in the Folio, all the information we need; and assume, too, that if we trust what he has given us, something theatrical will develop beyond the usual expectations or revelations of editors and directors.

The scripting to which I am here calling attention begins with Act Five, Scene Two, and continues to the end of the play, structuring the Folio's last scene--"*Scena Septima*"--with the death of young Seyward and the subsequent career of his body. The conflict with Macbeth's forces is even stranger than Malcolm and old Seyward suggest. Only two people die, only three people fight: Macbeth, young Seyward, and Macduff. Once the battle begins, only two other people enter to the stage--Malcolm and old Seyward, who are clearly not attacking or being attacked, who feel no threat or challenge or danger of any kind, and who could best be played putting their swords in their scabbards (as they enter, or as they leave). It is clear that, during the battle for the castle, the audience should see no soldiers from either army. There is not a single "excursion" from which to build a conventional Shakespearean battle. The stage is eerily empty--throughout the entire struggle, no more than two people and one dead body are present at any one time. Behind the emptiness, beyond the three brief, small episodes (young Seyward-Macbeth, old Seyward-Malcolm, Macduff-Macbeth), there is a wall or a world of sound: in the constant offstage "Alarums" resides the only suggestion of armies at war.

The orchestration of sound begins in Act Five, Scene Two, just after the whispering exit of the Doctor and the Gentlewoman, with a sudden, startling "*Drum and Colours*." Four thanes enter, followed by "*Soldiers*." The scene ends with "*Exeunt marching*"--that is, to drum and colors; and marching, we should remember, makes its own kind of noise. Scene Four, too, begins--and once again after the quiet exit of the Doctor--with "*Drum and Colours*." Malcolm, Seyward, Macduff, and Seyward's Son enter accompanied by the thanes from Scene Two, and with "*Soldiers Marching*" (now both Scottish and English). The scene ends--again like Scene Two--with "*Exeunt marching*": soldiers marching to drum and colors.

Scene Three, though without any explicit direction for sound, is nonetheless an integrated part of the texture. As Scene Two ends, the sound of exiting drums and marching is likely to continue briefly as Macbeth enters, effectively forcing him, beleaguered and angry, to shout above the noise: "Bring me no

more Reports, let them flye all." Such a staging binds the onstage and offstage action: the audience is, from the scripting, given the passage of one time in two places, both inside and outside the castle. As Macbeth's soldiers "flye" from him, Malcolm's forces increase, and the "Drum and Colours" of Scene Four might well begin with the low, returning sound of drums as, toward the end of Scene Three, Macbeth asks the Doctor, "*Hear'st thou*" of the English? Scene Four would then burst powerfully and loudly upon the stage--as if a door had suddenly opened or a dam burst--with all of Malcolm's forces together for the first time. The shrinking of one army and the growth of the other is precisely scripted in dialogue, sound, and action to create a growing sense of victory for Malcolm. Act Five is scripted, in great detail, to avoid even the briefest moment of doubt about the outcome, the inevitability of Macbeth's defeat being the scripted point.

Scenes Five and Six (first, Macbeth and his people; then, Malcolm and his) also begin with the sound of the drum, the spectacle of "colours," and the noisy action of marching soldiers. But they end quite differently from Scenes Two and Four. In Macbeth's scene--Five, near the end--he cries, "Ring the Alarum Bell," and the sound that thus replaces the drum has been preceded by its own description, a useful design signal: "the bleeding, and the grim Alarme." (5.2.4). With it, the earlier, disciplined "*Exeunt marching*" is replaced by an "*Exeunt*" choreographed by the new, grim sound; in rehearsal, we must find that choreography.

Ending the next scene, Macduff cries for a multitude of trumpets:

Make all our Trumpets speak, give them all breath
Those clamorous Harbingers of Blood, and Death.
(5.6.9-10)

Again, there is no marching off; the actors must devise an "exeunt" consonant with the bloody clamor of the trumpets, an extreme and climactic clamor, the obedient trumpeters blowing with *all possible breath* (for the meter tells them that "all" is not here a pronoun, merely repeating the first, but a powerful adjective). And the directions are precise about the sound with which the trumpets blend: "*Alarums continued*." At this point, the preparation for battle, the marching to battle, is over. It is time to fight.

With Scene Seven (in the Folio, but not in modern editions, the last scene) the fighting begins, and is continuous--in offstage sound--until Macbeth is slain. At first--that is, in Scenes Two, Four, Five, and Six--the script gives us the sound of drums-and-marching six times; on average, every 28 lines. Once the grim alarm bell starts, and is joined by the climactic clamor of many trumpets, the noise of battle never ceases: in 64 lines, there are six "alarums." As we have seen, Macduff enters pursuing the "noise" and exits pursuing the "great clatter" that he identifies with Macbeth and that ceases only when Macbeth is dead. And then, at once, new sounds: "*Retreat, and Flourish*."

Enter with Drumme and Colours, Malcolm, Seyward, Rosse, Thanes and Soldiers." With the end of all fighting, the drum and colors, the thanes, and the marching soldiers are back on stage, in victory filling the nearly empty space with noisy, colorful life.

Until this occurs, the stage presents itself throughout the Folio's *Scena Septima* as a pocket of relative silence in a sea of warlike noise, and the italicized visual sign is the one dead body, the only alien, unmoving object in a large, little-populated space that normal expectations would fill with soldiers crossing and re-crossing in combat. The sound of "alarums" creates a battle for which there is, precisely where the audience would expect it, no visual evidence. In such a theatre, it may be possible to believe that a battle is in progress but hard to believe that anyone is fighting--an effect very like that suggested by old Seyward: the "Thanes do bravely," but "little is to do"; the day need not be won, he says, it gives itself to Malcolm (5.7.26-27). The consequence of such a staging is that the one dead body becomes the sight that controls the stage, coloring the response of the audience to anything that happens there or (through sound) "within."

When Macbeth re-enters, the presence of the body works powerfully with his brief speech to keep him--at this last moment before the challenge from Macduff--in sharp focus for the audience:

Why should I play the Roman Foole, and dye
On mine owne sword? whiles I see lives, the gashes
Do better upon them. (5.8.1-3)

There are many ways to play this. Perhaps the first line and a half is to himself or to the audience, perhaps seeing the body motivates "while I see lives, the gashes / Do better upon them." The words are then a sneer, a brag, even a rejoicing, the body a visible reminder to himself that killing others is better than suicide; and the audience watches as he takes grotesque pleasure in the still-bleeding wounds of this boy-man he killed only minutes ago. Does he savagely turn the body? or kick it? Does he even stab the body again? Joyfully or grimly, madly stab at the body, perhaps with a dagger, kneeling? Could it remind the audience of the scene they never saw except in his own descriptions--the killing of Duncan? of the grooms? Would the boy's blood on the killer's hands--perhaps wiped off absent-mindedly--bring his whole career, in an instant, to the stage?

All such options (with more lying in wait) must be kept open until rehearsal and performance. But what is certain is that if Macbeth is turned to the corpse in any way whatever, Macduff's challenge at this point--"Turne Hellhound, turne"--comes not only from past grievances and accumulated rage, not only from a desire in the heart for revenge, but is, theatrically, alive in the moment. The audience will see that, for Macduff, Macbeth's present action reveals again, this time with ocular proof, the terrible evil in the man. And the

actor's voice will--in both the command, "Turne," and in the appellation, "Hellhound"--takes its tone, its quality, from the horror of *this* sight, *this* dreadful act. The tone will of course also derive from something carried in the voice through nights and days of grieving; but it will now come to new life in this new and horrifying moment.

As the two men speak, then fight, then speak again, for a total of twenty-seven lines, they will of course be the center of attention; but if the production has shown Macduff fighting, in part out of the demand of the moment, to rescue or protect young Seyward's body, the staging continues, in a very precise way to follow the suggestions in the script. While watching and listening to Macduff and Macbeth, the audience is not likely to forget young Seyward. And when, in one of the famous oddities of Shakespearean staging, the two men "*Exeunt fighting*" for no apparent reason, only to "*Enter fighting*" almost at once--with no more than set of "*Alarums*" intervening--one of the major consequences (possibly the only one) is that for a last time the audience contemplates a stage occupied by that single dead body backed by a solid wall of warlike sound. Suddenly, however, Macbeth is back and "slaine," and the stage briefly holds two dead bodies. One of them (Macbeth's) must, we know, go off at once, for after nineteen lines the Folio direction reads: "*Enter Macduffe, with Macbeths head.*" Somehow, Macduff takes the body off in order to return with a severed head when, for all practical purposes, a complete body, left right where it has fallen, would serve. Thus, in a single clutch of stage directions, Macduff has two unnecessary exits. Why?

The first, as I have said, leaves the audience alone with young Seyward, alone to experience a stage empty but for the body and the sound of war--and this in what appears to be the penultimate moment. As Macbeth cries, "Lay on, Macduffe," the audience expects a furious fight ending shortly in Macbeth's death; and yet suddenly the two rage off into the dark offstage world of alarums, leaving no other action in progress on stage. Through a strategy of surprise, the stage will never have seemed so empty. And yet, in a staging that has left the body cruelly and imaginatively prominent, the space will be filled with Macbeth's last inhuman act, as the audience, directed by the staging to contemplate the object of the act, feels at the same time the suspense of the fight that must, in some form, soon return from the "bleeding, and the grim Alarme." It is this surprising and complex experience that the script projects into the theatre; and it is a great mistake to think the moment is a "pointless break," as it has been called, and to fill it with the clutter of conventional battle or to dodge it entirely, as can easily be done, simply by ignoring the "*Exeunt.*"

But I must now, I think, face the editors more directly: inasmuch as Rosse says young Seyward's body has been "brought off the field," what is it still doing on stage? The actual fact is that there is no better, no simpler time than now to bring it off the field; and it need not--should not--go off the stage. "Retreat" is sounded, a "Flourish" is sounded, "Drumme and Colours" enter.

There is plenty of time for Rosse, with a soldier or two at his command, to see and recognize the body, place it on a litter, cover it appropriately, and bring it into the victorious gathering, which is assembling, presumably, inside the castle. That is: in full view of the audience, the body moves from the field to the interior of the castle; and there is nothing difficult, surprising, or un-Shakespearean about such a move. It is, however, extremely effective theatre.

And it brings us not to some expected celebration, some conventional or royal rejoicing, or even--more realistically--to some curiosity from the victors about Macbeth, whose fate or whereabouts is known only to the absent Macduff (even the audience cannot know what is actually happening). Instead, the script takes us to the surprising, apparently delaying nineteen-line response to young Seyward's death. Clearly, however, if the body has been a major part of the last scene from the beginning, further attention to it will seem not only appropriate but essential. As Rosse and his soldiers are moving forward with the body, the first thoughts of Malcolm and Seyward after victory are of the cost, and Malcolm is more concerned about his missing friends than about his missing enemy:

- Mal.* I would the Friends we misse, were safe arriv'd.
Sey. Some must go off: and yet by these I see,
 So great a day as this is cheapely bought.
Mal. *Macduffe* is missing, and your Noble Sonne. (5.9.1-4)

The emotional and intellectual texture of such lines is more complex, and their effect more powerful, if the covered body of the "Noble Sonne" is there as a visual comment on what both men say. Malcolm has begun deeply to feel the cost. Seyward--older, more experienced, more used to losing friends in battle, more stoical--is still, as he was earlier, amazed at how few of their number have in fact gone "off" to death. Even the lack of curiosity about Macbeth contributes to the strangeness of the battle. Armies fight but are not seen to do so, a dangerous tyrant apparently escapes but no one speaks of danger.

However, at just this moment, Seyward learns, from Rosse, about his son. The answer to "Then he is dead?" is not now simply in words. Other languages of theatre are also at work. As Rosse says "brought off the field," he means--and it now seems so obvious--brought here, to this place, to his father's presence. And as Seyward asks the soldier's question--"Has he his hurts before?"--he is looking directly at the covered body. Rosse's answer--"I, on the Front"--can now mean, as he lifts the cover, "Yes, see for yourself: don't worry." Perhaps, as Seyward looks, the staging will allow the audience to see the wounds and the young face again. Perhaps--with, "Why then, Gods Soldier be he"--Seyward kneels. Perhaps, as he starts to rise (with, "his Knell is knoll'd"), Malcolm stops him and kneels with him: "Hee's worth more sorrow. . . ." Perhaps Malcolm motions for all to kneel, or they do so spontaneously.

Such possibilities, and they are only that, we are allowed to hold in mind, waiting for the work of rehearsal. But we know that it can be some such scene to which Macduff enters: "*with Macbeth's head.*" The composition of the ensuing stage picture is the theatrical challenge toward which "*Scena Septima*" has, from the first, been moving. When Macduff says, "Behold where stands / Th'Usurpers cursed head," the verb "stands" implies, nearly everyone agrees, that the head is on a pole that Macduff plants somewhere on the stage. When he does so, the audience "beholds" the vivid representation of two contrasting lives: Macbeth's and young Seyward's. Theatre companies will stage the picture in different ways, but the script offers to everyone the same basic elements. Macbeth's head, the face horribly distorted by decapitation; young Seyward's body, the face young but serene, the wounds severe but honorable, his uniform English among the Scotsmen, his sword easy to fix at his head as a cross. Directors and designers will think long and hard about ways to show, in this single visual passage, the extremes of human life. Macbeth's "cursed head," severed, stands against all that the body, wounded but whole, represents. Seyward, so young as to be hardly more than a boy, is nonetheless "God's soldier," his an English life generously given for Scotland, a boy who was more of a man than was Macbeth, a boy who as a man "parted well, and paid his score" (5.9.18). At the end of the scene, the combined force of this corpse--richly staged in all its beauty--and of Macbeth's head--carefully staged in its revolting ugliness--rules the stage, creating the context within which the Scottish thanes for the first time hail Malcolm as Scotland's king. By this time, we surely know the reason that Macduff exits "unnecessarily" a second time, and why young Seyward's body never leaves the stage.

But the last scene of *Macbeth*, *Scena Septima*, a clear, straightforward, efficiently theatrical unit in the pages of the Folio, its essential rationale perfectly simple--in 104 lines it gives us the entirety of the battle and the victory--has never satisfied modern editors. Unanimously, they deform it, either enlarging it by joining it with Scene Six or (more often) cutting it up into whatever small units the editor finds attractive. The lack of agreement in the midst of unanimous dissatisfaction is itself instructive. If we look at the texts edited by some of the century's most influential editors, among them those most frequently followed in the academy and the theatre, we find the following:

1. Signet, Pelican, Scott Foresman and Bantam (both edited by Bevington), and Foakes make two scenes of the Folio's one.
2. Kittredge, Wilson, Muir, and the Riverside divide it into three scenes.
3. Wells, in his two Oxford editions, stops dividing only when he has created five scenes.

4. And G. K. Hunter--while deciding for the New Penguin in 1967 to join Scene Seven to Scene Six, thus creating a new and larger unit that seems to have convinced no one--thought that, though editors "usually" presented three scenes instead of one, "logic demands either [two] more divisions . . . or none at all" (by which he meant that Scene Seven should be collapsed into Scene Six).³

This dazzling disarray of scenic shapes, with not a single major editor convinced by the Folio, is, I think, definitively revealing on a matter of great importance: modern editorial "logic," of whatever variety, differs radically from the scripting logic that gave us *Scena Septima*.

But--a loud editorial voice says quickly--the scenic designation in the Folio may itself be an intervention, perhaps inserted by Shakespeare's first editors, thus no more Shakespearean or scripted than any others, signaling no more than any other disagreement in the editorial community, the "logic" of *Scena Septima* carrying no more authority than the scenic designations of any modern editor. To follow such assertions, one after the other, is to be compellingly led by the power of the initial truth, and then increasingly forced to raise major objections the further one travels the argumentative line. It is certainly true that the scenic designations may not be Shakespeare's, may even be the work of some unknown transcriber or compositor. But the contrary truth is equally powerful and far more promising: the designations might, after all, be Shakespeare's. He might be--yes, could in fact be--entirely responsible for *Scena Septima* as a sign on the page, as a dramatic shape, and as a theatrical signal.

If we assume, with the editors, that the scenic designation in the Folio for the last scene of *Macbeth* possesses no Shakespearean authority, we are left, as readers, in the chaotic world of editorial disagreement. Yet even if all the editors agreed that the one scene should be divided into two, say (or three or five), we would find ourselves in a world of literary signs only, of signs on the page having no theatrical significance whatever, of signs that have nothing to say to actors, directors, or designers. Such signs, as they nudge us for attention, seduce us away from theatrical thinking, take us out of the theatrical process of which scripts are a part. Editorial signs reflect editorial thinking, their purpose being to call to our attention, as readers, matters that Shakespeare as represented by the Folio text, clearly did not think significant.

What he seems most likely to have thought significant is precisely what the editors have tried to take away from us--an Act Five of seven scenes, with *Scena Septima* a single scripted unit of theatrical activity, in its structure a clear, strong signal to the acting company. If we at once trust and test the Folio as a script--thus working with the last scene as shaped by the presence, alive and dead, of young Seyward, for whom there is no exit except the final "*Exeunt Omnes*"--we discover that *Scena Septima* makes extraordinary

theatrical sense. Which is, after all, the only kind of sense a script is supposed to make. And we know that to scatter the signs for two or three or five scenes where one is theatrically comprehensible and practical is to make (if anything) a literary sense. Which is to say: in a script, no sense at all.

The precise duration of the battle, the presence of young Seyward fighting and dead, and the theatrical shape of *Scena Septima* are bound inseparably together: the first two combine to create the third. The last scene of *Macbeth* is not a point at which the Folio requires mediation from modern editors or directors. Exactly as it stands, it is clearly and powerfully scripted. The absence of an exit for the body is a defining richness; and editors who--whether in a note or a stage direction--provide an exit are using their editorial power to shut off areas that profit from being open to exploration.

It would be heartening to be able to believe that those editors who do not mention the body at all are deliberately protecting the scripted openness. But we are not allowed such encouragement. When the editors introduce, as they all do, additional scenic divisions, they mask the theatrical shape of the scene, obscuring its theatrical possibilities precisely so as to reveal that their silence is merely empty instead of rich with the Folio's theatrical treasure. The corpse has meant as little to them as to those who have openly created the exit that, if we trust the only available evidence, we must believe Shakespeare never scripted.

The point is sufficiently important for *Macbeth* alone, for its impact on our shared understanding of the scripted potential of Act Five. But the masked life of young Seyward's corpse is only one example among hundreds.⁴ What is now needed in editing and in producing Shakespeare, as in all other areas of Shakespearean activity, is a practicing discipline firmly centered on the text-as-script and guided by a theory adequate to the task of confronting the prevailing winds of commerce, the age-old aggression of literature, the increasing elitism of the academy, the endless procession of theatrical and scholarly fads, and--perhaps most of all at the moment--all other theory.

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Notes

1. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, *A Textual Companion* (Oxford, 1987) 547. I have examined over a dozen modern texts, including all of those currently most in use: Arden, Penguin, Signet, Bantam, Riverside, Scott Foresman, and the two Oxford editions. Quotations from the play (with typography modernized) are taken from Charlton Hinman, ed., *The First Folio* (The Norton Facsimile) (New York: Norton, 1968). For ease of reference, line numbering is from the Arden edition, ed. Kenneth Muir (Harvard, 1951). But all modern editions divide the Folio's last scene into two or more parts: see pages 149-150.

2. David Bevington, placing the action before the soliloquy, says, "young Seyward's body must be removed from the stage . . . Perhaps [by] Macbeth . . . perhaps . . . by soldiers . . ."

(New York: Bantam, 1988, 90). In the Arden, Muir, risking no guess about who moves the body, says the removal "was, perhaps, just" after the soliloquy (164). Wells and Taylor as we have seen, are in no doubt: with Bevington, they get rid of the body at once, and give the task to Macbeth.

3. Texts not already fully noted: *Signet*, ed. Sylvan Barnet (New York, 1963); *Pelican*, ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore, 1971); *Complete Works*, ed. David Bevington (Scott Foresman, 1980); *Macbeth*, ed. R. A. Foakes (Bobbs-Merrill, 1968); *Macbeth*, ed. George Lyman Kittredge, revised by Irving Ribner (Blaisdell, 1966); *The New Shakespeare*, ed. John Dover Wilson (Cambridge, 1968); *Riverside*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

4. For two other examples, see my "Menos and the Editors: A Folio Script Unscripted," *SQ* 36.2 (Summer 1985): 165-187, and "Editors vs. a Text: The Scripted Geography of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *SP* LXXXVII.1 (Winter 1990): 83-108.

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