

Scene 11 (II iii 167-82)

(II iii 167) *What will you do?* Though Folio fails to mark it, this is the start of a new scene. The king's two sons made their furtive exit a short while ago (II iii 153); now they reappear. Then, like everyone else (except Macduff and Lennox), they were wearing just their night-gowns; now they have got themselves dressed in their travelling clothes (the same clothes that we saw them wearing in scene 6) and are on their way to the stables, hoping not to be spotted.

This is a puzzling scene. "The amazing precipitate flight of Malcolm and Donalbain, without any apology, except the paltry one of instantaneous fear, places these sprigs of royalty in a contemptible light, and its effect on the stage proves the justice of this remark; for when one says, 'I'll to England,' and the other comically replies, 'To Ireland I,' nine times out of ten, the audience are thrown into a horse-laugh." (Gentleman 1770:91)

If Malcolm is a grown man, "pusillanimous" (Gentleman in Bell 1773:27) is indeed a fair description of his conduct. He does not assert himself. He lets himself be disregarded. He abandons his father's dead body. He seems to have no thought in his head except to run away.

On the other hand, if Duncan's sons are both teenagers, and one only slightly older than the other, their behaviour is not to be judged so harshly. They were told the news -- and then they were ignored. Nobody tried to comfort them; nobody made any effort to keep them safe. They cannot know who is to be trusted. They suspect, reasonably enough, that whoever killed their father may intend to kill them too. What else is there for them to do, in those circumstances, but to run and run until they are out of Scotland?

(II iii 171) *I'll to England.* This is the older brother speaking. His name is Malcolm, as we should know if we have been paying attention. But we do not discover till later that he has an English uncle, with whom he can seek protection.

(II iii 172) *To Ireland, I.* This is the younger brother, whose name is Donalbain. They have the idea that it would be safest for them to run off in different directions, since then they cannot both be killed at once. Donalbain decides -- we are not told why -- to try his luck in Ireland. (According to Holinshed, the two brothers fled together as far as Cumberland; but then "Donald passed over into

Ireland, where he was tenderlie cherished by the king of that land" (1587:171).) We do not see him again. In scene 24, as the English army approaches, somebody asks: "Who knows if Donalbain be with his brother?" And the answer is: "For certain, sir, he is not" (V ii 11-12).

In D'Avenant's play, in the scene that corresponds with scene 24, Donalbain and Fleance both return -- the former from Ireland, the latter (surprisingly) from France -- to participate in the denouement. Loose ends were distressing for D'Avenant, not so much so for Shakespeare.

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