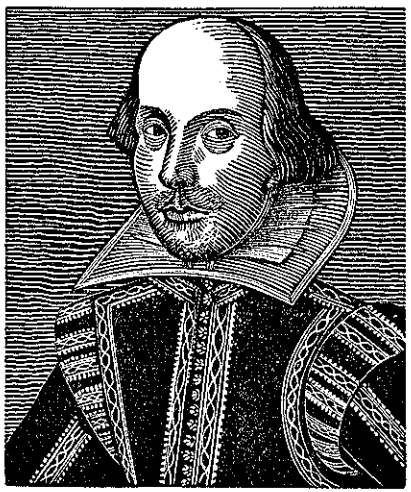
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

The Tragedy of Macbeth



PENGUIN BOOKS

THE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE

PLAYS

APPROXIMATE DATE		FIRST PRINTED
Before 1594	HENRY VI *three parts*	*Folio* 1623
	RICHARD III	1597
	TITUS ANDRONICUS	1594
	LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST	1598
	THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA	*Folio*
	THE COMEDY OF ERRORS	*Folio*
	THE TAMING OF THE SHREW	*Folio*
1594–1597	ROMEO AND JULIET (*pirated* 1597)	1599
	A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM	1600
	RICHARD II	1597
	KING JOHN	*Folio*
	THE MERCHANT OF VENICE	1600
1597–1600	HENRY IV *part i*	1598
	HENRY IV *part ii*	1600
	HENRY V (*pirated* 1600)	*Folio*
	MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING	1600
	MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR (*pirated* 1602)	*Folio*
	AS YOU LIKE IT	*Folio*
	JULIUS CAESAR	*Folio*
	TROYLUS AND CRESSIDA	1609
1601–1608	HAMLET (*pirated* 1603)	1604
	TWELFTH NIGHT	*Folio*
	MEASURE FOR MEASURE	*Folio*
	ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL	*Folio*
	OTHELLO	1622
	LEAR	1608
	MACBETH	*Folio*
	TIMON OF ATHENS	*Folio*
	ANTHONY AND CLEOPATRA	*Folio*
	CORIOLANUS	*Folio*
After 1608	PERICLES (*omitted from the Folio*)	1609
	CYMBELINE	*Folio*
	THE WINTER'S TALE	*Folio*
	THE TEMPEST	*Folio*
	HENRY VIII	*Folio*

POEMS

DATES UNKNOWN		
	VENUS AND ADONIS	1593
	THE RAPE OF LUCRECE	1594
	SONNETS	1609
	A LOVER'S COMPLAINT	
	THE PHŒNIX AND THE TURTLE	1601

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare was born at Stratford upon Avon in April, 1564. He was the third child, and eldest son, of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. His father was one of the most prosperous men of Stratford, who held in turn the chief offices in the town. His mother was of gentle birth, the daughter of Robert Arden of Wilmcote. In December, 1582, Shakespeare married Ann Hathaway, daughter of a farmer of Shottery, near Stratford; their first child Susanna was baptized on May 6, 1583, and twins, Hamnet and Judith, on February 22, 1585. Little is known of Shakespeare's early life; but it is unlikely that a writer who dramatized such an incomparable range and variety of human kinds and experiences should have spent his early manhood entirely in placid pursuits in a country town. There is one tradition, not universally accepted, that he fled from Stratford because he was in trouble for deer stealing, and had fallen foul of Sir Thomas Lucy, the local magnate; another that he was for some time a schoolmaster.

From 1592 onwards the records are much fuller. In March, 1592, the Lord Strange's players produced a new play at the Rose Theatre called *Harry the Sixth*, which was very successful, and was probably the *First Part of Henry VI*. In the autumn of 1592 Robert Greene, the best known of the professional writers, as he was dying wrote a letter to three fellow writers in which he warned them against the ingratitude of players in general, and in particular against an 'upstart crow' who 'supposes he is as much able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute Johannes Factotum is in his own conceit the only

Shake-scene in a country.' This is the first reference to Shakespeare and the whole passage suggests that Shakespeare had become suddenly famous as a playwright. At this time Shakespeare was brought into touch with Edward Alleyne the great tragedian, and Christopher Marlowe, whose thundering parts of Tamburlaine, the Jew of Malta, and Dr Faustus Alleyne was acting, as well as Hieronimo, the hero of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, the most famous of all Elizabethan plays.

In April, 1593, Shakespeare published his poem *Venus and Adonis*, which was dedicated to the young Earl of Southampton: it was a great and lasting success, and was reprinted nine times in the next few years. In May, 1594, his second poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*, was also dedicated to Southampton.

There was little playing in 1593, for the theatres were shut during a severe outbreak of the plague; but in the autumn of 1594, when the plague ceased, the playing companies were reorganized, and Shakespeare became a sharer in the Lord Chamberlain's company who went to play in the Theatre in Shoreditch. During these months Marlowe and Kyd had died. Shakespeare was thus for a time without a rival. He had already written the three parts of *Henry VI*, *Richard III*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*. Soon afterwards he wrote the first of his greater plays – *Romeo and Juliet* – and he followed this success in the next three years with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard II*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. The two parts of *Henry IV*, introducing Falstaff, the most popular of all his comic characters, were written in 1597–8.

The company left the Theatre in 1597 owing to disputes over a renewal of the ground lease, and went to play at the Curtain in the same neighbourhood. The disputes continued throughout 1598, and at Christmas the players settled the matter by demolishing the old Theatre and re-erecting a new playhouse on the South bank of the Thames, near Southwark Cathedral. This playhouse was named the Globe. The expenses of the new building were shared by the chief members of the Company, including Shakespeare, who was now a man of some means. In 1596 he had bought New Place, a large house in the centre of Stratford, for £60, and through his father purchased a coat-of-arms from the Heralds, which was the official recognition that he and his family were gentlefolk.

By the summer of 1598 Shakespeare was recognized as the greatest of English dramatists. Booksellers were printing his more popular plays, at times even in pirated or stolen versions, and he received a remarkable tribute from a young writer named Francis Meres, in his book *Palladis Tamia*. In a long catalogue of English authors Meres gave Shakespeare more prominence than any other writer, and mentioned by name twelve of his plays.

Shortly before the Globe was opened Shakespeare had completed the cycle of plays dealing with the whole story of the Wars of the Roses with *Henry V*. It was followed by *As You Like it*, and *Julius Cæsar*, the first of the maturer tragedies. In the next three years he wrote *Troylus and Cressida*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Hamlet* and *Twelfth Night*.

On March 24, 1603, Queen Elizabeth died. The company had often performed before her, but they found her successor a far more enthusiastic patron. One of the first acts of King James was to take over the company and to promote them to be his own servants, so that henceforward they were known as the King's Men. They acted now very

frequently at Court, and prospered accordingly. In the early years of the reign Shakespeare wrote the more sombre comedies, *All's Well that Ends Well*, and *Measure for Measure*, which were followed by *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. Then he returned to Roman themes with *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*.

Since 1601 Shakespeare had been writing less, and there were now a number of rival dramatists who were introducing new styles of drama, particularly Ben Jonson (whose first successful comedy, *Every Man in his Humour*, was acted by Shakespeare's company in 1598), Chapman, Dekker, Marston, and Beaumont and Fletcher who began to write in 1607. In 1608 the King's Men acquired a second playhouse, an indoor private theatre in the fashionable quarter of the Blackfriars. At private theatres, plays were performed indoors; the prices charged were higher than in the public playhouses, and the audience consequently was more select. Shakespeare seems to have retired from the stage about this time: his name does not occur in the various lists of players after 1607. Henceforward he lived for the most part at Stratford, where he was regarded as one of the most important citizens. He still wrote a few plays, and he tried his hand at the new form of tragi-comedy – a play with tragic incidents but a happy ending – which Beaumont and Fletcher had popularized. He wrote four of these – *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, which was acetd at Court in 1611. For the last four years of his life he lived in retirement. His son Hamnet had died in 1596: his two daughters were now married. Shakespeare died at Stratford upon Avon on April 23, 1616, and was buried in the chancel of the church, before the high altar. Shortly afterwards a memorial which still exists, with a portrait bust, was set up on the North wall. His wife survived him.

When Shakespeare died fourteen of his plays had been published separately in Quarto booklets. In 1623 his surviving fellow actors, John Heming and Henry Condell, with the co-operation of a number of printers, published a collected edition of thirty-six plays in one Folio volume, with an engraved portrait, memorial verses by Ben Jonson and others, and an Epistle to the Reader in which Heming and Condell make the interesting note that Shakespeare's 'hand and mind went together, and what he thought, he uttered with that easiness that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers'.

The plays as printed in the Quartos or the Folio differ considerably from the usual modern text. They are often not divided into scenes, and sometimes not even into acts. Nor are there place-headings at the beginning of each scene, because in the Elizabethan theatre there was no scenery. They are carelessly printed and the spelling is erratic.

THE ELIZABETHAN THEATRE

Although plays of one sort and another had been acted for many generations, no permanent playhouse was erected in England until 1576. In the 1570's the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London and the players were constantly at variance. As a result James Burbage, then the leader of the great Earl of Leicester's players, decided that he would erect a playhouse outside the jurisdiction of the Lord Mayor, where the players would no longer be hindered by the authorities. Accordingly in 1576 he built the Theatre in Shoreditch, at that time a suburb of London. The experiment was successful, and by 1592 there were

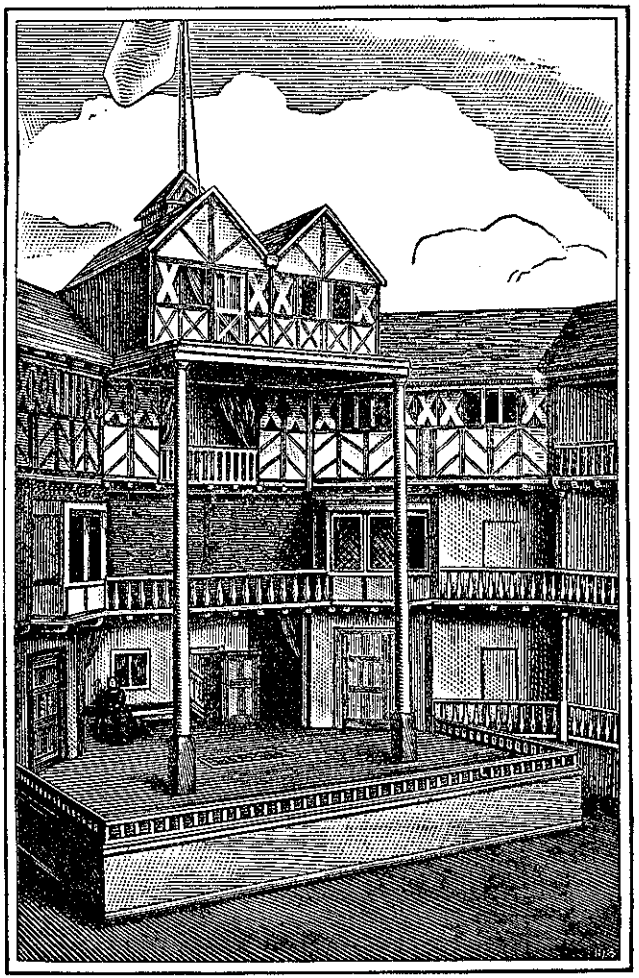
three playhouses in London, the Curtain (also in Shoreditch), and the Rose on the south bank of the river, near Southwark Cathedral.

Elizabethan players were accustomed to act on a variety of stages; in the great hall of a nobleman's house, or one of the Queen's palaces, in town halls and in yards, as well as their own theatre.

The public playhouse for which most of Shakespeare's plays were written was a small and intimate affair. The outside measurement of the Fortune Theatre, which was built in 1600 to rival the new Globe, was but eighty feet square. Playhouses were usually circular or hexagonal, with three tiers of galleries looking down upon the yard or pit, which was open to the sky. The stage jutted out into the yard so that the actors came forward into the midst of their audience.

Over the stage there was a roof, and on either side doors by which the characters entered or disappeared. Over the back of the stage ran a gallery or upper stage which was used whenever an upper scene was needed, as when Romeo climbs up to Juliet's bedroom, or the citizens of Angiers address King John from the walls. The space beneath this upper stage was known as the tiring house; it was concealed from the audience by a curtain which would be drawn back to reveal an inner stage, for such scenes as the witches' cave in Macbeth, Prospero's cell or Juliet's tomb.

There was no general curtain concealing the whole stage, so that all scenes on the main stage began with an entrance and ended with an exit. Thus in tragedies the dead must be carried away. There was no scenery, and therefore no limit to the number of scenes, for a scene came to an end when the characters left the stage. When it was necessary for the exact locality of a scene to be known, then Shakespeare



THE GLOBE THEATRE

Wood-engraving by R. J. Beedham after a reconstruction by J. C. Adams

indicated it in the dialogue; otherwise a simple property or a garment was sufficient; a chair or stool showed an indoor scene, a man wearing riding boots was a messenger, a king wearing armour was on the battlefield, or the like. Such simplicity was on the whole an advantage; the spectator was not distracted by the setting and Shakespeare was able to use as many scenes as he wished. The action passed by very quickly: a play of 2500 lines of verse could be acted in two hours. Moreover, since the actor was so close to his audience, the slightest subtlety of voice and gesture was easily appreciated.

The company was a 'Fellowship of Players', who were all partners and sharers. There were usually ten to fifteen full members, with three or four boys, and some paid servants. Shakespeare had therefore to write for his team. The chief actor in the company was Richard Burbage, who first distinguished himself as Richard III; for him Shakespeare wrote his great tragic parts. An important member of the company was the clown or low comedian. From 1594 to 1600 the company's clown was Will Kemp; he was succeeded by Robert Armin. No women were allowed to appear on the stage, and all women's parts were taken by boys.

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH

In *The Tragedy of Macbeth* Shakespeare dramatized certain events and legends of the history of Scotland in the eleventh century recorded in Ralph Holinshed's *Chronicles,* from which he borrowed and altered freely. Holinshed told how Macbeth's imaginations were first fired by the prophecies of 'three women in strange and wild apparel, resembling creatures of the elder world'. Egged on by the importunity of his wife, Macbeth slew Duncan, with the aid of Banquo and other friends. Holinshed gave no details of the murder of Duncan. This episode Shakespeare adapted from the murder of King Duff by Donwald, who also was encouraged by an ambitious wife. Duff is portrayed in the woodcut in the *Chronicle* as an old warrior with an ample white beard. According to Holinshed Macbeth at first was a good king and made admirable laws, but after some years, remembering the words of the Weird Sisters, he began to fear that he would, in his own turn, be murdered. Accordingly Banquo was slain, but Fleance, his son, escaped and became the ancestor of the House of Stuart. The *Chronicle* does not, however, record any appearance of Banquo's ghost. Macbeth's character now degenerated, and, warned by a prophecy, he began to suspect Macduff; but a certain witch 'told that he should never be slain with man born of any woman, nor vanquished till the wood of Bernane came to the Castle of Dunsinane'.

When Macduff fled, Macbeth came to his Castle, which was unsuspectingly opened to him, and caused Macduff's wife, children and people to be murdered. Macduff took

refuge in England and came to Malcolm, and their long conversation was closely reproduced in Act IV, Scene 3. After this there was a general revolt against Macbeth. When Macduff reached Bernane wood he ordered his men to cut down boughs to cover their advance against Dunsinane Castle. Macbeth led his men out, though he perceived that the first warning prophecy was now fulfilled, but when he saw the great numbers of Macduff's army he fled away on horseback. Macduff pursued him and brought him to bay. Macbeth cried that he was not appointed to be slain by any creature that is born of woman. Macduff replied, '"It is true, Macbeth, and now shall thine insatiable cruelty have an end, for I am even he that thy wizards have told thee of; who was never born of my mother, but ripped out of her womb." Therewithal he stept unto him, and slew him in the place. Then cutting his head from his shoulders, he set it upon a pole, and brought it unto Malcolm.'

The play was probably written in 1606. The style, and especially the teeming poetic imagery of the great speeches, belong rather to the period of *Lear* (1606) than of *Hamlet* (1601). Moreover, the remarks of the Porter (p. 49 ll. 16–19) – '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' – are a likely reference to the notorious trial of Father Garnet on March 28, 1606, for complicity in the Gunpowder Plot. Garnet admitted in his defence that he had deliberately deceived his accusers, and justified himself by the Jesuit doctrine of equivocation (see note on p. 49 ll. 16–19 on p. 114–115).

Although the great scenes in *Macbeth* – the murder of Duncan, the banquet, the sleepwalking – are unsurpassed anywhere, *Macbeth* is in some ways the least satisfactory of Shakespeare's mature tragedies. The last Act falls away, and there are several patches of verse very inferior to the rest. Most editors have agreed that the play was partly revised after Shakespeare had written it. The speech of the 'bleeding Captain', if not the whole of Act I, Scene 2, and the operatic episodes of Hecate and the witches (Act III, Scene 5, and Act IV, Scene 1) are not in Shakespeare's manner, and Thomas Middleton, who wrote a play called *The Witch*, about 1612, is generally credited, or debited, with them. The songs, to which reference is made in the stage directions of the Hecate scenes, are given in full in *The Witch*.

There is some external evidence of revision. Simon Forman, a notorious quack and astrologer, kept notes of some plays which he saw in 1611. Of *Macbeth* at the Globe, on April 20 he wrote – 'There was to be obserued, firste, howe Mackbeth and Bancko, 2 noble men of Scotland, Ridinge thorowe a wod, the(re) stode before them 3 women feiries or Nimphes, And saluted Mackbeth, sayinge, 3 tyms vnto him, haille Mackbeth, king of Codon; for thou shalt be a kinge, but shalt beget No kinges, &c. Then said Bancko, What all to Mackbeth And nothing to me. Yes, said the nimphes, haille to thee Bancko, thou shalt beget kinges, yet be no kinge. And so they departed & cam to the Courte of Scotland to Dunkin king of Scotes, and yt was in the dais of Edward the Confessor. And Dunkin bad them both kindly wellcome, And made Mackbeth forth with Prince of Northumberland, and sent him hom to his own castell, and appointed Mackbeth to prouid for him, for he would sup with him the next dai at night, & did soe. And Mackbeth contrived to kill Dunkin, & thorowe the persuasion of his wife did that

night Murder the kinge in his own Castell, beinge his guest. And ther were many prodigies seen that night & the dai before. And when Mack Beth had murdered the kinge, the blod on his handes could not be washed of by Any meanes, nor from his wiues handes, which handled the bloddi daggers in hiding them, By which means they became both moch amazed & Affronted. The murder being knowen, Dunkins 2 sonns fled, the on to England, the [other to] Walles, to saue them selues, they being fled, they were supposed guilty of the murder of their father, which was nothinge so. Then was Mackbeth crowned kinge, and then he for feare of Banko, his old companion, that he should beget kinges but be no kinge him selfe, he contriued the death of Banko, and caused him to be Murdred on the way as he Rode. The next night, being at supper with his noble men whom he had bid to a feaste to the which also Banco should haue com, he began to speake of Noble Banco, and to wish that he wer ther. And as he thus did, standing vp to drincke a Carouse to him, the ghoste of Banco came and sate down in his cheier behind him. And he turninge About to sit down Again sawe the goste of Banco, which fronted him so, that he fell into a great passion of fear and fury, Vtterynge many wordes about his murder, by which, when they hard that Banco was Murdred they Suspected Mackbet.

'Then MackDove fled to England to the kinges sonn, And soe they Raised an Army, And cam into Scotland, and at Dunston Anyse overthrue Mackbet. In the meantyme whille Macdouee was in England, Mackbet slewe Mackdoues wife & children, and after in the battelle Mackdoue slewe Mackbet.

'Obserue Also howe Mackbetes quen did Rise in the night in her slepe, & walke and talked and confessed all, & the docter noted her wordes.'

[Quoted in E. K. Chambers' *William Shakespeare,* ii, 337–8.]

There is no trace, in the play as now known, of any episode where the blood on the hands of Macbeth and his wife could not be washed off, nor is it a confused memory of the sleepwalking scene.

There are several other indications in the text that either Shakespeare was himself revising or rewriting an older play, or, more probably, that he had a collaborator. These are most noticeable in the last Act, particularly in scenes 2, 6 and 8, where the rhythms are unlike Shakespeare's and the rhymes are unusually feeble. The difference between Shakespeare's usual style and the inferior work can be seen by comparing two small scenes, linking up the main action. In Act II Scene 4 the conversation between Ross and the old man is not in the style of Shakespeare, who seldom invented such a turgid phrase as 'dark night strangles the travelling lamp'. On the other hand, in Act III Scene 6 Lennox's speech is, by contrast, full of the subtlest tones and hints of meaning. At times the join where Shakespeare's verse is patched on to inferior work is almost perceptible. The speech (p. 101 l. 29) beginning 'If thou speak'st false . . .' begins in Shakespeare's style down to

> 'I pull in resolution, and begin
> To doubt th' equivocation of the fiend,
> That lies like truth. Fear not, till Birnam wood
> Do come to Dunsinane;'

Then the solemn rhythm changes pace, and proceeds at a rapid trot –

'Arm, arm, and out,
If this which he avouches, does appear,
There is nor flying hence, nor tarrying here,
I 'gin to be aweary of the sun,
And wish th' estate o' th' world were now undone.
Ring the alarum-bell, blow wind, come wrack,
At least we'll die with harness on our back.'

If, as is likely, these inconsistencies of style are due to hasty writing, then a probable occasion of the play was the visit of King Christian of Denmark, King James's brother-in-law, to the English Court from 17th July to 14th August, 1606. Shakespeare and his company were the King's Players, and it was a natural occasion for them to produce a story of Scottish History touching on the ancestry of their patron. In the previous summer, when King James made a visit in state to the University of Oxford, three small boys dressed like nymphs greeted him with a short Latin dialogue reminding him of the ancient legend of the Three Sisters who had prophesied the future glories of Banquo's descendants. Now, as before in other plays intended for the Court – *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* – Shakespeare worked in some compliment to the royal audience, such as the vision of the eight kings seen by Macbeth (p. 79), or the tactful reference to King James's divine touch in healing those afflicted by the King's Evil. There was no time to polish the play, for the King of Denmark arrived somewhat unexpectedly, so that Shakespeare worked on the high scenes, leaving the last Act but sketched out and ill-proportioned, the minor characters imperfect and slightly drawn, and trusting to an assistant to fill in the gaps. It was a common practice for dramatists to collaborate,

especially when, for any reason, a play was needed in a hurry.

This is, admittedly, a hypothesis, but some explanation of the inconsistency in *Macbeth* is necessary. I suggest therefore that *Macbeth* was written in haste by Shakespeare and Another, who was responsible for the Bleeding Captain, the Old Man, and much of Act V; some years later the play was revised for another Court performance, and the witch scenes, as they now exist, substituted by Middleton for those in the original play.

Macbeth was first printed in the First Folio in 1623; there is no earlier text. The text in the Folio is, on the whole, accurately printed, apparently from a fair copy made for stage use. It has certain peculiarities. Capital letters are used lavishly, and in several passages the division of the verse lines is apparently incorrect. Editors have endeavoured to set the verse lines right, but not always very successfully, for many verse lines in the play were not written in the formal five stress metre, but in a free rhythmic verse.

The punctuation of the Folio text differs from modern usage. The modern custom is to punctuate according to syntax, the Elizabethan to punctuate for recitation. The Folio text divides the play into Acts and Scenes, but gives no place headings; these have been added by editors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Indeed, the 'authorized text' of Shakespeare differs considerably from the Folio. A modern editor is therefore in difficulty. If he reprints exactly the Folio text with all its antique spellings and inconsistent punctuation he will confuse and irritate the general reader; if he simply follows the 'authorized text' he will annoy those who have studied the recent work of scholars. I have therefore compromised,

and the present text may best be described as the Folio text, conservatively modernized. The spelling is modernized, but the original punctuation and arrangement have been kept except in places where they seemed obviously wrong. The reader who is used to the 'authorised text' may find the text, at first sight, unfamiliar, but it is nearer to Shakespeare's own version, and to the play as presented by his actors.

The Tragedy of Macbeth