

Thomas Satchell, 'The spelling of the First Folio', *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 June 1920, 352.

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THE SPELLING OF THE FIRST FOLIO.

Sir, -- The spelling of the First Folio is a subject which, I believe, has not yet received much attention from Shakespearian scholars. Some investigations I have made would indicate that such a study would yield interesting results.

I have before me a verbal index to the First Folio text of *Macbeth*, recording not only every word in the text (including the proper names), and every word in the stage directions (excluding the proper names), but also all variations in spelling. A study of these variations has brought out some curious facts in regard to the compositors' attitude towards their "copy."

One might expect that if the Elizabethan compositors spelled according to their own inclination we should find a sequence of variations in spelling corresponding to the portions of the manuscript set by each compositor. Thus, we might expect to find a run of "do" followed by a run of "doe," these being the chief variants in the spelling of this word. In *Macbeth* these sequences do occur in some words, while in others no sequence of spelling is observable. Such words as "he," "we," and "me" vary from line to line. In "me" progress towards normalization has been great, only two cases of "mee" occurring in the play. But in the case of "he" and "we" the variants "hee" and "wee" are more frequent and seem to follow no sequence, both spellings sometimes occurring in the same line. The single vowel spellings are in the majority, showing which way the tide was running, but the frequency of the double vowel spellings prevents us from deciding whether the compositor was "following copy" or his own fancy. Apart from these and a few other words, however, the spelling of *Macbeth* shows a sequence of a remarkable nature.

The two common words "do" and "go" are the guides. There are three spellings of "do" -- "do," "doe," and "doo." From the beginning down to the end of I. v. the spelling is consistently

"doe." The word does not occur in I. vi., but in I. vii. the spelling is "do" (correcting the misprint "no" in I. vii. 55). From this point to III. iii. 20, the last place in the scene where the word occurs, we have "doe" again, and from the beginning of III. iv. to the end of the play we have "do" except in two cases, V. i. 37 and V. v. 36, where it appears as "doo." Practically, therefore, we may say that the play is divided into two halves, in the first of which the spelling "doe" is used, with the exception of I. vii., and in the second of which the spelling "do" is used. The division is done very accurately, it may be observed, for the end of III. iii. represents half the play.

This division of the play into two halves, which we may call A and B, is confirmed by the spellings

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of other common words. Thus, there is a consistent use of the spelling "goe" in A (with one exception) and of "go" in B. Further, the two sections are distinguished by a consistent use of such variations as "mercy" and "mercie," section A containing forms in "ie" and section B those in "y."

The following list of the variations in spelling in A and B is not a complete one, but is sufficient to show that it is not a question of mere chance: --

A.	B.
afraid (2)	affraid (3)
countreyes (1)	countries (3)
cryes (2)	cries (2)
deare (2)	deere (3)
dearest (4)	deerest (1)
doe (35)	do (41)
eyther (1)	either (1)
eternal (1)	eternall (1)
filthie (2)	filthy (1)
furie (1)	fury (2)
gift (1)	guift (1)
goe (15)	go (9)
haste (1)	hast (2)
hereafter (3)	heereafter (1)
interprete (1)	interpret (1)
majestie (2)	majesty (3)
memorie (1)	memory (1)
mercie (1)	mercy (1)

A.	B.
mistresse (1)	mistris (1)
neyether (2)	neither (1)
plentie (1)	plenty (1)
pluck (1)	plucke (1)
royaltie (1)	royalty (1)
rubs (1)	rubbes (1)
runs (1)	runnes (1)
societie (1)	society (1)
sunne (3)	sun (1)
sweare (1)	swear (1)
thick (3)	thicke (1)
traytor (1)	traitor (4)
trecherie (1)	trechery (1)
voyce (1)	voice (1)
wait (2)	waite (1)
weyward (3)	weyard (3)
winne (3)	win (1)

This list only contains words (with the exception of "do" and "go") which have no exceptions. The list would be considerably increased if the words which have only one or two exceptions were included. But I think it is sufficient to show beyond a doubt, that there is a consistent variation in the spellings of A and B. Particularly noticeable is the preference shown in A for the "ie" spelling in contrast to the preference shown by B for the "y" ending. Of course there are exceptions, such as the word "bloody," which occurs fourteen times in *Macbeth* (Bartlett records only four), and is only once spelled "bloodie," besides variations such as "heart" and "hart," which occur indiscriminately. But something more than mere chance must have led to the sequences noted.

There are two ways in which these sequences may be explained: --

(1) The manuscript was the work of two scribes, who each wrote half. (In this case we must suppose the compositors "followed copy" to a great extent.)

(2) The manuscript was set by two compositors, who each took half, and carried out their own ideas in the spelling.

In modern printing offices, in book work, each compositor will receive enough copy to carry him through the day. I have no information as to the procedure in the composing room in Shakespeare's

time, but it seems quite probable that in the case of the First Folio a play might be set by two composers, who would divide the manuscript before they started. One compositor might even take a whole play. In these circumstances it is very difficult to decide whether the sequence of spellings in *Macbeth* is due to (1) or (2).

I noted above that there was one scene in A (I. vii.) where the "do" spelling was used, which would suggest that this scene was the work of scribe or compositor B. As "do" is always associated with "go," we might expect to get some confirmation in this direction, but unfortunately the word "go" does not occur in this scene. Some of the exceptions noted above, however, throw some light on the matter. Thus "here" in this scene is spelled consistently "heere," although there are only two other cases in A (II. iv. and III. i.) where this spelling is used, and only one instance in B where it is not used. We also find "bin" for "been" in this scene, a spelling which only occurs elsewhere in B. There is thus some evidence that this scene contains peculiarities in spelling which are found elsewhere only in B, but again no clear proof that these peculiarities were part of the original manuscript.

Yours truly,
THOMAS SATCHELL.

Kobe, Japan, July 9, 1919.