The text divided into scenes

The text of *Macbeth*, as we find it in Folio, is more or less completely divided into numbered acts and scenes -- completely for the acts, not quite completely for the scenes. The scheme being used was conventional, then and later, for any lengthy play, but it disguises an important difference. Apart from the glaringly obvious fact that the end of an act has to coincide with the end of a scene, scenes and acts have nothing in common. The scenes are intrinsic divisions, written into the play by the author; the acts are extrinsic divisions, imposed on the play for the purpose of performance. Most of the time, it seems safe to say, this division was determined by the actors, not the author.

In the manuscript delivered by the author to the actors, the scenes, it appears, were not numbered; they may not even have been very clearly marked. Some plays as we find them in Folio -- *Antony and Cleopatra*, for instance -- are still in that pristine shape.* (It was, clearly, a matter of indifference for the printers whether a play had its divisions marked or not. They printed what was put in front of them. Any marking up that was done had been done before the printers got involved.)

* Except for the initial heading -- "Actus Primus. Scœna Prima." -- which was being carried forward mechanically from one play to the next (Willoughby 1932:15-19).

Capell was the first editor who appreciated the necessity of understanding what Shakespeare meant by a scene, so that the edition could be made conformable with his intentions: "with him, a change of scene implies generally a change of place, though not always; but always an entire evacuation of it, and a succession of new persons" (Capell 1768 1:25). The first half of that statement is wrong. A change of scene does always -- not just "generally" but invariably -- imply a change of place. There may or may not be some lapse of time, but there must be some sideways movement, even if just from one room to the next.* The second half, however, is exactly right. Each scene begins and ends with an empty stage, "an entire evacuation". That is Shakespeare's rule -- the rule, therefore, which every editor is bound to follow. (It is a sad fact that Capell, despite his having recognized the rule, frequently failed to apply it.)

* A character who exited at the end of a scene was never permitted to reappear straight away. The actor had to twiddle his thumbs for some time (while other characters got the next scene started) before he could enter again; and that delay represents the time that the character would take, in the real world, transporting himself from the location of the previous scene to the location of this one.

It is sometimes up to us, therefore, to formalize the division
of a play into scenes -- and that is not vastly difficult. We
work through the text, looking for the "Exits" and "Exeunts",
deciding in each case whether that direction results in an empty
stage. If it does, that is the end of a scene. It is possible,
of course, that an "Exeunt" may have been omitted accidentally,
and therefore we need to pay attention to the entrances too. If
a character who enters starts soliloquizing, or if two or more
characters who enter start talking to one another, we can be
fairly sure that this is the start of a new scene. In the end,
rather than just relying on the manuscript, we have to try to
visualize what is happening on the stage.

How long is a scene? Just as long (or as short) as Shakespeare
wanted it to be. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, as edited by Clark
and Wright (1866), there are two scenes consisting of four lines
each, and the last and longest scene runs to 362 lines.

(Headings for scenes in *Antony and Cleopatra* were first inserted
by Rowe (1709); and Rowe was right as far as he went,* but did
not go far enough. A fair amount of work remained to be done by
Dyce (1857). Those two four-line scenes were first marked off
in his edition (Dyce 1857 6:171, 194); there is actually a
three-line scene here too (Dyce 1857 6:190, Clark and Wright
1866:111),† overlooked even by him.)

* Except that one of his headings -- "SCENE VII. Alexandria." -- is
misplaced (Rowe 1709 6:2724). (It belongs with "Enter Antony, and Scarus",
ten lines back, not with this "Enter Antony".)

† "*Alarum. Drums and trumpets. Enter Agrippa and others. / Agr.* Retire,
we have engag'd ourselves too far: / Cæsar himself has work, and our
oppression / Exceeds what we expected. [*Exeunt.*" That is the entire
scene. (Short scenes such as this are often used to evoke the excitement
of a battle.)

In the manuscript of *Macbeth*, somebody had done the job of
inserting headings for the scenes before the play came to be
printed. True enough -- but to say that somebody had done the
job is not to say that he had done it well. Even if we end up
by agreeing with him, it is still up to us to work things out
for ourselves.* From Pope (1723) onwards,† editors have
sometimes decided that additional headings were needed. And
such is indeed the case. Though Folio's headings are mostly
right (as they could scarcely fail to be), they are, it seems to
me, defective in two places.‡

* Anyone who wants to try this should make a copy of the script of Folio
Macbeth, remove all the headings, and then work through the text on their
own, inserting a heading whenever the stage is entirely evacuated.

† Pope thought to improve on Shakespeare by starting a new scene whenever new characters entered. (Thus, for example, he made three scenes out of the third scene in *Macbeth*, four scenes out of the first scene in *Coriolanus*.) That is not at all the right idea.

‡ I reserve discussion of the break that I think should be made in the middle of the play, after III i 14.

(1) The stage should be entirely evacuated after "Exeunt" at 138b18, and a new scene (scene 11 in my numbering) should start after that, with the line "What will you do?" (II iii 167). Folio makes two mistakes here. A direction "Exeunt Malcolm and Donalbain" ought to appear at 138b5, after "... foot of motion" (II iii 153); and "Enter Malcolm and Donalbain" ought to appear at 138b19, at the beginning of this new scene.* A character who says "Let's away", as Donalbain does (II iii 150), is about to make his exit:† he does not intend to hang around on the stage waiting for everyone else to leave. At that point, moreover, Malcolm and Donalbain are, like all the other characters (except Macduff and Lennox), in a half-naked state. By the time they reappear, they are dressed in their travelling clothes and on their way to the stables: "Therefore to horse ..." (II iii 178). In the next scene, when Macduff tells Ross that the king's two sons "are stol'n away and fled" (II iv 37), he is only recounting what we have seen for ourselves. We have seen them steal away (II iii 153); and we have seen them flee (II iii 182).

* It is not problematic for both directions to go missing, because the (accidental) omission of one might easily provoke the (deliberate) omission of the other. If the "Exeunt" was omitted, the "Enter" would seem to be an error; if the "Enter" was omitted, the "Exeunt" would seem to be an error.

† Or "Let's hence", "Let's along", followed by "Exeunt", at the end of the first scene in *Coriolanus*.

(2) Whoever inserted the headings failed to finish the job. The last of his headings, towards the end of his "Actus Quintus", is "Scena Septima" (150b25); but the stage is entirely evacuated four times after that (not counting the final "Exeunt omnes"), and four more headings are needed. If the job had been properly completed, we would find "Scena Octava" before "Enter Macduff" (150b46), "Scena Nona" before "Enter Malcolm and Seyward" (151a3), "Scena Decima" before "Enter Macbeth" (151a12), and "Scena Undecima" before "Enter with drum and colours ..." (151b2). Some editors have supplied headings in some of those places, none that I know of in all of them. But scenes are scenes -- and I can see no reason for leaving some of them unmarked, nor any advantage in it. (In my numbering, Folio's "Scena Septima" comprises scenes 29--33.)

So much for the scenes: the "acts" are quite different
creatures. They have no intrinsic reason for existing: they
only exist because the intermissions exist. The audience
expected -- demanded -- that there should be four intermissions
in any long play, and the actors were willing -- happy -- to
comply. An "act" is just a segment of a play created by the
insertion of the intermissions.

Assuming that the endings of the scenes are clearly marked, we
ought not to have much difficulty deciding where to put the
intermissions. We are looking for four moments, approximately
equidistant, coinciding with the end of a scene. (If some of
the scenes are very long, that might not be as easy as it
sounds.) In other words, we do the same thing that we would do
if we were inserting commercial breaks into an old movie before
showing it on TV -- except that with a movie we would be looking
for moments with a blank screen, rather than moments with an
empty stage. After a commercial break, the action continues
from the point where it was interrupted, just as if no
interruption had occurred. And the same is true for an
intermission in a play.

But nothing is definite yet. Once the play has been tried out
on the stage, in rehearsal or in actual performance, we may
decide that some of the intermissions come too soon, or do not
come soon enough. If so, we are free to move them, one scene
this way or that. If the play undergoes some significant
alteration -- if scenes are added or omitted, lengthened or
shortened -- again the intermissions may need to be adjusted
accordingly. All that is for us -- the actors -- to determine.
Initially, perhaps, the author had some say in the matter: once
the play belongs to us, we do as we think best.

If the time arrives when some version of the play is put into
print, the intermissions for that version become frozen in
place.* After that, the rest follows automatically. With the
intermissions fixed, the acts number themselves; with the acts
fixed, the scenes number themselves -- or at least they do if we
let them. If we let them be numbered like this -- act by act,
as convention dictates -- their numbering is the last thing to
be settled. But that is not what I would recommend. On the
contrary, if I were editing a play I would think it best for the
scenes to be numbered consecutively all the way through, and for
the acts not to be mentioned except in footnotes.

* Some plays in Folio -- *Coriolanus*, for example -- have headings which
mark the intermissions ("Actus Secundus", "Actus Tertius", "Actus Quartus",
"Actus Quintus") but no headings for the scenes. (There are 29 scenes in
that play. Each act-heading doubles up as a scene-heading; so there are 24
scene-headings still to be supplied. Try the experiment yourself if you

want to: take my word for it that the endings of the scenes are all
correctly marked.)

I append a list of the scenes as I have numbered them in the
file I call script 1. For each scene, the second column gives
the number of lines, as they were printed in Folio. Scene 31 is
the shortest, scene 22 the longest. The total comes to 2532
lines.*

* This total does not quite tally with the "through line numbering"
introduced by Hinman (1968). He did not count the title (two lines) at the
beginning nor "FINIS" (one line) at the end. So his numbering ends at
"Exeunt Omnes" (V vii 136) with line 2529.

References

Capell 1768   Edward Capell (ed.), *Mr William Shakespeare his
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  The works of William Shakespeare, vol. 9 (Cambridge nd London,
  1866).

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  Shakespeare* (New York, 1968). "The Norton Facsimile."

Pope 1723   Alexander Pope (ed.), *The works of Mr. William
  Shakespear*, 6 vols. (London, 1723).

Rowe 1709   Nicholas Rowe (ed.), *The works of Mr. William
  Shakespear*, 6 vols. (London, 1709).

Willoughby 1932   E. E. Willoughby, *The printing of the First
  Folio of Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1932).

C.F. Oct 2024

The text divided into its constituent scenes

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 1    15      I i            When shall we three meet again?
 2    82      I ii           What bloody man is that?
 3   181      I iii          Where has thou been, sister?
 4    70      I iv           Is execution done on Cawdor?
 5    83      I v            They met me in the day of success,
 6    41      I vi           This castle hath a pleasant seat.
 7    97      I vii          If it were done, when 'tis done,
 8    78     II i            How goes the night, boy?
 9    95     II ii           That which hath made them drunk
10   166     II iii 1--166   Here's a knocking indeed.
11    16     II iii 167--82  What will you do?
12    57     II iv           Threescore and ten I can remember
13    14    III i 1--14      Thou hast it now,

14   156    III i 15--170    Here's our chief guest.
15    66    III ii           Is Banquo gone from court?
16    37    III iii          But who did bid thee join with us?
17   175    III iv           You know your own degrees.
18    42    III v            Why, how now, Hecat,
19    56    III vi           My former speeches have but hit
20   184     IV i            Thrice the brinded cat hath mewed.
21   102     IV ii           What had he done,
22   280     IV iii          Let us seek out some desolate shade
23    81      V i            I have two nights watched with you,
24    40      V ii           The English power is near,
25    74      V iii          Bring me no more reports.
26    31      V iv           Cousins, I hope the days
27    59      V v            Hang out our banners
28    17      V vi           Now near enough:
29    21      V vii 1--21     They have tied me to a stake.
30    11      V vii 22--32    That way the noise is.
31     9      V vii 33--41    This way, my lord.
32    43      V vii 42--84    Why should I play the Roman fool
33    53      V vii 85--137   I wish the friends we miss
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The last six scenes as they have been handled
or mishandled by different editors

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                  | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 32 | 33 ‖

                  vi  vii
           F1     | 28 | 29 ⋯ 30 ⋯ 31 ⋯ 32 ⋯ 33 ‖

                  vi
         Rowe     | 28 ⋯ 29 ⋯ 30 ⋯ 31 ⋯ 32 ⋯ 33 ‖

                  vi                  vii  viii
         Pope     | 28 ⋯ 29 ⋯ 30 ⋯ 31 | 32 | 33 ‖

                  vi  vii
  Capell as F1    | 28 | 29 ⋯ 30 ⋯ 31 ⋯ 32 ⋯ 33 ‖

                  vi  vii          viii
         Dyce     | 28 | 29 ⋯ 30 ⋯ 31 | 32 ⋯ 33 ‖

                  vi  vii          viii  ix
       Wilson     | 28 | 29 ⋯ 30 ⋯ 31 | 32 | 33 ‖
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