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Ben Jonson's "y" Spellings in the *Masque of Queens* Holograph

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While Herford and Simpson demonstrated the use of spelling evidence from Jonson's holograph *Masque of Queens* (British Museum Royal MS. 18 A. xlv) to identify authorial proof corrections in the 1616 Folio *Workes*, noting in selected instances Jonson's preferences for specific spellings, heretofore no comprehensive analysis of Jonson's spelling in the holograph has been attempted.¹ Although it is not the purpose of this note to present the results of such an analysis (I hope to publish a complete account of these at a later date), a number of specific autograph spellings as well as certain significant features of Jonson's spelling in the holograph deserve separate discussion in that they appear to contradict some of the conclusions advanced by Herford and Simpson which are relevant to determining the authority of specific Folio proof corrections and, therefore, can potentially contribute to knowledge of the Folio's textual history. The intention of this note is to show that while correctly concluding that Jonson preferred certain spellings to others, Herford and Simpson were mistaken in suggesting that Jonson preferred spelling "ie" to "y" in final syllables and favored eliminating "y" spellings generally. Evidence in the *Masque of Queens* holograph indicates just the opposite: Jonson more frequently spelled "y" than "ie" terminally and "y" medially. As these autograph spellings provide a substantial body of evidence whose authority is unquestionable, they merit additional scholarly consideration for what they might reveal about the authority of Jonson's printed texts upon which Herford and Simpson based their conclusions.

In their analysis of the proof corrections in signature F of the 1601 quarto of *Cynthia's Revels*, Herford and Simpson indicated Jonson's responsibility "for changing the '-y' of final syllables to '-ie'" and his consistency in eliminating "y" spellings in general (IV, 8-10). In the outer forme of signature F, for instance, Herford and Simpson suggested that Jonson corrected ten words in III.ii.—"any" (11. 49 and 53), "Courtly" (1. 48), "Enuy" (1. 23), "euery" (1. 47), "extraordinary" (1. 57), "Marry" (1. 46), "particularly" (1. 58), "slightly" (1.51), "Society" (1.34), and "waye" (1. 58)—by eliminating "y." Similarly, in leaf F2v, Herford and Simpson indicated that Jonson eliminated six other "y" spellings including, in III.iv., "away" (1.63), "body" (1. 50), "onely" (1. 71), and "truly" (1.51), while perhaps writing "Playes" (1. 67) and "eyther" (1. 48). Herford and Simpson tested Jonson's preference for "-ie" in *Cynthia's Revel's* "Induction" in which some twenty-three "-y" spellings in the 1601 quarto were changed to "ie" in the 1616 Folio while eight of the quarto's "-y" spellings were preserved. Among those "-y" spellings which Herford and Simpson believed that Jonson changed were "any" (I. 47) "Capacity" (1, 215), "Company" (1.183), "Countrey" (1. 43), "Enuy" (I' 30), "euery" (1. 181), "Memory" (1. 108), and "trechery" (1. 25). The preference for "-ie" was further tested by two proof corrections in the Folio's text of the "Induction"—"peremptory" (1. 74) and "deformity" (1. 120)—which Herford and Simpson identified as Jonson's.²

Analysis of Jonson's spellings in the *Masque of Queens* holograph reveals evidence which clearly contradicts Herford and Simpson's conclusions about Jonson's spelling preferences, indicating in fact that Jonson wrote terminal "-y" more frequently than "-ie" and consistently wrote

"y" medially. In the holograph Jonson ended some 146 different words occurring 427 times with "-y." Only sixteen different words appearing twenty-three times end with "-ie." Nearly equal in number, however, are words ending in "-ye"—eleven different words occurring thirteen times. A selection of Jonson's "-y" spellings in the holograph includes "any" (11. 42,105, 116 note o, 218, 309 note m, 359,637, 659, 662, and 666); "away" (11. 51, 70, and 327); "body" (Dedication 1. 8, and 11. 249 note f and 575); "capacity" (1. 106); "company" (1. 23); "countrey" (1. 607); "envy"(1. 422); "every" (Dedication 11. 5 and 28, and 11. 110, 208, 246, 247, 340 note o, 433, 434, 436, 440, 445, and 588); "memory" (Dedication 1. 36, and 11. 195 note 11,358,428, and 542); "only"(Dedication 11.30, 39, and 42, and 11. 14, 38, 80 note k, 116 note o, 119 note 12, 238, 356, 394, 443, 518, 521, and 650); "particularly" (1. 159 note 2); "trechery" (1. 518); "truely" (1. 135); and "way" (11. 99, 132 note p, and 774). In the holograph Jonson never spelled any of the words identified by Herford and Simpson with "ie."

That Jonson preferred to write "y" medially is also evident in the holograph. For example, 71 different words appearing 131 times in the holograph were spelled with "ay." The most significant example is "hayre" (11. 95 note n, 96, 181, and 246 note e, and 552). This spelling contradicts Herford and Simpson's suggestion that Jonson changed "hayre" to "haire" in 1601 *Cynthia's Revels* III.v. 78. In comparison, only four different words appearing six times in the holograph were spelled with "ai." Similarly, twenty-three words appearing thirty-eight times in the holograph were spelled with "oy." The most significant example is "choyse"(l. 410), which contradicts Herford and Simpson's suggestion that Jonson, in 1601 quarto III.iv., preferred "choice" (1. 95) and "choise"(l. 105). Jonson never used "oi" in comparable words in the holograph.

Herford and Simpson were correct in contending that Jonson preferred particular spellings to others and that knowledge of these preferences was useful in identifying authoritative characteristics of Jonson's text. Their conclusion that Jonson disfavored "y" spellings, however, was based on textual evidence of less authority than that witnessed in the *Masque of Queens* holograph. This note calls for a more comprehensive and thorough examination of the authoritative witnesses of Jonson's preferences, the holograph *Masque of Queens* being a principal example.

Notes

¹All quotations from Jonson and Herford and Simpson are from the eleven volume *Ben Jonson* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52). Herford and Simpson were mostly concerned with Jonson's classicized spelling of Greek and Latin derivatives in the holograph as well as in his other works; see especially IV, 337-38; V, 149, 278; VII, 206, 273; and IX, 47. The notable exception was Herford and Simpson's identification of the Folio proof correction of "Neyther" to "Neither" in *Catiline*, V. 212, as "a printer's correction" on the evidence Jonson's writing "neyther" in the holograph *Masque of Queens*, 1. 334 (IX, 71).

²Herford and Simpson noted that since these corrections occurred in verse, the printer would not have manipulated them in order to adjust spacing (IV, 9).