

Two Emendations to Measure for Measure

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TWO EMENDATIONS TO *MEASURE FOR MEASURE*

The purpose of this note is to attempt to justify two original emendations in my text of *Measure for Measure* for the third edition of the *Norton Shakespeare*.¹

2.4.73-7

Angelo attempts to entrap Isabella into compromising herself:

ANGELO Nay, but heare me,

Your sence pursues not mine: either you are ignorant,

Or seeme so crafty; and that's not good.

ISABELLA Let be ignorant, and in nothing good,

But graciously to know I am no better.²

All editions emend, and all emend to "Let me be ignorant, and in nothing good." But is this emendation necessarily the correct one?

¹ See William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure* in Stephen Greenblatt, gen. ed., *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd edition (New York, 2015), 2171-2240; for discussion of the overall textual situation, of the methodology followed here, and of the one other original emendation in that edition, see Matthew Steggle, "The cruces of *Measure for Measure* and EEBO-TCP", *Review of English Studies* 65 (2014): 438-455, to which this note is effectively an appendix.

² William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. Mark Eccles (New York, 1980), 2.4.73-7. Post-Eccles editions consulted include William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. N.W. Bawcutt (Oxford, 1991); ed. Nick de Somogyi (London, 2002); ed. Brian Gibbons, updated edn (Cambridge, 2006); ed. Grace Ioppolo (New York, 2010); *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington, 5th edn (London, 2004); William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, 2nd edition (Oxford, 2005); William Shakespeare, *Complete Works*, ed. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (London, 2007); *The Complete Works of Thomas Middleton*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford, 2007).

Early modern spelling had recurrent difficulties with the phrase "let it". In early modern writing, and in particular in early modern dramatic texts, the phrase was usually written out in full as it is now; but it could also be given as "let't". EEBO-TCP finds three examples of **let't** in the First Folio of Shakespeare, and dozens from other early modern texts. However, with its clashing pair of "t"s, "let't" itself was open to further contraction and potential corruption.

Consider, for instance, Ben Jonson, *Cynthia's Revels*, 5.1.110, where Cynthia requests Arete to introduce Crites to her. This line evolves through three different forms in three early editions, reflecting three different contractions of "let it":

Let, be thy care, to make vs knowne to him (Q, 1600)

Let' be thy care, to make vs knowne to him (F1, 1616)

Let't be thy care, to make vs known to him (F2, 1640)³

The earliest of these, obviously, is so minimal as to be potentially misleading, and the later forms are progressively more standardized. But a form of "let it be" which is even more streamlined than that in Jonson's quarto can be illustrated from the play *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1638). There, Saint Patrick accepts the advice of Saint Anthony to walk onwards: "Your counsell wee'le allow, on, let be so: / Come Gentlemen, lets walke".⁴ In this

³ For all three see Jonson, *Cynthia's Revels*, 5.6.110, cited from Ben Jonson, *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford, Percy Simpson, and Evelyn Simpson (Oxford, 1925-52). Similarly, at 5.11.31 of the same play, Q gives "let suffice" in place of F's "let't suffice".

⁴ John Kirke, *The seven champions of Christendome* (London, 1638), I4v.

conveniently unambiguous example, "let be" is clearly not the idiomatic "let be" meaning "leave off" or "leave [something] undisturbed" (*OED*, *Let* v.20). Rather, "let be so" seems to be the consequence of "let' be so" losing its apostrophe in transmission. The examples from the 1601 *Cynthia's Revels* and from *The Seven Champions* indicate that, when faced with the words "let be" in an early modern text, one should bear in mind the possibility that they stand for what modern spelling would render "let it be".

To return to the passage in question: as it stands, Isabella's speech is grammatically incomplete, and the reader will see the possibility of emending her first phrase to "let't be ignorant". One would posit that what was originally written "let' be" has lost its apostrophe in transmission. Either Ralph Crane omitted it in preparing the transcript that is generally thought to underlie F - and Crane, as Howard-Hill notes, was "often slapdash" in his writing of apostrophes - or else it was lost as a result of compositorial error.⁵ On this reading, Isabella's "it" answers Angelo's "That", and both pronouns refer to Isabella's behaviour. To paraphrase: "~~Let~~ Consider my behaviour ~~be~~ ignorant and ~~worthless~~ no good, except ~~to~~ for the fact that I know that I am no better". "Ignorant" here functions in *OED*'s sense 3, applying to actions, as it does in *Othello*, 4.2.70: "Alas, what ignorant sin have I committed".

Why has this straightforward-seeming emendation not been proposed before? The reason is that F2 renders Isabella's line as "Let me be ignorant, and in nothing good". In this version, Isabella answers not Angelo's "That" but his accusatory "you", but in terms of overall meaning, the effect of this is almost indistinguishable from "let it be ignorant". Every edition

⁵ T H Howard-Hill, *Ralph Crane and Some Shakespeare First Folio Comedies* (Charlottesville, 1972), 72.

of which I am aware accepts F2's emendation - and emendation it is, since F2 is not thought to have independent authority - with little or no discussion.

F2's emendation posits that the transmissional process omitted a single word, and that could certainly have happened.⁶ But the change suggested here requires a smaller error still: the omission of a single apostrophe from the phrase "let' be". This is an omission that can be paralleled from at least two other early modern dramatic texts, as discussed above.

The line, then, is better emended to "Let't be ignorant, and in nothing good." Isabella concedes the possibility of ignorance and worthlessness in her *behaviour*, not in herself.

4.1.53-4

Disguised as a Friar, the Duke asks Mariana if she trusts him:

Duk. Do you perswade yourself that I respect you?

Mar. Good Frier, I know you do, and haue found it.

Mariana's line is conspicuously unmetrical. Seeing no plausible reason for the unmetrality, most editors believe a word has dropped out, and most try to remedy or at least mitigate the

⁶ Cf. *As You Like It*, 4.1.1, where F2 emends "let me better acquainted" into the generally-accepted "let me be better acquainted". This is a good comparison, although in fairness the reduplication of "be" and "better" is arguably a more obvious cause of eyeskip than anything present in the *Measure for Measure* passage.

problem using emendation, the leading candidates being:

- and I have found it
- and oft have found it
- and so have found it

All three of these emendations make sense; none of them is obviously impossible; any of them probably gives the general idea of the putative original state of the line.⁷ I offer a fourth candidate: "and have so found it".

Of the three leading candidates, the first and second both require "found it" to function in an elliptical sense, meaning "found it to be so". This is not impossible, but sounds slightly awkward. The third alternative, "and so have found it" is preferable to them in that it requires no such ellipsis. And yet it, too, sounds vaguely unidiomatic.

That subjective impression is backed up by EEBO-TCP, which currently finds only two occurrences of the sequence of four words **so have found it**. What is more, in each case, the "so" belongs (at least in part) to the previous grammatical clause. For instance, Richard Parr argues that dying in God's service is a blessed thing, and "those who have done so have found it by experience, and have given in their Testimony to it".⁸ At the time of writing, EEBO-TCP contains no clear examples of "so have found it" functioning as an independent

⁷ Eccles, *Variorum*, listing further attempts on p.289.

⁸ Richard Parr, *A sermon preached at the funeral of that faithful servant of Christ, Robert Breton* (London, 1672), 8.

phrasal unit.

EEBO-TCP does, however, find six occurrences of **have so found it** functioning as a unit.⁹

This must then be considered a slightly more idiomatic word order. In 1614, the preacher Thomas Adams talks about the promise of salvation:

*To whom shall we goe? Lord, thou hast the words of eternall life. The Apostle doth so sound it, the Saints in Heauen haue so found it, and we, if we beleeeue it, if we receiue it, shall perceiue it, to be the word of life.*¹⁰

Adams's frame of reference is, obviously, different, but the phrase comes in the right general context: a truth at first thought likely, and then confirmed through experience. Another parallel comes from another clergyman, Joseph Mede, attempting to interpret the prophecies in the Book of Daniel: he has been

so curious as to enquire, whether the Desolation of City and Sanctuary (to be in the middle of the seventieth Week) were fulfilled to a very day or not? And as I think, I have so found it, very near, if not altogether...¹¹

Unlike its rival, then, "have so found it" has six clear documented early modern parallels.¹²

⁹ EEBO-TCP search carried out on 16 February 2016, variant spellings engaged. In fact, EEBO-TCP returns seven results, since the Mede passage is found twice over from two different editions.

¹⁰ Thomas Adams, *The deuills banket described in foure sermons* (London, 1614), 307.

¹¹ Joseph Mede, *Daniels weekes: an interpretation of part of the prophecy of Daniel* (London, 1643), 50.

What is more, whereas the other solutions to this crux posit an error with no clearly discernible cause - and while such errors are certainly more than possible - the error proposed here does come with a possible explanation. A manuscript reading "and have found it" is, to copyist or printer, potentially an invitation to eyeskip.

On the balance of probabilities, then, Mariana's line may better be emended to, "Good friar, I know you do, and have so found it."

Conclusion

These emendations are in some respects similar. Both are alternatives to accepted emendations in lines long thought to be corrupt; neither is greatly significant to the overall meaning; both cases come down to a least bad solution. None of that, of course, removes the requirement to defend them, and it is interesting that the weapons by which they may be attacked or defended lie increasingly in electronic databases such as EEBO-TCP.

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¹² **oft have found it** makes no appearances in EEBO-TCP, and neither does **have oft found it**. On the other hand, both **and have found it** and **I have found it** are both, of course, very frequent in senses that don't entirely parallel the *Measure for Measure* passage..