

SUMMARY: The document below is an unsigned letter to Sir Francis Walsingham dated 25 January 1587 said to have been written by Maliverny Catlyn, a spy in Walsingham's employ. Catlyn mentions Oxford's players among the foremost companies of the day, decries stage plays as an abuse, and calls it a 'woeful sight to see two hundred proud players jet in their silks'.

Little is known of Catlyn's career. In the letter below he calls himself a soldier. His first letter to Walsingham was written from Rouen on 22 April 1586. In June he was in Portsmouth jail and in August in the Marshalsea in London in connection with his activities as a spy. In late August Walsingham sent him to the north of England. By November 1586 he was back in London, at which time he was spying on Edward Somerset (d.1589), the Earl of Worcester mentioned in the Howard/Arundel allegations against Oxford. Catlyn writes:

*I spied the Earl of Worcester and the Lord Mordaunt go off to an obscure inn and have conference with a third man whom I knew not. I have within these four or five weeks used my best endeavour to pierce into the mind of a very great one of this realm and have been with him within these few hours, not doubting but to find his affections thoroughly and then I will advertise you.*

Catlyn went north again near the end of January 1587, and was back in London in April. In June 1587 he was still in London, but according to Conyers Read, 'that is the very last we hear of him'. A warrant dated 2 June 1589 granting a lease in reversion to Catlyn's widow establishes that he had died before that date. See Read, Conyers, *Mr. Secretary Walsingham and the Policy of Queen Elizabeth*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), Vol. II, pp. 322, 327, 335.

For Maliverny Catlyn, see also Cooper, John, *The Queen's Agent: Francis Walsingham at the Court of Elizabeth I*, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2011), p. 235 at:

<https://books.google.ca/books?id=mocnVcGOMUoC&pg=PA235&lpg=PA235&dq=%22Maliverny+Catlyn%22&source=bl&ots=-nGru5IdAm&sig=xXeL3t7vA6Ann0FJh9Bu37C0udw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjpS3kn5DRAhVC92MKHbQaCZcQ6AEIOzAI#v=onepage&q=%22Maliverny%20Catlyn%22&f=false>.

See also Adams, Robyn and Rosanna Cox, *Diplomacy and Early Modern Culture*, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 56 at:

<https://books.google.ca/books?id=5leCDAAAQBAJ&pg=PA56&lpg=PA56&dq=%22Maliverny%22&source=bl&ots=2PLVUmV9tg&sig=JMvzRlc8GuCG41W3cZEemQETK4k&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiq4O7IyZDRAhUC2WMKHTuFCCAQ6AEIJzAD#v=onepage&q=%22Maliverny%22&f=false>.

I have oftentimes purposed to attempt your Honour's patience in viewing this discourse following, but fearing lest I should be thought too officious I have let sleep my determination in hope that time would take away th' occasion, which I see, to my grief, runneth on a *malo ad peius*. The thing is this.

The daily abuse of stage plays is such an offence to the godly and so great a hindrance to the Gospel as the Papists do exceedingly rejoice at the blemish thereof, and not without cause, for every day in the week the players' bills are set up in sundry places of the city, some in the name of her Majesty's men, some the Earl of Leicester's, some the Earl of Oxford's, the Lord Admiral's, & divers others, so that when the bells toll to the lectures, the trumpets sound to the stages, whereat the wicked faction of Rome laugheth for joy while the godly weep for sorrow. Woe is me, the playhouses are pestered when the churches are naked; at the one it is not possible to get a place, at the other void seats are plenty. The profaning of the Sabbath is redressed, but as bad a custom entertained, and yet still our long-suffering God forbearth to punish. It is a woeful sight to see two hundred proud players jet in their silks where five hundred poor people starve in the streets, but if needs this mischief must be tolerated, whereat, no doubt, the highest frowneth, yet for God's sake, sir, let every stage in London pay a weekly pension to the poor, that *ex hoc malo proueniat aliquod bonum*. But it were rather to be wished that plays might be used as Apollo did his laughing, *semel in anno*. The Lord of Hosts will surely forsake to dwell amongst the tents of Israel if the sins of the people do still provoke him. The spoil and overthrow of Nineveh is feared and daily looked for; therefore more time to pray than to play. Now methinks I see your Honour smile and say to yourself, *These things are fitter for the pulpit than a soldier's pen*, but God, who searcheth the heart and reins, knoweth that I write not hypocritically, but from the very sorrow of my soul, and the rather to you because I know your affection and means of redress. And truly I am fully persuaded that it well agreeth with the office of every true Christian of what calling soever to labour about the building of Sion, lest in neglecting that work all other buildings be cast down and overthrown. God grant you may be mindful of this matter as not of least moment, and then I doubt not but remedy will follow, for where God is pleased, there all things go well, but when his wrath is kindled, there man's policy cannot prevent punishment. I hope this disliketh you not, but if it be a course not allowed, blame my heart, for that drew my hand to write.

Jennings of Portsmouth hath sent me word that he will speak with me tomorrow, and hath requested a note of my lodging. He cometh up secretly, and therefore I suppose his errand is extraordinary. For this sennight almost day by day I have given advertisement of French and Scottish designs(?) to T. P.

The Lord bless you in all things. The 25<sup>th</sup> of January 1586 [=1587].

Addressed: To the right honourable Sir Francis Walsingham, knight, her Majesty's Principal Secretary