

SUMMARY: The document below is the epistle 'To the Reader' from the 1600 edition of *Bel-vedere or The Garden of the Muses*, which contains unidentified excerpts from Oxford's poetry. As noted on p. iv of the Spenser Society's 1875 reprint, the epistle 'enumerates the authors from whom the extracts were made', but was 'omitted, for what reason it is hard to conjecture, in the second edition' of 1610. See *Bodenham's Belvedere, or The Garden of the Muses*, (Spenser Society, 1875), at:

<https://archive.org/stream/bodenhamsbelved00bodegoog#page/n27/mode/2up>.

See also the *ODNB* entry for John Bodenham, which mentions both Bodenham's connection with *Palladis Tamia* (1598) and the extensive allusion to *Belvedere* in the second part of *The Return From Parnassus*:

Bodenham [Bodnam], John (c.1559–1610), literary patron and grocer, was born in London, perhaps in the parish of St Stephen Walbrook. He was the eldest son in a family of five children of William Bodnam (d. 1580), grocer, and his wife, Katherine Wanton (d. in or before 1598), eldest daughter of Thomas Wanton of York. On 3 December 1570 he was admitted to the Merchant Taylors' School, London, and was also educated by a tutor.

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Bodenham's historical importance is as the initiator, projector, and patron of a series of five printed prose and poetical commonplace books, material for which he gathered from his extensive reading before handing it over to others for final arranging and editing. Three of the five are dedicated to Bodenham: Politeuphuia, Wits Commonwealth (1597), edited by Nicholas Ling; Belvedere, or, The Garden of the Muses (1600), a collection of 4482 one- or two-line poetical citations arranged, like the prose compilations, under commonplace headings, edited by Anthony Munday and dedicated to Bodenham, who is called:

*Arts lover, Learnings friend,
First causer and collectour of these floures*

and Englands Helicon (1600), edited by Nicholas Ling, with a dedicatory poem by A. B. (possibly the editor), 'To his loving kinde friend, Maister John Bodenham', that praises Bodenham for collecting the poetry and projecting the previous works. Francis Meres's Palladis tamia, Wits Treasury (1598) was dedicated to Thomas Eliot, but, Rollins points out (Rollins, 47–8), it was conceived as the second of a series of three prose compilations projected by Bodenham. The fifth text, Wits Theater of the Little World (1599), was edited by Robert Allott and published by Ling.

Politeuphuia and Wits Theater are commonplace-book compilations of prose aphorisms, sententiae, and reading notes, representing a practice widespread in manuscript culture, the material arranged under set headings facilitating their subsequent use in speech and writing. To this end, as Crawford has shown (Crawford, 199), the compiler, presumably

Bodenham, rewrote some poetical selections as prose to fit the general format. These popular publications went through many editions through the next century. In Belvedere the one- and two-line pentameter excerpts are arranged under commonplace headings—many prose excerpts actually being reformulated as verse. Its ballad-writing editor (Anthony Munday), the patron, and the collection itself are mocked in the contemporary Cambridge satiric comedy The Second Part of the Return from Parnassus (I.ii.173–335). A reprint of Belvedere was published in 1875 by the Spenser Society.

For the extensive allusion to *Belvedere* in the second part of *The Return From Parnassus*, see Macray, W.D., ed., *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus with The Two Parts of The Return From Parnassus; Three Comedies Performed in St. John's College Cambridge A.D. MDXCVII-MDCI*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1886), pp. 82-8 at:

<https://archive.org/stream/pilgrimagetoparn00macruoft#page/82/mode/2up>.

It shall be needless, gentle reader, to make any apology for the defence of this labour because the same being collected from so many singular men's works, and the worth of them all having been so especially approved and passed with no mean applause, the censure of all in general doth both disburden me of that pains and sets the better approbation on this excellent book. It shall be sufficient for me then to tell thee that here thou art brought into the Muses' garden, a place that may beseem the presence of the greatest prince in the world. Imagine then thy height of happiness in being admitted to so celestial a paradise. Let thy behaviour then, while thou art here, answer thy great fortune, and make use of thy time as so rich a treasure requireth.

The walks, alleys and passages in this garden are almost infinite, everywhere a turning, on all sides such windings in and out, yet all extending both to pleasure and profit, as very rare or seldom shalt thou see the like. Mark then what variety of flowers grow all along as thou goest, and trample on none rudely, for all are right precious. If thy conscience be wounded, here are store of herbs to heal it. If thy doubts be fearful, here are flowers of comfort. Are thy hopes frustrated? Here's immediate helps for them. In brief, what infirmity canst thou have, but here it may be cured? What delight or pleasure wouldst thou have, but here it is afforded?

Concerning the nature and quality of these excellent flowers, thou seest that they are most learned, grave and witty sentences, each line being a several sentence, and none exceeding two lines at the uttermost. All which being subjected under apt and proper heads as arguments what is then dilated and spoken of, even so each head hath first his definition in a couplet sentence, then the single and double sentences by variation of letter do follow, and lastly similes and examples in the same nature likewise to conclude every head or argument handled. So let this serve to show thee the whole intent of this work.

Now that everyone may be fully satisfied concerning this garden that no one man doth assume to himself the praise thereof or can arrogate to his own deserving those things which have been derived from so many rare and ingenious spirits, I have set down both how, whence and where these flowers had their first springing till thus they were drawn together into the Muses' garden, that every ground may challenge his own, each plant his particular, and no one be injured in the justice of his merit.

First, out of many excellent speeches spoken to her Majesty at tiltings, triumphs, masks, shows and devices performed in progress, as also out of divers choice ditties sung to her, and some especially proceeding from her own most sacred self, here are great store of them digested into their meet places according as the method of the work plainly delivereth. Likewise out of private poems, sonnets, ditties and other witty conceits given to her honourable Ladies and virtuous Maids of Honour according as they could be obtained by sight or favour of copying, a number of most witty and singular sentences.

Secondly, look what works of poetry have been put to the world's eye by that learned and right royal king and poet, James, King of Scotland, no one sentence of worth hath escaped, but are likewise here reduced into their right room and place.

Next, out of sundry things extant and many in private done by these right honourable persons following:

Thomas, Earl of Surrey
The Lord Marquess of Winchester
Mary, Countess of Pembroke
Sir Philip Sidney
(From poems and works of these noble personages extant)

Edward, Earl of Oxford
Ferdinando, Earl of Derby
Sir Walter Raleigh
Sir Edward Dyer
Fulke Greville, esquire
Sir John Harington
(From divers essays of their poetry, some extant among other honourable personages' writings, some from private labours and translations)

Edmund Spenser
Henry Constable, esquire
Samuel Daniel
Thomas Lodge, Doctor of Physic
Thomas Watson
Michael Drayton
John Davies
Thomas Hudson
Henry Lok, esquire

John Marston
Christopher Marlowe
Benjamin Jonson
William Shakespeare
Thomas Churchyard, esquire
Thomas Nash
Thomas Kyd
George Pele
Robert Greene
Joshua Sylvester
Nicholas Breton
Gervase Markham
Thomas Storer
Robert Wilmot
Christopher Middleton
Richard Barnfield

(These being modern and extant poets that have lived together, from many of their extant works and some kept in private)

Thomas Norton, esquire
George Gascoigne, esquire
Francis Kinwelmersh, esquire
Thomas Atslowe
George Whetstone

(These, being deceased, have left divers extant labours and many more held back from publishing which for the most part have been perused and their due right here given them in the Muses' garden)

Besides what excellent sentences have been in any presented tragedy, history, pastoral or comedy, they have been likewise gathered, and are here inserted in their proper places.