

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter dated 10 October 1585 from Sir John North (c.1550-1597) to Sir William More (1520-1600) of Loseley requesting More to extend a lease in the Blackfriars which the Italian fence-master, Rocco Bonetti (d.1587), had purchased from Oxford's servant, John Lyly.

It is helpful to clarify that Lyly held four different leases in the Blackfriars, all four of which Wallace considers were given to Lyly by Oxford. See Wallace, Charles William, *The Evolution of the English Drama up to Shakespeare*, (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1912), p. 187. The first, and best-known, was the lease of the site of the first Blackfriars theatre, which had originally been granted by Sir William More to Richard Farrant (d. 30 November 1580). Farrant left it in his will to his wife, Anne, who sold it to William Hunnis and John Newman, who sold it to Henry Evans, who sold it to Oxford, who gave it to John Lyly. See Folger MS L.b.350. Sir William More eventually recovered that lease through litigation in 1584, and according to Wallace, *supra*, p. 194:

When the Farrant-Lyly theatre broke up, the lease was forfeited to More, and Lyly could not sell it.

Although he could not sell the Farrant lease, Lyly could and did sell the other three. He sold two leases to Henry Carey (1526-1596), 1st Baron Hunsdon, who used the premises as his residence. See Wallace, *supra*, pp. 186-7.

Lyly's fourth lease, the lease he sold to Bonetti, is the one referred to by North in the letter below. See Wallace, *supra*, p. 187.

For Sir John North, see the *ODNB* article. For another letter from North to More on the same subject dated 6 November 1585, see SHC LM/COR/3/383.

Sir Walter Raleigh and Oxford's brother-in-law, Peregrine Bertie (1555-1601), Lord Willoughby d'Eresby, also wrote to More on Bonetti's behalf. For Raleigh's letter see Folger MS L.b.37. For Lord Willoughby's letter see SHC LM/COR/3/372. See also the Loseley manuscripts at:

http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/results/r?_ep=Rocco&_dss=range&_ro=any&_p=1500&Refine+dates=Refine.

Shakespeare alludes to Bonetti's skill as a fencer in *Romeo and Juliet* ('the very butcher of a silk button'). Since a topical allusion of this sort would not have been made after Bonetti's death, the allusion indicates that *Romeo and Juliet* was written prior to 1587.

Sir, I have received both your letters wherein you offer as much friendship as may be required, the which I have showed and read unto Rocco, whom I reproved for his ill behaviour and clamorous speeches towards you. The man truly denieth the same unto

me, and is wholly content by good persuasion to refer himself and the consideration of his poor estate, wife and family with all humility unto your good courtesy(?) and favour.

Truly I do speak it from my heart with pity of the party, that he is in marvellous poor estate, and compelled to extremity for his maintenance. I am thoroughly acquainted with it because I have imparted of mine own upon compassion unto him, who hath freely of late with tears discovered his present misery unto me, and is like with despair to continue if you do withdraw your favour from him.

You know, sir, that the desperate estate of a distressed person doth often deprive them of the terms of reason, and so I pray you in charity and wisdom consider of the poor stranger who feareth, doubeth and distrusteth by the former deceit and double dealings of lewd persons.

I did understand by the bringers of my letter unto you that Mr More, your son, did take exception unto me that lightly I would believe and be persuaded to witness a promise by comparing and preferring Mr Dr Gifford. I trust he hath no cause to condemn without a cause, especially being a gentleman accounted wise and discreet, and nothing rash in judgment. In truth, thus much I said at Westminster (as far as I remember), that you said no man should prevent him of that house, and if I be not deceived, that during his life also he should not be thrust out. I am not of that profession to make *officiosum mendacium* [=lies to help another] for th' advantage of mine own brother. I am a Christian, and will embrace the truth.

But to conclude, Sir William More, you shall [+make?] me beholding unto you and command me in any matter if you will vouchsafe at my request to grant him some lease upon th' agreement of rent. Otherwise, I speak it unfeignedly, his estate is most miserable.

The poor man wholly submitteth and referreth himself unto you, so leaving him to your good consideration and with my best commendations, praying you to accept of this my hasty scribbling by night. London, 10 October 1585.

Your assured friend,

John North

Endorsed: (1) To the right worshipful Sir William More at Loseley; (2) Doctor Bayly for my wife's [illegible]