

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter dated 5 March 1579 from Gilbert Talbot (1552-1616), later 7th Earl of Shrewsbury, to his father, George Talbot (c.1522-1590), 6th Earl of Shrewsbury, concerning events at court.

Talbot mentions a 'devise' presented before the Queen at Shrovetide (1 – 3 March) by Oxford and three of his young kinsmen: Philip Howard (1557-1595), later 13th Earl of Arundel, and his younger half brother, Thomas Howard (1561-1626), later 1st Earl of Suffolk, sons of Oxford's recently-executed first cousin, Thomas Howard (1538-1572), 4th Duke of Norfolk, and Oxford's nephew, Frederick, Lord Windsor, son of Oxford's half-sister, Katherine de Vere, and Edward, 3rd Lord Windsor. For the will of Frederick, Lord Windsor, see TNA PROB 11/69/1.

The 'devise' was also described by the French ambassador to England, Michel de Castelnau (c.152-1592), Sieur de Mauvissiere, who was present at the performance, together with Jean de Simier (see below):

une belle comedie qui se conclust par ung mariage puis vint une Navre du bout d'une grande salle ou estoient le comte d'Auxford et le comte de Succex et trois ou quatre jeunes seigneurs qui vindrent faire ung naufrage au mitan de la salle & sortirent de la avec ung ballet bien concerté et prindrent ladicte royne, qui, comme il est croyable devoit estre de la partie puis luy firent des presens fort riches de la reste de leur naufrage & a quelques dames, et le tout n'estoit en conclusion que paroles d'amour & de mariage pour faire de belles alliances affin de vivre la reste de ceste vie en plisir et repos.

The 'devise' was also mentioned by Anthony Munday on p. 35 of *Zelauto* (1580) :

a brave and comely ship brought in before her Majesty wherein were certain of her noble Lords, and this ship was made with a gallant devise that in her presence it ran upon a rock & was despoiled. This credit was the very bravest devise that ever I saw, and worthy of innumerable commendations.

For the foregoing quotations from Mauvissiere and Munday, see Woudhuysen, H. R., *Leicester's literary patronage*, Dphil, University of Oxford, 1981, pp. 309-10 at:

<http://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:3c0b5d66-d7fa-4d49-b330-b1e43b46fbd3>.

See also Wiggins, Martin, *British Drama 1533-1642: A Catalogue*, Vol. II, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 222-4 at:

http://books.google.ca/books?id=VNoVxu3SG1IC&pg=PA222&lpg=PA222&dq=%22wiggins%22+%22mauvissiere%22&source=bl&ots=Dqd7gn5Fy2&sig=M_7y0GMC-Na9ed4DIYlNGuqjiI&hl=en&sa=X&ei=pI-YU97c9LZoAS_hYKYBA&ved=0CBwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=%22wiggins%22%20%22mauvissiere%22&f=false.

As mentioned by Talbot in the letter below, the Lord Keeper, Sir Nicholas Bacon, had died on 20 February 1579. He was succeeded by Sir Thomas Bromley (c.1530-1587). In 1575 Bromley had acted as one of three trustees appointed by Oxford to handle sales of his lands while he was on his continental tour. See SRO D615/D 45 (1).

The rumour reported by Talbot of the death of the Palsgrave Lewis VI, elder brother of Duke John Casimir (1543-1592), was premature; he did not die until 1583. His infant son, Frederick IV (1574-1610), survived him, and had a son, Frederick V (1596-1632), who married Elizabeth Stuart (1596-1662), the daughter of James I of England.

Jean de Simier, Baron de St Marc, mentioned in the letter as having dined with Leicester, had been sent to England by Francois, Duke of Alençon to further his suit for the hand of Queen Elizabeth.

Dr Julio Borgarucci, mentioned in the letter, was a close association of the Earl of Leicester. For his will, dated 26 and 30 December 1580 and proved 31 January 1581, see TNA PROB 11/63/44.

'My Lady' mentioned in the letter was the Earl of Shrewsbury's second wife, Bess of Hardwick (1527?-1608).

The transcript below is taken from Lodge, Edmund, *Illustrations of British History, Biography, and Manners in the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, & James I*, vol. II (London: G. Nicol, 1791) pp. 209-11.

My duty most humbly remembered, right honourable my singular good Lord & father, Mr Secretary Walsingham sent me this morning a letter which in his packet came by post from your Lordship dated on Shrovetide Sunday. I heartily thank God that your Lordship hath your health so well, and for such bruits as your Lordship heard should be raised of the contrary, it is a token that the vipers that devise it cannot tell by what other means to spit any of their poison against you, and God be therefore thanked that they have no better matter to work upon.

There is no great news stirring here that cometh to my knowledge. It is not yet known who shall be made Lord Keeper. Some think one & some another. For my own part, I can give no guess.

It is but vain to trouble your Lordship with such shows as was showed before her Majesty this Shrovetide at night. The chiefest was a devise presented by the persons of th' Earl of Oxford, th' Earl of Surrey, the Lords Thomas Howard & Windsor. The devise was prettier than it had hap to be performed, but the best of it (& I think the best liked) was two rich jewels which was presented to her Majesty by the 2 Earls.

Other matters is that the Duke Casimir is safely landed at Flushing after he had tarried a long while on the coast on this side for a wind, and was after driven to Black Nest. He is far to blame if he speak not great honour of her Majesty and her realm, for there was never any of his coat that was able to brag of the like entertainment that he received here. It is said that his elder brother, the Palsgrave, is dead, & then, as I suppose, the Duke Casimir is to hold his room during the nonage of his elder brother's son, who is an infant, and if the said child miscarry, the whole is his, and then shall he be a very great Prince. It is a good change for her Majesty and this realm if it be so, for then she shall possess a noble, honest, able friend of this Duke to pleasure her, and lose an evil-affected froward Lutheran, if not an obstinate Papist, in part of his elder brother.

My Lord of Leicester is now at Wanstead, and this day Monsieur Simier & his company do dine there with him. He returneth again tomorrow. My Lord Treasurer was made a little afraid with the gout, but he entreated him so discourteously as he is departed from him till a better opportunity. Belike his Lordship is not at leisure to entertain him now, insomuch as he is now afoot again, and cometh abroad.

Mr Julio hath not yet fully ended with my wife, but he is very near it, and assureth himself, by God's grace, of her perfect recovery & well doing.

I know not wherewith to trouble my Lady at this present, but will, God willing, not forget my duty to her by Tymple.

And so most humbly I beseech your Honour's blessing & hers with my wonted prayer for your long continuance in all honour & most perfect health. At your Lordship's little house near Charing Cross this 5th day of March 1578 [=1579], being Thursday at night.

Your Lordship's most humble & obedient loving son,

Gilbert Talbot

My Lord my brother tarrieth only for her Majesty's letters to my Lady, which she saith she will write in her own hand so as nobody shall be acquainted with a word therein till my Lady receive it. I have not seen her look better a great while, neither better disposed; the living God long continue it.