
SUMMARY: Dedicatory epistle to Oxford in Anthony Munday's *Zelauto*, published in 1580. Munday identifies himself in the epistle as Oxford's servant. *Zelauto* is considered a source of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.

To the right honourable his singular good Lord and master, Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxenford, Viscount Bulbeck, Lord Sanford and of Badlesmere, and Lord High Chamberlain of England, Anthony Munday wisheth all happiness in this honourable estate, and after death eternal life.

After that the English prince (right honourable and my very good Lord) had taken view of the seemly portraiture of Gridonia, her tender infant lying by her, and leading two lions in her hand, he presently left the court and took himself to travel. When the princely Primaleon heard pronounced before his famous father, the Emperor of Constantinople, the sorrowful letters sent by the Lady of the Lake, how his best beloved brother was lost in the unfortunate forest of England, he abandoned all his courtly delights, and never ceased wandering till he became prisoner in the same place. So my simple self (right honourable), having sufficiently seen the rare virtues of your noble mind, the heroic qualities of your prudent person, thought, though ability were inferior to gratify with some gift, yet goodwill was ample to bestow with the best. When all the brave gallants and worthy gentlemen in Rome presented unto the Emperor jewels and gifts of great value and estimation, a poor citizen amongst them all brought a handful of flowers and offered them to the Emperor, the which he received graciously and with great affection, and gave him a great reward. Why (quoth one of the gentlemen), how durst thou presume to give so poor a present to so puissant a person? Why (quoth the citizen), how durst they be so bold to give such great gifts? Quoth the gentleman, they are of great credit, and beside, their gifts worthy the receiving. And I am poor (quoth the citizen), and therefore I give such a mean gift, yet hath it been gratefully accepted, and although they descend of such noble lineages, yet do they owe dutiful allegiance unto the Emperor, and as poor as I am, I bear him as true a heart as the best. Even so my poor gift hath been as faithfully delivered as the richest jewel that was by them presented.

And lo, right honourable, among such expert heads, such pregnant inventions and such commendable writers as prefer to your seemly self works worthy of eternal memory, a simple soul (more emboldened on your clemency than any action whatsoever he is able to make manifest) presumeth to present you with such unpolished practices as his simple skill is able to comprehend. Yet thus much I am to assure your Honour, that among all them which owe you dutiful service, and among all the brave books which have been bestowed, these my little labours contain so much faithful zeal to your welfare as others whatsoever, I speak without any exception. But lest that your Honour should deem I forge my tale on flattery, and that I utter with my mouth my heart thinketh not, I wish for the trial of my trustiness what reasonable affairs your Honour can best devise; so shall your mind be delivered from doubt and myself rid of any such reproach. But as the puissantest prince is not void of enemies, the gallantest champion free from foes, and the

most honest liver without some backbiters, even so the bravest books hath many malicious judgments and the wisest writers not without rash reports. If then (right honourable) the most famous are found fault withal, the cunningest controlled, & the promptest wits reproached by spiteful speeches, how dare so rude a writer as I seem to set forth so mean a matter, so weak a work, and so skillless a style? When the learned are deluded, I must needs be mocked, and when the skilfullest are scorned, I must needs be derided. But yet I remember the wise will not reprehend rashly, the learned condemn so lightly, nor the courteous misconstrue the good intent of the writer, but only such as Aesop's dog, that brags but dares not bite, hid in a hole and dare not show their heads; against all such the countenance of your Honour is sufficient to contend, which makes me not fear the force of their envy. The chirurgeon more doubteth the hidden fistule than the wide wound, the worthiest warrior more feareth the secret assault than the boldest battle, a little hook taketh a great fish, a little wind falleth down big fruit, a small spark kindleth to a great fire, a little stone may make a tall man stumble, & a small wound kill a puissant person. Even so the hidden enemy may sooner harm a man than when he trieth his quarrel face to face, and the least report of a slanderous tongue (being lightly believed) may discredit him to his utter undoing. But for my part I fear not; let them prate at their pleasure & talk till their tongues ache. Your Honour to please is the chief of my choice, your goodwill to gain is my wished reward, which shall be more welcome than Croesus's abundance and more heartily accepted than any worldly wealth. The last part of this work remaineth unfinished, the which for brevity of time and speediness in the imprinting I was constrained to permit till more limited leisure, desiring your Honour to accept this in mean time as a sign and token of my dutiful goodwill. Not long it will be before the rest be finished, and the renowned *Palmerin of England* with all speed shall be sent you. Thus praying for your prosperity and the increase of your honourable dignity, I commend your worthy state to the heavenly eternity.

Your Honour's most dutiful servant at all assays,
Anthony Munday