

SUMMARY: The document below is Oxford's Latin epistle dated 3 January 1571 [=1572 New Style] in praise of Bartholomew Clerke's *Balthasaris Castilionis Comitis De Curiali siue Aulico*, a translation into Latin of Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*. The work was dedicated by Clerke to Queen Elizabeth. In addition, the introductory material contains a secondary dedication to Lord Buckhurst, and a commendatory epistle from Buckhurst to Clerke.

Oxford's Latin epistle was praised by Gabriel Harvey in *Gratulationes Valdinenses* in 1578 (see STC 12901):

*Go, Mars will see you in safety and Hermes attend you; aegis-sounding Pallas will be by and will instruct your heart and spirit, while long since did Phoebus Apollo cultivate your mind with the arts. Your British numbers have been widely sung, while your Epistle testifies how much you excel in letters, being more courtly than Castiglione himself, more polished. I have seen your many Latin things, and more English are extant; of French and Italian muses, the manners of many peoples, their arts and laws you have drunk deeply. Not in vain was Sturmius himself known to you, nor so many Frenchmen and polished Italians, nor Germans.*

For the will of Bartholomew Clerke (c.1537-1590), see TNA PROB 11/75/199.

A transcript of the Latin of the 1571 [=1572 New Style] edition is given below, followed by an English translation by Dr. Dana F. Sutton, Professor Emeritus of Classics, The University of California, Irvine.

Edouardus Verus, Comes Oxoniae, Dominus magnus Angliae Camerarius, Vicecomes Bulbeck, & Dominus de Scales, & Badilsmere Lectori. S. D.

Castilionis Itali conuersione{m}, a Clerko meo iampride{m} susceptam, ornaremne scriptis & literis meis, an grato tantum animi studio prosequerem, cum saepe diuq{ue} deliberassem, in ancipites cogitationes distrahebar. Alterum enim facultatis maioris, & artificij videbatur : voluntatis alterum, & studij non minoris : vtrumq{ue} autem, cum exquisitae industriae, tum beneuolentiae singularis.

Feci tandem, & feci certe non inuitus, vt ad id studium, quo libru{m} hunc complexus sum, laureolam hanc nostra{m} qualemcunq{ue} adiungerem, ne aut voluntas nostra, (quae summa fuit) sine literis obscura fuisset : aut facultas illa (quae exigua est) lucem oculosq{ue} hominum formidare videretur.

Ac in istam quidem Aulici descriptionem multiplices mihi dissemina{n}dae laudes sunt. Nam & authorem, & Interpretem, & tanti, ac potius tantam operis patronam (cuius nomine ipso augustum plane atq{ue} honorificu{m} opus apparet) vt summis

maximisq{ue} laudibus exornem, dignu{m} plane, ac prope etiam necessariu{m} videtur.

Quid enim difficilior quisq{uam}, quid praeclarius, quid magnificentius in se suscepit, q{uam} artifex ille Castilio, qui eam aulici formam effigiemq{ue} expressit, cui nihil addi possit, in quo nihil redundet, quem summum hominem & perfectissimu{m} iudicemus ? Itaq{ue} cum natura ipsa nihil omni ex parte perfectum expoliuerit : hominum autem mores, eam, quam tribuit natura, dignitate{m} peruertant [quare whether a printer's error for praevertant?]: & seipsum vicit, qui reliquos vincit : & naturam superauit, quae a nemine vnquam superata est. Huc accedit, quam accurata res sit, quemadmodum in tanta Aulæ magnifice{n}tia, tanto splendore hominum, tanto exterorum concursu, in ipsis etiam oculis vultuq{ue} principis viuendum sit, praecepta dare.

Quibus plura, atq{ue} maiora Castilio expressit. Quis enim de principibus viris maiori grauitate ? Quis de illustribus foeminis dignitate ampliori ? Nemo de re militari ornatus, de equorum concursu aptius, de conserendis in procinctis manibus praeclarius aut admirabilior. Non scribam, quanta cum concinnitate & praestantiae, in summis personis, virtutum ornamenta depinxerit : nec referam, in ijs, qui Aulici esse non possunt, quemadmodum aut vitium aliquod insigne, aut ridiculum ingenium, aut mores agrestes & inurbanos, aut speciem deformem delinearit. Quicquid est in sermonibus hominum, in congressu, & societate ciuili, aut decoru{m}, atq{ue} ingenium: aut deforme, & turpe : id eo habitu illustrauit, vt etiam oculis cerni posse videatur.

Huic tantarum reru{m} Autori, oratori etiam non indiserto, nouum lumen orationis accessit. Latinus enim iam Aulicus, tanquam ex veteri illa vrbe Romana, in qua eloquentiae studia vigerunt, in curiam nostram vultum retulit, egregio habitu, summo apparatu, admiranda dignitate. Quod factum est Clerki nostri, cum incredibili ingenio, tum eloquentia singulari. Excitauit enim sopitam illam suam dicendi suauitatem : ornamenta & lumina, quae seposuit, ad res dignissimas reuocauit. Ergo maiori laude afficiendus cumulandusq{ue} est : qui rebus tantis (cum essent magnae) vt maiores essent maxima lumina & ornamenta adiecit.

Quis enim aut verborum vim plenius expressit ? aut sententiarum dignitatem illustrauit ornatus ? aut rerum varietatem artificiosius subsequitur ? Si res grauioribus in sermonem incidant, verbis amplioribus & grauioribus explicat : si familiares & facetiae, festiuis quidem atq{ue} argutis. Cum igitur & verbis pure atq{ue} ornate, & prudenter dilucideq{ue} sententijs, & toto elocutionis genere cum dignitate scribat : egregium quoddam ex hijs opus profluat atq{ue} promanet, necesse est. Mihi quidem tale videtur, vt Aulicum hunc Latinum cum lego, Crassum, Antonium, & Hortensium audire videar ijsdem de rebus disserentes.

Atq{ue} haec omnia tanta cum sint, fecit homo non imprudens, vt conuersionem suam vno omnium maximo ornamento illustraret. Quid enim potuit aut ad subsidium firmiter, aut ad gloriam illustrius, aut ad fructum fieri vberius : quam quod Aulicum suum Illustrissimae amplissimaeq{ue} Principi dicauerit ? in quam cu{m} omnes Aulicae

virtutes transfusae sunt : tum diuiniore quaedam & plane caelestes infusae. Cuius praestantiam omnem si oratione complecti me posse existimarem, imprudens essem. Nulla est enim tanta scribendi vis, tantaque copiae, nullum tam apparatus orationis genus, quod illius virtus non superet. Persapienter igitur interpres iste talem quaesivit operis patronam, virtute quidem praestantissimam, ingenio sapientissimam, Religione optimam, doctrina cum excultissimam tum in alijs etiam literarum studiae exornantem [quare whether a printer's error for studiis exornatam?].

Quae si sapientissimorum principum clarissima insignia, si florentis reipublicae certissima praesidia, si optimorum ciuium ornamenta maxima & suo merito, & omnium iudicio, semper sunt habita : ea & autoritate tueri, & praemijs amplificare, & nominis sui titulo insignire : res profecto, cum omni Principe dignae, tum nostra videtur Principe dignissima, cui vni omnis omnium Musarum laus & literarum gloriae attribuendae videtur.

Datum Ex Aula regia tertio Nonas Ianuarij. 1571

Edward Vere, Earl of Oxford, Lord Great Chamberlain of England, Viscount Bulbeck,  
and Lord Scales and Baldesmere greets the reader

I have been doubtfully dithering whether I should adorn this translation of Castiglione the Italian, long since undertaken by my friend Clerke, with a written preface, or whether I should simply devote myself to it with a grateful mind, and I have often debated with myself at length and have been of varying opinions. For the one course seemed to require greater talent and art than I possess, whereas the other needed no less enthusiasm and care, and the both of them required particular industry and singular benevolence.

In the end I created this, and assuredly I did not do so unwillingly, so that I might add my own little laurel (of whatever quality it may be) to the relish with which I have embraced this book, lest either my enthusiasm (which has been great) might lie in obscurity without my written attestation, or my ability (which is small) might seem to fear the light and men's eyes.

In my opinion, many forms of praise deserve to be accorded to this description of the courtier, and it appears worthy, indeed downright necessary, that I bestow the highest lauds on the author, the translator, and above all on the patroness of the work (thanks to whose very name it stands forth as a very august and honorable opus).

For what man has undertaken a more difficult, more distinguished, or grander task than the artistic Castiglione, who has limned a form and model of the courtier to which nothing can be added, in which nothing is superfluous, describing a man whom we should adjudge to be a consummate and perfect? Therefore, since nature

herself has brought nothing to polished perfection in every respect, human manners should improve on that dignity conferred by nature, and Castiglione, who surpasses others, has both surpassed himself and bested nature (who has never been bested by any man). Then too, what a painstaking a business it is to set forth precepts on how to live in such great magnificence of a court, in such human splendor, among such a great concourse of foreigners, in the very eyes and presence of one's sovereign!

Castiglione has done more and greater things than these. For who has written of princes with greater gravity, of famous women with more ample dignity? Nobody has written more lavishly of military matters, more to the point about cavalry encounters, more brilliantly or admirably about encounters on the field of battle. I shall not write about the great neatness and excellence with which he has depicted the ornaments of the virtues in personages of the highest rank. I shall not repeat how he has described the notable viciousness, silly character, uncouth and boorish manners, or unhandsome appearance that exist in those who are incapable of being courtiers. He has represented whatever exists in human conversation, intercourse and society that is either decorous and polite, or unsightly and debased, with such a quality that you seem to see it before your eyes.

The man who wrote about such important matters (even though he was no mean stylist) has been enhanced by this new light of eloquence. For now the Latin courtier has once more shown his face at our court (as if returned from that city of Rome wherein the pursuit of eloquence thrived), having an excellent appearance, equipped with consummate endowments, and wonderful dignity. This is the achievement of friend Clerke, accomplished with unbelievable genius and singular eloquence. For he has revived that dormant sweetness of speech he possesses; for these most worthy matters he has recalled the ornaments and lights he had set aside. Therefore he is to be lauded and heaped with all the greater praise, that he has made such things, great as they are, yet more so by adding these lights and ornaments.

For who has expressed the significance of his words more fully? Or shone a more elegant light on the dignity of his sentences? If more serious matters come up in the discourse, he renders them in words more ample and grave, but if everyday and witty, he uses clever and witty ones. Since, therefore, he employs a pure and elegant vocabulary, writes his sentences with good style, prudence, and clarity, and employs an overall manner of eloquence marked by dignity, an excellent work must needs flow and derive from these things. It strikes me as such, with the result that, when I read this Latin *Courtier*, I seem to be hearing Crassus, Antony and Hortensius conversing of these things.

And although all these things are such, this man has not imprudently ennobled his translation by a single greatest ornament. For how could he procure a stronger support, a brighter glory, or a richer fruit, than by dedicating his *Courtier* to our most illustrious and distinguished sovereign? Just as all the courtly virtues are imparted to her, so are more divine and heavenly ones. If I were to imagine I could encompass the whole of her excellence in my discourse, I should be a fool. Writing

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has no great power, no fertility of invention, no manner of discourse so splendid, that her virtue cannot surpass. Therefore this translator has in his wisdom sought a patroness for his work who is most outstanding in her virtue, most wise in her genius, the best in religion, and most well-furnished in erudition and well-equipped in other literary pursuits.

If the noblest distinctions of right wise sovereigns, thanks to their own deserts and according to the judgment of all men, are always to be reckoned the surest protection of their flourishing commonwealths, and the greatest adornment of their citizenries, then protecting one's work by their authority and enhancing it by their rewards is a thing worthy of any sovereign, but most worthy of ours, to whom alone is to be credited all the praise of all the Muses and the glory of belles lettres.

Given at the royal court the third day of January 1571 [=1572].