

First Folio Dedication & Introduction



shakespearecandle.com

The following forms part of the preface to the First folio of 1623. The original spelling is used.

TO THE MOST NOBLE AND INCOMPARABLE PAIRE OF BRETHREN
WILLIAM Earle of Pembroke, &c;. Lord Chamberlaine to the Kings most Excellent
Majesty.

AND

PHILIP Earle of Montgomery, &c;. Gentleman of his Majesties

Bed-Chamber. Both Knights of the most Noble Order

of the Garter, and our singular good L O R D S.

Right Honourable,

Whilst we studie to be thankful in our particular for the many favors we have received from your L.L. (Lordships), we are fallen upon the ill fortune, to mingle two the most diverse things that can be: feare, and rashnesse - rashnesse in the enterprize, and feare of the successe. For, when we vauled the places your H.H. sustaine, we cannot but know their dignity greater, then to descend to the reading of these trifles: and, while we name them trifles, we have depriv'd our selves of the defence of our Dedication. But since your L.L. have beene pleas'd to thinke these trifles some-thing, heeretofore; and have prosecuted both them, and their Authour living, with so much favour: we hope, that (they out-living him, and he not having the fate, common with some, to be exequutor to his owne writings) you will use the like indulgence toward them, you have done unto their parent. There is a great difference, whether any Booke choose his Patrones, or finde them: This hath done both. For, so much were your L.L. likings of the severall parts, when they were acted, as before they were published, the Volume ask'd to be yours. We have but collected them, and done an office to the dead, to procure his Orphanes, Guardians; without ambition either of selfe-profit, or fame: onely to keepe the memory of so worthy a Friend, & Fellow alive, as was our S H A K E S P E A R E , by humble offer of his playes, to your most noble patronage. Wherein, as we have justly observed, no man to come neere your L.L. but with a kind of religious addresse; it hath bin the height of our care, who are the Presenters, to make the present worthy of your H.H. by the perfection.

But, there we must also crave our abilities to be considerd, my Lords. We cannot go beyond our owne powers. Country hands reach foorth milke, creame, fruites, or what they have : and many Nations (we have heard) that had not gummes & incense, obtained their requests

with a leavened Cake. It was no fault to approach their Gods, by what means they could: And the most, though meanest, of thins are made more precious, when they are dedicated to Temples. In that name therefore, we most humbly consecrate to your H.H. these remaines of your servant Shakespeare; that what delight is in them, may be ever your L.L. the reputation his, & the faults ours, if any be committed, by a payre so carefull to shew their gratitude both to the living, and the dead, as is.

Your Lordshippes most bounden,

JOHN HEMINGE.
HENRY CONDELL.

To the great Variety of Readers.

From the most able, to him that can but spell: there you are number'd. We had rather you were weighed; especially, when the fate of all bookes depends upon your capacities and not of your heads alone, but of your purses. Well ! It is now publique, & you wil stand for your priviledges wee know : to read, and censure. Do so, but buy it first. That doth best commend a Booke, the Stationer saies. Then, how odde soever your braines be, or your wisdomes, make your licence the same, and spare not. Judge your six-pen'orth, your shillings worth, your five shillings worth at a time, or higher, so you rise to the just rates, and welcome. But, whatever you do, Buy. Censure will not drive a Trade, or make the Jacke go. And though you be a Magistrate of wit, and sit on the Stage at Black-Friers, or the Cock-pit, to arraigne Playes dailie, know, these Playes have had their triall alreadie, and stood out all Appeales ; and do now come forth quitted rather by a Decree of Court, then any purchased letters of commendation.

It had bene a thing, we confesse, worthie to have bene wished, that the author himselfe had lived to have set forth, and overseen his owne writings; but since it hath bin ordain'd otherwise, and he by death departed from that right, we pray you do not envie his Friends, the office of their care, and paine, to have collected & publish'd them; and so to have publish'd them, as where (before) you were abused with diverse stolne, and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of injurious impostors, that expos'd them : even those, are now offer'd to your view cur'd, and perfect of their limbes; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers as he conceived them.

Who, as he was a happie imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he uttered with that easinesse, that wee have scarce received from him a blot in his papers. But it is not our province, who onely gather his works, and give them you, to praise him. It is yours that reade him. And there we hope, to your divers capacities, you will finde enough, both to draw, and hold you: for his wit can no more lie hid, then it could be lost. Reade him, therefore; and againe, and againe : And if then you doe not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger, not to understand him. And so we leave you to other of his Friends, whom if you need, can be your guides: if you neede them not, you can lead yourselves, and others, and such readers we wish him.

John Heminge.
Henrie Condell.