

Classic Poetry Series

Anthony Munday

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Anthony Munday (1560 - 10 August 1633)

Anthony Munday (or Monday) was an English playwright and miscellaneous writer. The chief interest in Munday for the modern reader lies in his work as one of the chief predecessors of [Shakespeare](http://www.poemhunter.com/william-shakespeare/) in English dramatic composition, as well as his writings on Robin Hood.

Biography

He was once thought to have been born in 1553, because the monument to him in the church of St. Stephen Coleman Street, stated that at the time of his death he was eighty years old. From the inscription we likewise learn that he was "a citizen and draper". In 1589 he was living in the city, and dates his translation of The History of Palmendos "from my house in Cripplegate". That he carried on the business of a draper, or had some connection with the trade as late as 1613, may be gathered from the following passage at the close of The Triumphs of Truth, the city pageant for that year, by Thomas Middleton: "The fire-work being made by Maister Humphrey Nichols, a man excellent in his art; and the whole work and body of the Triumph, with all the proper beauties of the workmanship, most artfully and faithfully performed by John Grinkin; and those furnished with apparel and porters by Anthony Munday, Gentleman." The style of "gentleman" was probably given to him with reference to the productions of his pen.

Early years

He probably already had appeared on the stage as an actor when he was bound apprenticed in 1576 for eight years to the stationer John Alde, an apprenticeship from which he was soon released. By 1578 he was in Rome. In the opening lines of his English Romaine Lyfe (1582) he states that he went abroad solely in order to see strange countries and to learn foreign languages; but he may have been a spy sent to report on the English Jesuit College in Rome or a journalist intent on making literary capital out of the designs of the English Catholics then living in France and Italy. He writes that he and his companion, Thomas Nowell, were robbed of all their possessions on the road from Boulogne to Amiens, where they were helped by an English priest who entrusted them with letters to be delivered in Reims. These they handed over to the English ambassador in Paris. Under a false name, as the son of a well-known English Catholic, Munday gained recommendations which secured his reception at the English College in Rome. He was treated with special kindness by the rector, Dr. Morris, for the sake of his supposed father. He gives a detailed account of the routine of the place, of the dispute between the English and Welsh students, of the carnival at Rome, and finally of the martyrdom of Richard Atkins.

The playwriting years

His political services against the Catholics were rewarded in 1584 by the post of messenger to her Majesty's chamber, and from this time he seems to have given up acting. In 1598-1599, when he travelled with the Earl of Pembroke's men in the Low Countries, it was in the capacity of playwright to rewrite old plays. He devoted 'himself to writing for the booksellers and the theatres, compiling religious works, translating *Amadis de Gaule* and other French romances, and putting words to popular airs. He was the chief pageant-writer for the City from 1605.

His works

At what date he acquired the title of "poet to the city" is not known; he had certainly been previously employed in a similar capacity, as [Ben Jonson](http://www.poemhunter.com/ben-jonson/) introduces him in that capacity in "The Case is Altered," which was written in 1598 or 1599. He ridicules upon Don Antonio Balladino (as he calls Munday), and Middleton mentions him in his "Triumphs of Truth".

Munday was a very voluminous author in verse and prose, original and translated, and is certainly to be reckoned among the predecessors of Shakespeare in dramatic composition. One of his earliest works was *The Mirror of Mutability*, 1579, when he was in his 26th year: he dedicated it to his long-time patron Earl of Oxford, and perhaps then belonged to the company of players of that nobleman, to which he had again attached himself on his return from Italy. The Council Registers show that Oxford had a company of players under his protection in 1575 known as "Oxford's Men". Munday's *Banquet of Dainty Conceits* was printed in 1588, and we particularise it, because it was unknown to Ames, Herbert, and Ritson. Catalogues and specimens of his other undramatic works may be found in *Bibliographia Poetica*, *Censura Literaria*, *British Bibliographer*, etc.

Nearly all the existing information respecting Anthony Munday's dramatic works is derived from Henslowe's papers. At what period he began to write for the stage cannot be ascertained: the earliest date in these manuscripts connected with his name is December 1597; but as he was perhaps a member of the Earl of Oxford's theatrical company before he went abroad, and as he was certainly at Rome prior to 1578, it is likely that he was very early the author of theatrical performances. In the old catalogues, and in Langbaine's *Momus Triumphans*, 1688, a piece called *Fidele and Fortunatus* is mentioned, and such a play was entered at Stationers' Hall on 12 November 1584. There is little doubt that this is the same production, two copies of which have been discovered, with the running title of *Two Italian Gentlemen*, that being the second title to *Fidele and Fortunatus* in the Register. Both copies are without title-pages; but to one of them is prefixed a dedication signed A.M., and we may with tolerable certainty conclude that Anthony Munday was the author or translator of it, and that it was printed about the date of its entry on the Stationers' Books. It is pretty evident that the play now reprinted from the only known edition in 1601 was written considerably before 1597-8, the year when it is first noticed in the accounts of the proprietor of the Rose. The story is treated with a simplicity bordering upon rudeness, and historical facts are perverted just as suited the purpose of the writer. Whether we consider it as contemporary with, or preceding the productions of the same class by Shakespeare, it is a relic of high interest, and nearly all the sylvan portions of the play, in which Robin Hood and his "merry men" are engaged, are of no ordinary beauty. Some of the serious scenes are also extremely well written, and the blank-verse, interspersed with rhymes, as was usual in our earlier dramas, by no means inharmonious.

Works:

Fedele and Fortuna or *Fedele and Fortunio*, by Anthony Munday. c.1584.
Mother Redcap, by Anthony Munday and Michael Drayton. December 1597. Not printed and therefore did not survive.
The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntington, by Anthony Munday. February

1597-8. Printed in 1601.

The Death of Robert Earl of Huntington, by Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle. February 1597-8. Printed in 1601.

The Funeral of Richard Cordelion, by Robert Wilson, Henry Chettle, Anthony Munday, and Michael Drayton. May 1598. Not printed.

Valentine and Orson, by Richard Hathwaye and Anthony Munday. July 1598. Not printed.

Chance Medley, by Robert Wilson, Anthony Munday, Michael Drayton, and Thomas Dekker. August 1598. Not printed.

Owen Tudor, by Michael Drayton, Richard Hathwaye, Anthony Munday, and Robert Wilson. January 1599-1600. Not printed.

Fair Constance of Rome, by Anthony Munday, Richard Hathwaye, Michael Drayton, and Thomas Dekker. June 1600. Not printed.

Fair Constance of Rome, Part II., by the same authors. June 1600. Not printed.

The Rising of Cardinal Wolsey, [154] by Anthony Munday, Michael Drayton, Henry Chettle, and Wentworth Smith. November 12, 1601. Not printed.

Two Harpies, by Thomas Dekker, Michael Drayton, Thomas Middleton, John Webster, and Anthony Munday. May 1602. Not printed.

The Widow's Charm, by Anthony Munday. July 1602. Printed in 1607, as Malone conjectured, under the title of The Puritan or Widow of Watling Street, and ascribed to Shakespeare.

The Set at Tennis, by Anthony Munday. December 1602. Not printed.

The first part of the Life of Sir John Oldcastle, by Anthony Munday, Michael Drayton, Robert Wilson, and Richard Hathwaye; printed anonymously in 1600 (Q1), and again in 1619 (Q2) under the name of William Shakespeare.

Translations

Palmerin D'Oliva (1588)

Francisco de Morais's The honorable, pleasant and rare conceited historie of Palmendos (1589)

Etienne de Maisonneuf's Gerileon of England (1592)

The anonymous Primaleon of Greece (from 1594)

Amadis de Gaul (from 1596)

Palmerin of England (from 1596)