

A Congress for Cultural Freedom Failure

Stephen Greenblatt, president of the Modern Language Association (MLA) in 2003, is the guru of a school of literary criticism, “The New Historicism,” which draws on the outlook of Immanuel Kant and the French post-Modernist Michel Foucault. Upon learning this, I thought of the “New Criticism” of the Nashville Agrarians, led by John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate, which became the dominant orthodoxy of the MLA and Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) types after World War II.¹

The Ku Klux Klan’s “New Criticism” insisted that literature ought to be judged purely on its “literary” qualities, quite apart from any historical, psychological, sociological, or other context. Thus, the “New Critics” rationalized their bizarre, 20-year campaign on behalf of Fascist traitor Ezra Pound, which successfully used an insanity claim to extricate Pound’s neck from the noose his treason had earned him, awarded him the Nazi-loving Mellon banking family’s Boelligen Prize in poetry, turned him into a Beat and Hippie hero, and, eventually, freed him to return to Italy.

The New Historicism, by contrast, is supposed to examine art in context, and has a “leftish,” “cultural relativist” flavor. Exactly how different these orthodoxies are in intention, is indicated by the amusing, but not surprising fact that Greenblatt’s book was financed by the Mellon Foundation of the same Synarchist family which had bankrolled the New Critics and the Fascist Pound.

Also worth noting is Greenblatt’s collaboration with one-time CCF board member, Tom Stoppard, as literary advisors to Marc Norman’s

movie *Shakespeare in Love*. *Shakespeare in Love*, Stoppard’s own *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, and Greenblatt’s work, are all “backstory”—made-up stories designed to portray what happened behind the scenes, to explain the visible action. Norman and Stoppard are obviously dealing in fiction; but Harvard University’s Greenblatt is promoted as the leading Shakespeare critic of our age, and he claims to be doing something else.

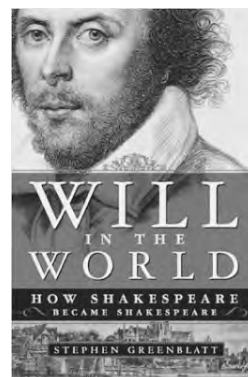
‘New Historicism’

Greenblatt writes, that he will explain how a young provincial “without independent wealth, without powerful family connections, and without a university education,” became “the greatest playwright not of his age alone but of all time.” He can do this without documentation, because, he asserts, “[o]ut of a tissue of gossip, hints, and obscure clues a shadowy picture can be glimpsed, rather as one can glimpse a figure in the stains on an old wall.”

Examination of the grease stains tells Greenblatt that Shakespeare went into the theatre because he was sexually aroused by the thought of kissing the boy actors who portrayed women. He also aspired to dress and walk as a gentleman, but this was only permitted to him on the stage. Ultimately, having lived prudently and invested his theatre

earnings in real estate, he succumbed to “the triumph of the everyday,” and retired to live in the company of his daughter, son-in-law, and granddaughter in his hometown of Stratford.

Greenblatt explains the content of Shakespeare’s work in the same way, notably claiming, that the ridiculous social climber Malvolio of



**Will in the World:
How Shakespeare Became
Shakespeare**
by Stephen Greenblatt
New York, W.W. Norton, 2004
336 pages, hardcover, \$26.95

Twelfth Night was Shakespeare’s portrayal of his own aspirations. It turns out that *Hamlet* is about Shakespeare’s unresolved sorrow at the death, five years earlier, of his son Hamnet, and, more immediately, of his father John, along with his *oedipal* difficulties with his own wife, Anne. *Macbeth* is an attempt to flatter the new Scottish King of England, James Stuart, with the story of his legendary ancestor, Banquo, and to thrill him with a tale on his favorite subject, witchcraft.

Otherwise, Greenblatt announces his discovery that Shakespeare invented a literary technology, used in *Hamlet* and the succeeding tragedies: the “radical excision of motive.” The idea is that Shakespeare applied Greenblatt’s theories about Shakespeare to his own characters, who, therefore, have no motivation, other than erotic impulse.

What’s He Hiding?

The secret behind Greenblatt’s babbling is this: The Promethean idea, that the very center of man’s being is the capacity he shares only with the Creator to understand an entire array of universal physical principles, and to improve upon this understanding and transmit it to his posterity, is the enemy image of Greenblatt’s crowd. Their mission has been to not only physically destroy Shakespeare and other towering Promethean figures who prove them wrong, but to destroy any comprehension of what these fig-



Shakespeare’s Globe



Above: France's Henry IV (of Navarre). **Top right:** St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. **Right:** Christopher Marlowe, author of "The Massacre at Paris."



ures, from Homer to Benjamin Franklin, Friedrich Schiller, and Ludwig van Beethoven, were or are.

I have reported elsewhere on the actual intervention of Shakespeare and his circle, in direct and indirect alliance with France's Henry IV, against the barbaric culture of Venetian-orchestrated religious strife of his time.² Greenblatt, however, reports voluminously on gossip suggesting that Shakespeare's father John was an agent of the Spanish Inquisition. The prize piece of evidence for this is a "testament" bearing John Shakespeare's name, based on the writing of Council of Trent and Inquisition kingpin Charles Borromeo. This prize document, which is widely touted by Jesuit and other partisans of the theory that Shakespeare was a Catholic subversive, has *never* been presented to public view. The only evidence of its existence is a second-hand report that a roofer working on the Shakespeare house, a century and a half after John's death, found the document, memorized it or copied it, and then lost it.

Meanwhile, Greenblatt ignores the very well documented literary and historical evidence. Although he mentions Erasmus once, derisively, and reports

Shakespeare's involvement in writing a play on Thomas More, he does not treat Shakespeare's well-known intellectual reliance on these Renaissance Catholic collaborators, the former of whose writings were proscribed by Borromeo's Council of Trent.³

He takes pains to demonstrate, correctly, that Christopher Marlowe was the only playwright who rivalled Shakespeare's quality of work, and notes that, despite the lack of concrete evidence of their contact, the two men were in an artistic dialogue through their plays and poetry. But, he repeatedly characterizes Marlowe as an unsavory, cruel, and dangerous character, an atheist, a drunk, and a homosexual, who died in a barroom brawl. He does this, despite reporting also, that the accusations he repeats against Marlowe were obtained by the "Gitmo" methods then in use by the Queen's Privy Council. He also reports, in contradiction to his other characterizations, that he knows (as has been widely documented) that Marlowe had done service for the Queen in France, and that the "companions" who killed him were Privy Council spies, so that the brawl was quite likely an assassination.⁴

He is silent, however, on the actual context of the assassination. That is, that Marlowe had just presented his *Massacre at Paris*, on the subject of Henry IV, and

that his assassins were provocateurs who had been involved in the 1585 "Babington Plot" set-up of the Catholic Mary Stuart's execution by the Protestant Queen Elizabeth.

Greenblatt also fails to present the actual history that would puncture his "triumph of the everyday" fable about Shakespeare's retirement. Shakespeare's withdrawal from London began in about 1610, and was more or less completed in 1613. In 1610, Henry IV was assassinated by a Jesuit priest. In 1612, James Stuart's heir, Henry, who, along with his mother Queen Anne, had formed a pro-Renaissance counterweight to the deranged king, died. In 1613, the Globe Theater, in which Shakespeare was a partner, burned to the ground. Greenblatt presents a lengthy quotation from a well-known account of the blaze, but fails to mention two things: that the author is Henry Wotton, the leading agent in London, at that time, of one of Shakespeare's major targets, the world capital of usury and perfidy, Venice; and, that Wotton is delighted by the conflagration.

So much for Professor "Greaseblott." He breathes death, but Shakespeare lives still.

—Stanley Ezrol

1. For background on the Nashville Agrarians, see Stanley Ezrol, "Seduced from Victory: How the Lost Corpse Subverts the American Intellectual Tradition," *Fidelio*, Winter/Spring 2002 (Vol. XI, No. 1-2); for the Congress for Cultural Freedom, see *Children of Satan* (Washington, D.C.: Lyndon LaRouche PAC, 2004).
2. Stanley Ezrol, "Will Shakespeare's Mission Be Ours," in "A Shakespeare Symposium," *Fidelio*, Fall 2004 (Vol. XIII, No. 3). Cf. Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. "Toward a New Treaty of Westphalia: The Coming Eurasian World," *Executive Intelligence Review*, Dec. 17, 2004 (Vol. 31, No. 49).
3. Ezrol, *ibid*.
4. I.e., Charles Nicholl, *The Reckoning: The Murder of Christopher Marlowe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

Every great recovery of a people from a self-inflicted tragedy, comes from a mobilization of a part of its young people, its young adults, who, seeing a future that is a no-future before them, kick their parents' generation in the ass, and say, 'We have a right to a future. This nation has a right to a future. Your grandchildren have a right to a future.' Therefore, you are an elite. You are the raggedy-pants elite!

—LYNDON H. LAROCHE, JR.
November 10, 2004

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