

in that year. At the same time, it is held that the author of the play was connected with the mysterious School of Night, spoke French, knew the King of Navarre and belonged to a little 'academe' of scholars who were in Brabant in June 1577.

The third of the Four Women profiles reads: **The author was an intimate of the Essex House Circle in 1596, and was connected with the School of Night, spoke French, knew the King of Navarre and was with a little 'academe' in Brabant in June 1577, when Helene of Tournon died for love.**

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As has been shown, Greville, the patron/protégé of Southampton from 1591, 'shared rooms' with the members of the Essex House Circle (the actors of *Love's Labour's Lost*) from September 1596 until 15 March 1600, when 'By her Majestys express commandment my Lady Lester, Lord and Lady Southampton, Mr. Grivell, Mr. Bacon are all removed from Essex Howse.'²³⁶ Greville, as has been shown, was an intimate friend and former pupil of John Florio ('Holofernes') and he shared a table at Essex House with Antonio Perez ('Don Armado'). He also fits Acheson's School of Night theory because, according to Phillips and Keatman, Greville was a principal member of the School of Night and the group 'held meetings at Greville's house'. The theory also holds that Christopher Marlowe was first introduced into the group 'by Greville's friend Sidney'.²³⁷

The Stratford poet's knowledge of French is held to be shown by his references to Belleforest's *Histoires tragiques* 'where he had no access to translations'.²³⁸ In about 1564, the two schoolboys Philip Sidney and Fulke Greville wrote their names in a copy of Belleforest's *Histoires tragiques*, 'which their tutor's records suggests was used as a source of "example phrases and sentences in frenche"'.²³⁹ Greville was a 'friend' of Henry of Navarre and fought as a volunteer beside the king at the Battle of Coutras²⁴⁰ in 1587. According to Stewart, Sidney and Greville had attended Navarre's marriage to Marguerite de Valois and they had met the young Navarre king at that time: 'Greville notes that Henri, "having measured and mastered all the spirits in his own nation, found out this master-spirit among us [Sidney], and used him like an equal in nature and, so, fit for friendship with a king"'.²⁴¹

In c.1576–77, Sidney, Greville and Edward Dyer founded a literary

‘academy’ called the Areopagus, ‘perhaps in imitation of the Florentine Academy in the time of Lorenzo,²⁴² which bore the same name’.²⁴³ Their little ‘academe’ is ‘explicitly referred to’ in a poem by Daniel Rogers (c.1578) in which he tells of his desire for inclusion in it:

Nor are you [Sidney] without a faithful and happy circle of companions in whom, in close friendship, there abounds a pious love. In divine virtue Dyer, keeper of judgement, storer of wit, excells. Next comes Fulke whom you have known since the earliest days of manhood, Fulke, dear offspring of the House of Greville. With them you discuss great points of law, God or moral good, when time permits these pious studies. You are all ornaments of the Court, its favourites almost – the Royal Court (Nemesis be my witness) is therefore dearer to me.²⁴⁴

Edmund Spenser wrote to his friend Gabriel Harvey on 16 October 1579:

Now they have proclaimed in their Areopagus a general surceasing and silence of bald rhymers, and also of the very best too; instead whereof they have, by authority of their whole senate, prescribed certain laws and rules of quantities of English syllables for English verse.²⁴⁵

It remains only to fit the last piece of the plot, in which the little literary ‘academe’ becomes involved in a diplomatic mission in Brabant in June 1577. As Brooks showed, in June 1577 the three members of the little literary ‘academe’ of the Areopagus, Greville, Sidney and Dyer, ‘were in Brabant returning from the baptismal ceremony of the Prince of Orange’s daughter’.²⁴⁶ Early in 1577 Greville and Dyer had been ‘commissioned to attend Philip Sidney on an embassy to Germany’.²⁴⁷ Following the death of the Emperor Maximilian, Elizabeth had appointed Sidney as a special envoy to offer her condolences to the Emperor’s grieving widow and children. Also in the party were two experienced diplomats, Sir Henry Lee and Sir Jerome Bowes.

The record of the Areopagus’s diplomatic mission shows that the three poets travelled to Ostend and then on through Brussels and Louvain, Heidelberg (22 March), and then via Nuremberg to Prague, arriving on Maundy Thursday (4 April). On 30 April the party arrived back at Heidelberg and met Elector Ludwig. On 4 May, the Areopagus, following orders, headed for England, and by the end of the month had reached the Low Countries. According to Languet’s account Sidney then received a letter from the Queen which commanded him ‘to visit the Prince of Orange and attend the baptism of his daughter