



## **Shakespeare: A critical analysis**

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### **Speaker:**

How relevant is Shakespeare in contemporary society? Stephen Greenblatt:

### **Stephen Greenblatt:**

My guess is that, since I tend to believe that there really was someone out there named Shakespeare and that he was an incredibly clever fellow, that he sort of under - he got it very early on, that it was as it were in his interests broadly speaking in the interests of his profession his company and perhaps of his own ambitions, that he in fact be lots of things to lots of people, be used in lots of different ways. I went before the fall of the Berlin Wall I went to an East German event called a Shakespeare Taga, quite a remarkable event in Dima I think it still happens now but the Shakespeare Association is reunited in Germany, but it there was I remember and this was the old East German regime GDR regime there was a performance a student performance of Hamlet, no better than it should be, and it was one sat through it politely but there was one moment, a moment an odd moment in the play to think of as the most exciting moment in the play, in which Laerte's asks for permission to go back to go to Paris, and I don't know if you remember the moment, the king says 'I'll have to get your fathers permission or have you got your fathers permission' he said. 'Yes' Polonius says 'Yes I've given him permission'. And then in this production, pure bit of stage business it's not the text at all, the king Claudius went over to a huge escritoire, opened it up, took out a passport an East German passport, and handed it to Laertes, and the entire crowd gasped, (gasps), because it was so hard to get a passport to get out of, cos they were shooting people at the wall at this point to go to Paris now, is this purely extraneous bit of stage business - well yes, I mean there's a Shakespeare was not anticipating the GDR, but I think that Shakespeare in lots of different ways, was anticipating precisely the use of his texts for all kinds of purposes other than the one strictly speaking for which the texts were originally written. That's why an older historicism that simply tries to track down the relation of the text to its immediate historical setting, doesn't get what the texts actually are even in their own historical relation which is much more open, much more vital and much more disturbing than they might at first seem.