

**Some of the Many Inconsistencies & Dubious Assertions
in Greenhalgh's *A Forger's Tale*,
as Revealed by a Scientific & Historic Examination
of *La Bella Principessa***

Convicted forger Shaun Greenhalgh says La Bella Principessa is his own 1970 portrait of a check-out girl from a Bolton supermarket.

*French scientist **Pascal Cotte** of Lumière Technology, who has examined the work in detail using ultra-powerful multispectral imagery, dismantles this outlandish claim.*

1/ Jeanne Marchig testified on oath that she saw the work in the collection of Giannino Marchig before their marriage in 1955. This is obviously incompatible with a dating from 1970 (Marchig may have acquired the portrait at any time from 1920-55).

2/ The portrait has undergone two campaigns of restoration – one probably over 200 years ago, and one by Marchig. Both are incompatible with a dating from 1970.

3/ Pigments used in the second restoration, carried out by Marchig in the 1950s, have been identified as belonging to the boxed pastels which Mrs Marchig submitted to the Lumière Technology laboratory for pigment analysis. This is incompatible with a dating from 1970.

4/ Prof. D.R. Edward Wright, emeritus Professor of art history at the University of South Florida, Tampa, USA, worldwide specialist of Incunabuli, discovered first, and then suggested to Pr Kemp because of its dimensions, the portrait could have come from a late 15th century incunabulum, *the Sforziada*, housed one in the Polish National Library, and the others in London, Paris and Italy libraries. Martin Kemp and I, on Pr Wright suggestion, travelled to Warsaw to examine his hypothesis, and published our findings in a book: the dimensions of the vellum sheet used for *La Bella Principessa*, as Wright thought at the origin, are identical with the sheets of the *Sforziada*, while the irregular spacing of the holes on the left of *La Bella Principessa* exactly matches the spacing of the *Sforziada*'s binding threads. Other scientific parameters successfully verified include the matching thickness of the vellum, and the vellum's absorption of the light spectrum. How could the youthful Mr Greenhalgh have been aware of all this and met Pr Wright before us ?

5/ The wooden panel on which the vellum is mounted cannot come from a school desk, as Mr Greenhalgh claims. The panel is not flat, but varies in thickness from 4.6mm in its bottom corner to 8.8mm in the opposite top corner, suggesting it was used to provide rigid support inside the cover of a book meant to be placed on a lectern – perhaps the original cover of the Warsaw *Sforziada* (which received new covers during rebinding).

6/ Mr Greenhalgh claims to have provided the strips of paper stuck to the back of the panel on which the portrait is mounted – but seems unaware that the portrait, when owned by Giannino Marchig, was framed (this frame was removed by Christie's prior to the auction of the portrait in 1998). Recently discovered photographs reveal this frame to have been of Italian style, and adorned with illustrations recalling the *Sforziada* illuminations by Gian Pietro Birago. The strips of paper helped fix the wooden panel to the back of the frame. The total absence of any sign of nails, or any other form of fixation, confirms that these paper strips were the sole means of fixing the work to the frame.

7/ The French customs stamps, to be found on the back of the panel on which the portrait is mounted, date from the late 19th or early decades of the 20th century, and are therefore incompatible with a dating from 1970.

8/ Mr Greenhalgh says he used only three chinks, and makes no mention of the portrait's highlights in lead white. But these highlights are clearly visible in X-rays and L.A.M. images, and lead white is frequently found in other Leonardo drawings.

9/ The lead isotope 210 enables lead white to be dated in cycles of 22.2 years, up to a limit of eleven cycles. Analysis of *La Bella Principessa*, carried out by the Chemistry Department of Pavia University, shows that lead white was applied to the portrait over 240 (11 x 22.2) years ago. It is not possible for a forger to reproduce 'old' lead white: basic lead carbonate ($2\text{PbCO}_3, \text{Pb}(\text{OH})_2$) is chemically unstable and returns to lead if it is not protected from air, e.g. by a binder such as oil, and it has powerful drying properties which rapidly desiccate any binder. Attempting to accelerate ageing (by exposing to heat, UV etc.) is doomed to failure whatever the method, as it does not act on radio-activity. Could Mr Greenhalgh have been aware all this at the age of 17?

10/ There was no green chalk: Leonardo obtained the colour green by applying charcoal to a yellow ground. Was Mr Greenhalgh aware of this at the age of 17?

11/ Mr Greenhalgh says he coated the surface of the vellum with gum arabic, yet fails to mention that the surface also features yellow pigment – a discovery NOT mentioned in the book by Martin Kemp & Pascal Cotte.

12/ Mr Greenhalgh first says he was not seeking to imitate Leonardo in particular, but an unspecified 'Old Master' – then contradicts himself by saying he wanted to imitate a left-handed artist, as Leonardo is known to have been (Holbein was right-handed).

13/ If Mr Greenhalgh did indeed attempt to produce a Fake Leonardo, he contradicts himself by making no attempt to present it as such.

14/ It is impossible for a right-handed artist to pass himself off as left-handed merely by turning a drawing upside-down to applying hatching (narrow lines), as such lines inevitably have a slight curve physically caused by the hand/wrist movement. The curves of the hatching on *La Bella Principessa* reveal its artist to have been left-handed, whereas Mr Greenhalgh declares himself right-handed.

15/ The background was applied by left-handed brushstrokes (clearly visible on L.A.M. images), whereas Mr Greenhalgh makes no mention of imitating a left-handed artist for the background.

16/ Whatever the precocious artistry of a Bolton teenager, the portrait presupposes detailed knowledge of the style, materials and costumes of Renaissance Milan. Such knowledge remains incomplete even today, and was flimsy in 1970.

17/ L.A.M. images reveals five tiny hair-pins near the bottom of the plait (*coazzone*) that are invisible to the naked eye. Given the absence of such pins in other Milanese portraits of the period featuring a *coazzone*, Mr Greenhalgh cannot possibly have been aware of these pins in 1970.

18/ The triangular opening on the sleeve of *La Bella Principessa* subtly evokes the stylized outline of a *scopetta* (the small brush used as the personal emblem of the sitter's father, Duke Ludovico Sforza). How could a 17 year-old Lancastrian have been aware of this?

19/ A work dating from 1970 cannot have so many gaps or display such signs of wear.

20/ One of Italy's three State-approved laboratories, the highly reputed Venaria Reale in Turin, confirmed all the scientific conclusions established by Lumière Technology before guaranteeing the work's authenticity to Italy's Ministry of Culture prior to its exhibition in Italian State museums.

It is deeply regrettable – for the sake of Leonardo, the History of Art and the patrimony of mankind – that so much demonstrable nonsense has been mindlessly regurgitated in certain sectors of the press.

Pascal Cotte
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