

Latest Results in the Field of Shakespeare Research

Recent investigations by the Shakespeare scholar Professor Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel, based on fresh evidence assembled by the author and presented in her newly-published book *And the Flower Portrait of William Shakespeare is Genuine After All*, have further demonstrated the authenticity of the Flower portrait of William Shakespeare. Collaborating with experts from the German Federal Bureau of Criminal Investigation and with medical experts, it was in 1995/96 that she first offered proof that the painting was genuine. Hammerschmidt-Hummel's current findings reveal the existence of two copies of the Flower portrait hitherto not declared as such. Each of these copies has been erroneously presented as the original. The reproductions are strikingly distinct from the original painting, and also differ from each other. Both were examined in the National Portrait Gallery's laboratories in London in 2005. One of the copies was subjected to an x-ray examination and the other to a paint analysis. The original painting, however, which apparently has been missing since about 1999, was not involved in these investigations.

When the National Portrait Gallery curator Dr Tarnya Cooper put together her exhibition, "Searching for Shakespeare" (2006) and the accompanying catalogue of the same title, she cast doubt upon the authenticity of the Flower portrait. Hammerschmidt-Hummel then embarked on a further, comprehensive review of the matter, and in January 2007, with the permission of the curator of the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon, David Howells, she visited the depository of the RSC collection to conduct a very thorough inspection of the Flower portrait, which had then only recently returned from the exhibition. The Shakespeare expert made a photographic record of the panel (surface, back, corners and edges). She also analysed the BBC documentary film "The Flower Portrait", which BBC producer John Hay had made available to her, complete with the BBC time code. The film presented Cooper's results to a world-wide audience in April 2005. In evaluating her new pictorial evidence, Hammerschmidt-Hummel once again worked with a group of international experts, including a criminologist, an expert on Old Masters, a dermatologist, a radiologist, a conservator, a picture restorer, an expert on inscriptions, and another Shakespeare scholar.

The radiologist and expert on x-rays of Old Masters, Professor Volker Menges, consulted by the German Shakespeare scholar, established that the Flower portrait verified by Hammerschmidt-Hummel in 1995/96 as genuine corresponds in every detail to the x-ray of the Flower portrait carried out at the London Courtauld Institute in 1966. Among other things, the author had discovered symptoms of disease in the picture which she then submitted for diagnosis by medical specialists. The diagnosed pathological symptoms accorded with other authentic portrayals of the playwright. The radiologist stated that only the 1966 x-ray met all the criteria of an antique portrait dating from the time of Shakespeare. He came to the conclusion that this x-ray had been copied and presented as a new x-ray picture from 2005 in the Searching for Shakespeare catalogue. A feature picked out by the picture restorer Dr Eva Brachert of the Mainz Landesmuseum, Shakespeare's strikingly white face with its light flesh tones (found only in the original picture, not in the copies) derives, as Professor Menges explains in his report, from the portraitist's use of lead white paint in the early 17th century. The radiologist specifically emphasised that this appeared in impressively high contrast in the "lighter parts of the face" on the old x-ray photograph from 1966, serving as yet another – significant – criterion of authenticity.

Hammerschmidt-Hummel's latest, most meticulous comparison of the original picture and the two copies revealed some striking discrepancies. While the original panel shows all the characteristics of an old, cracked and worm-eaten painting, the wood of the reproductions is of relatively recent date. The corners and edges of these pictures are robust and practically undamaged – in complete contrast to those of the old picture with the genuine Shakespeare portrait. There where the original panel threatens to fall apart, the copies are firmly glued together. The crack of the original has only been painted on in one of the copies, in the other it is virtually non-existent. The typical pitting and flaws in the paint, characteristic of a four-hundred-year-old portrait, also contrast significantly with the more recent reproductions, where these marks of age have simply been imitated. The good condition of the picture inspected by Hammerschmidt-Hummel in Stratford in 2007, but above all that of the other picture – seen in the BBC film positioned in the x-ray apparatus – clearly contradicts the descriptions of the old, damaged panel given around 1900 by top British experts, who dated it to the early 17th century. The 15th or early 16th-century Madonna painting discovered by x-ray in 1966 underlying the Shakespeare image indicated that the wood must in fact be at least about a hundred years older. An inscriptions expert at the Mainz Academy of Sciences, Dr Eberhard Nikitsch, has also established that the inscriptions on the three paintings differ from one another. Likewise, the minutely detailed comparison carried out by the dermatologist Professor Jost Metz showed that there were distinct discrepancies in the iris in all three versions.

All of the results of the investigations that Hammerschmidt-Hummel has put forward have been critically scrutinised by well-known experts and fully confirmed. The consultants' expertise contributed important additional arguments, further strengthening the author's case. It is now up to Tarnya Cooper to subject the execution and results of her investigations to further critical examination, and to respond to the questions raised here.

Prof. Hammerschmidt-Hummel is grateful to Prof. Jürgen Oldenstein, the former Vice President of the University of Mainz for important advice and also her contact with Dr. Eva Brachert, the above-named picture restorer of Old Masters at the Landesmuseum Mainz. It was Prof. Oldenstein with whom she discussed the unpublished research results of her book *And the Flower Portrait is Genuine After All*. A decisive contribution to her latest scientific publication was made by Dr Annette Holzapfel-Pschorn, an executive at the Centre for Data Processing, who carried out the complicated work of the illustration section, published on a CD ROM attached to the book.

In 2008, Dr Holzapfel-Pschorn had created for the new digital 'Shakespeare Illustration Archive Oppel-Hammerschmidt' the impressive prototype of an intelligent, multiply linked-up Internet version, introduced to the public at the Mainz University in November 2008. In the summer of 2010, Holzapfel-Pschorn - with the consent of Dr Andreas Anderhub, head of the Central University Library - made an inquiry to the university's Legal Department. The heart of the matter was whether the digital Shakespeare Illustration Archive could go online, possibly by inserting a watermark. Since the public presentation of this attractive research facility at the University of Mainz many internet users had lodged complaints concerning the fact that access to the digital collection was only possible via the terminals of the university's network. Having thoroughly examined the matter, the Legal Department informed Dr Holzapfel-Pschorn in an email communication on 22 September 2010 that – for reasons of copyright - the multiply linked-up Internet version of the Shakespeare Illustration Archive could not go online. The reason given was that the collection contained "photographic reproductions of paintings, drawings, woodcuts, steel and copper engravings as well as etchings and portraits of actors, sketches of Shakespearian characters, stage and costume designs, images combining several

Shakespearian scenes (Simultankonzeptionen), comic strip representations and other pictorial materials.” In these cases the copyright of the artists which might still exist had to be observed. Since the copyright would expire only seventy years after an artist’s death, a copyright examination had to be carried out for each individual case. For this, however, no financial resources would be available.

In early September 2010, Prof. Hammerschmidt-Hummel compared the new 3D recreation of the Darmstadt Shakespeare death mask with the original kept in the University and State Library in Darmstadt. This novel three-dimensional image was shown in the WILD DREAM FILMS documentary ”Death Masks,” broadcast on HISTORY in Great Britain in September 2010 and in the United States in the year 2009. Although the Shakespeare researcher, who had been able to prove the authenticity of the death mask in 1995/96 with the help of BKA (= CID/FBI) experts and medical specialists and was therefore interviewed for this film, was impressed by the fascinating technique and the result in general, she found a couple of divergences between the new 3D depiction and the authentic death mask: As a consequence of the insertion of artificial eyes, striking, medically diagnosed signs of illness were removed, like, for instance, the mask’s deformed and protruding left eye, or were no longer clearly visible, like the significant pathological protuberance on the forehead. The artificial beard of the 3D reproduction and its likewise artificial moustache are not in agreement with the original. And the warts in the area of the chin are additions. Prof. Hammerschmidt-Hummel concluded: The novel 3D recreation of Shakespeare’s death mask cannot claim to depict all the details of the poet’s face faithfully. Only the Darmstadt Shakespeare death mask reveals what Shakespeare’s face really looked like at the time of his death.

For further information see: www.hammerschmidt-hummel.de

Contact and information

GEORG OLMS VERLAG
Hagentorwall 7
31134 Hildesheim
Germany
Tel. +49 (0)5121 15010
Fax +49 (0)5121 150150
E-Mail: info@olms.de
<http://www.olms.de>

Prof. Dr. Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel
Tel. +49 (0)611 521989
E-Mail: h.hammerschmidt-hummel@t-online.de
<http://www.hammerschmidt-hummel.de>