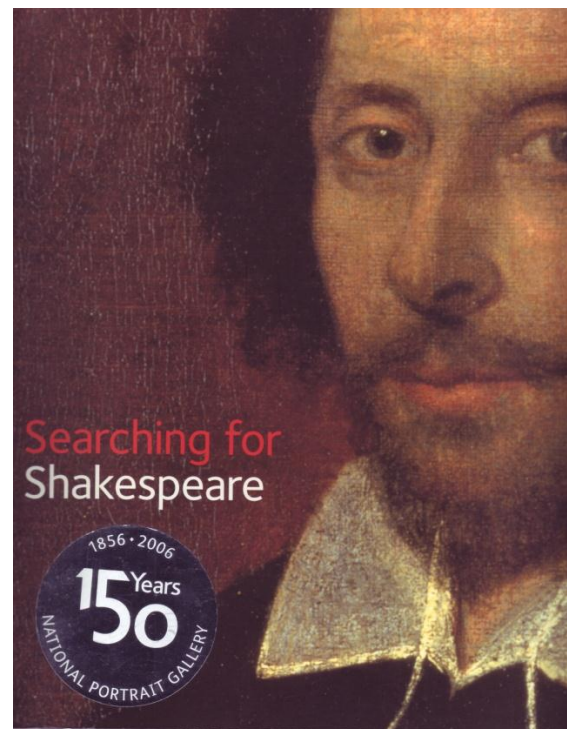
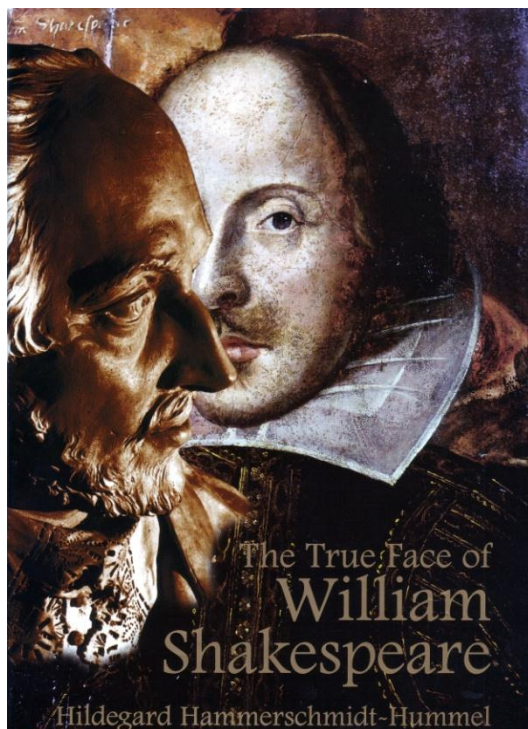


**Dr. Thomas Merriam, Anglo American Shakespeare Scholar, “A Question of Authenticity” (on H. Hammerschmidt-Hummel, *The True Face of William Shakespeare: the Poet's Death Mask and Likenesses from Three Periods of His Life*, and T. Cooper, ed., *Searching for Shakespeare*), in: *Religion and the Arts* (Boston College) 13-1 (2009), pp. 122-135. – Extract**



*...The first pillar of the author's [H. Hammerschmidt-Hummel's] argument is the comparative forensic examination of the four contenders for authenticity - the death mask (1616), the painted Chandos portrait (conventionally dated 1600-1610), the painted Flower portrait (1609), and Davenant terra cotta bust (unknown date), - by Reinhardt Altmann and his associates of the German Federal Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BKA) in Wiesbaden (1995-1998). The Droeshout First Folio engraving (1623) and the funerary bust of Shakespeare in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon ..., both serving as the basis for these tests, were critically examined by the author against the background of their cultural historical context. They proved to be credible images of the poet made from likenesses created during his lifetime, or immediately after his death. ...*

*The techniques used by Altmann are based (a) on general identification skills he acquired in the course of criminal investigations and (b) on the BKA's techniques, one of which is somewhat unfortunately rendered in English as "Trick Image Differentiation Technique". In this case, television imaging, scaling and montage are used to juxtapose halves of two different facial images along chosen separating lines to establish identity or not. "According*

*to the BKA experts this procedure has proved its value over decades, and has never yet failed.” (49) In the case of the Chandos, Flower and Droeshout, all showed “correspondences that were a perfect fit, seamless joins and convincing harmonies.” (51)*

*The same and similar techniques were applied to three-dimensional images of the Stratford funerary bust, the Darmstadt death mask and the Davenant bust. The funerary bust and the death mask showed remarkable agreement (52, Fig. 032), as did the Davenant bust in comparison with the Droeshout engraving, the funerary bust, and the death masks, and the Chandos and Flower portraits as well. The BKA specialist concluded that in every case “one and the same person” is represented, i.e., William Shakespeare (52, 56). It must be said that this vital part of Hammerschmidt-Hummel’s thesis hangs upon the validity of the skill and techniques used by Reinhardt Altmann and other experts. ...*

*With the exception of the rejections of the so-called Sanders, Jansen (possible), and Grafton portraits by Altmann, the reader of ‘The True Face’ in light of the examinations of the Bureau of Criminal Investigations of the Federal Republic of Germany, this trust is not unreasonable. The partially related “facial compositing” software is available to law enforcement agencies only, and therefore constitutes a “black box” for the general reader, unable to evaluate fully the striking illustrations of matches (51-55 & 69-71).*

*A radical criticism of the use of forensic techniques in the applications presented in ‘The True Face’ was expressed by Dr. Tarnya Cooper of the National Portrait Gallery in London. “My view about using measurements of facial features from portraiture is that this is based on a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of visual art. Portraits are not, and can never be forensic evidence of likeness.” This opinion would not presumably be shared by agencies which use photographs for identification such as the British Identity and Passport Service, preparing to spend billions of pounds on identity card contracts. Even hand-drawn and painted portraits have been employed for identification, notably Holbein’s portrait of Anne of Cleves and the facial composites used by the FBI if, according to Wikipedia, “...the [FBI](#) maintains that hand-drawing is the correct method to construct a facial composite.”*

*The purpose of a death mask was to provide a sculptor with a template from which to create a funerary bust. The bust in this case is that of Shakespeare on the left wall of the chancel of Holy Trinity Church in Stratford. In his standard comparison of images, the BKA specialist established five similarities and two divergences between the mask and the bust (the reason for the divergences, Hammerschmidt-Hummel conjectures, is damage to the funerary bust by the Puritans during the English Civil War). With respect to the Chandos, Flower, and Droeshout portraits, he found seventeen facial features in agreement.*

*The second pillar of the argument of ‘The True Face’ is the medical evidence.*

*“In the Droeshout engraving, the Chandos portrait and the Flower portrait I noticed in January 1995 a conspicuous, clearly pathological protuberance on the left upper eyelid which had never been remarked upon before, in spite of the intensive examination of the pictures by many (art) experts in the past.” (68)*

*Although the Darmstadt death mask shows an enlarged left eyelid, which might seem to the non-expert to be partly an accident of the molding process, the Droeshout engraving has doubtfully a “conspicuous, clearly pathological protuberance on the left upper eyelid”. And despite remarking that the “symptom is particularly marked on the left in all three portraits” (68), the author appears to contradict this by stating that the associated caruncular tumor is missing from the Droeshout engraving, “as the ophthalmologist expressly noted in his expert medical appraisal.” (68). The caruncle is the small, red portion in the nasal corner of the [eye](#). Professor Hammerschmidt-Hummel proceeds to argue that the absence of the caruncular tumor from the Droeshout engraving indicates that it was copied from the Flower portrait, rather than vice versa. It is, of course, impossible for an engraving to be done from life, as no*

sitter would spare the time needed by an engraver, and no engraver could “eye-ball” the sitter while etching the plate. “ ... Although it would not seem impossible for an engraver to reproduce such fine distinctions as the relative size of the eye’s caruncle, Droeshout did not depict this detail. A later painting, based on the Droeshout engraving, would not have been likely to invent the pathological symptoms seen in the Flower portrait. Hence the author reasoned that the Flower portrait precedes the engraving and must have been painted from life.[1]

Professor Hammerschmidt-Hummel cites the authority of four medical experts. Professor Walter Lerche, medical director of the Land-Capital Hospital, Wiesbaden, for example, reported in his “Shakespeare portraits: Expert Statement “ of April 1995 that the swelling on the upper eyelid, “was indeed a pathological symptom, probably the Mikulicz Syndrome, with is a disorder in the area of the tear glands.” (68) ...

The author of ‘The True Face’ gives an account of the painting’s provenance ... Purchased ...in 1892 by Edgar Flower, it was donated by Mrs. Flower to the Memorial Gallery of the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1895. It was cleaned, restored and examined by experts of the day who were convinced of its authenticity and that of the date in the upper right-hand corner, “1609”. The noted Shakespearean Sidney Lee declared that the Droeshout frontispiece to the First Folio must have been based on the Flower portrait. This opinion held until the publication of Marion H. Spielmann’s seminal article for the eleventh edition of the Britannica in 1911. From this time on, Spielmann’s opinion prevailed and was supported by the influential authority of Samuel Schoenbaum in the twentieth century.

... the Courtauld Institute’s X-ray in 1966 revealed that it was an Italian Madonna with Christ Child and St. John the Baptist, probably dating from the fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries. ...

In the Flower portrait, reproduced in ‘The True Face’ (28) as it appeared to the unassisted eye, there is no indication of an under painting. All this, however, changed with the further cleaning and restoration of the Flower portrait in 1979 by Nancy Stocker of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Arcs of the three haloes of the Virgin, Christ, and John were left visible along with a cross on the left and a shoulder segment of a rose-colored robe on the right. (29).

Spielmann himself described the condition of the panel on which the portrait was painted as “a worm-eaten panel of English elm” (n. 93, 154)[2], an important testimony in light of what was to follow. ...

Leap forward to the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2005, the eve of the anniversary of Shakespeare’s death 389 years before. The BBC news announced that, after a four-month examination of the Flower portrait by the National Portrait Gallery in London, “Chrome yellow paint, dating from around 1814, had been found embedded in the portrait.” It was therefore a fake ...

Following this discovery, Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel did not question the validity of the microscopic paint test, but argued that that the NPG had tested a copy, not the original Flower portrait which Nancy Stocker had cleaned and restored in 1979. Professor Hammerschmidt-Hummel’s suspicions had been aroused in the autumn of 2002 when her German publisher, Philipp von Zabern, received from Stratford a color photograph of the Flower portrait which differed from the Ektachrome (“true color”) provided in 1996 by Brian Glover, then director of the Royal Shakespeare collection. In an appendix to ‘The True Face’ both color reproductions are printed opposite each other for comparison (144 and 145).

As with all color reproductions in books, it is not possible to judge exact tints because of variations in printing fidelity. The 1996 reproduction (144) shows a whitish face with conspicuous pock marks on the lower left side of the face (or right, as one looks at the face). These are due to the flaking away of paint with age. By contrast, the 2002 reproduction (145)



has a smooth “smoky-pink” facial coloring. The pock marks are replaced by more uniform greyish speckles. The most striking alteration is the disappearance of a well-delineated cusp of cloth material beyond the collar on the right side from the observer’s viewpoint. The 2002 reproduction shows the cusp partly filled in with color matching the pink of the cloth which presumably belongs to the under painting of the Virgin’s rose-colored robe.

Reinhardt Altmann opined that the more recent reproduction was that of a copy of the old painting, while Professor Wolfgang Speyer thought that the original painting had been “repainted”. (147). The 1996 and 2002 versions can be exactly scaled to each other. Their proportions are the same. I was unaware that an artist’s copy can be made with such accuracy until I discovered [www.FakeArt.co.uk](http://www.FakeArt.co.uk) on the internet.

Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel saw at first hand the original Flower portrait (144) in July 1996 with Brian Glover and Prue Dunne of the Royal Shakespeare Company present. The author therefore wrote to the new curator of the Stratford Gallery in 2003 to ask whether the painting had undergone any changes since she saw it in 1996. David Howells wrote back on 12 January 2004 to say that the Flower portrait had not been altered since the 1979 cleaning and restoration in Oxford. After the publication of ‘The True Face’, however, he wrote to the author in July 2006, saying that he had overlooked a report of 1994 which showed that some reinforcement of the upper left-hand side of the painting had been done to hold the aging panel together. No restoration work was involved. It may be noted that this repair was made before Professor Hammerschmidt-Hummel viewed the painting in 1996 and would not have affected the appearance of the portrait.

Following the return of the ‘Searching for Shakespeare’ exhibition from the United States in the autumn of 2006, Hammerschmidt-Hummel inspected the portrait in Stratford on 26 January 2007. With permission of the present curator, David Howells, she measured the painting ...

At this point I may be allowed to interrupt the account of the Flower portrait by noting the closing essay in ‘Searching for Shakespeare’, “National Identity and the afterlife of Shakespeare’s portraits” by Marcia Pointon. It provides a summary of current (or then current) [4] professional thinking about Shakespeare portraiture that is radically opposed to that of Hammerschmidt-Hummel. The various portraits of the 2006 NPG exhibition are seen by Professor Pointon not as likenesses of the actual playwright, but as expressions of a need for mythologizing the ideal of England’s greatest poet and playwright. The idea of authentic portraiture is a wishful illusion. “Shakespeare portraiture is a story of the triumph of art over life, and of desire over knowledge.” Furthermore, “the name Shakespeare can never merely signify an individual in history, its meanings are forever changing, and forever challenging classification.”

Unsurprisingly, the Darmstadt death mask, arguably the key to the facial correspondences in ‘The True Face of William Shakespeare’, occupies the polar opposite of Marcia Pointon’s viewpoint. Not only is a death mask a “work of art, albeit a fairly literal one”, it is not a portrait at all. And, in contradiction to Professor Hammerschmidt-Hummel’s claim that the tomb monument of the English historian and antiquarian John Stow has features that “are faithfully reproduced, quite clearly by using a death mask” [5], Professor Pointon states that only royalty or nobility had death masks made in Shakespeare’s time.

One of the consequences of Pointon’s concept is that fraud and forgery are expressions of the Zeitgeist, equally capable of channeling emotional, not to mention financial, investment in the objects of their attention - as are authentic works should these really exist. Whether the Chandos portrait is a genuine portrait of Shakespeare or not, Professor Pointon concludes that “As an emblem of national identity and cultural pride it is without rival.” The lure of an exhibition such as of the ‘Searching for Shakespeare’, as with the objects and places of the

*Birthplace Trust in Stratford, on the other hand derives from an appeal to the naïve realism of those who pay to come. They expect to find authentic relics, not social constructs.*

*... John Hay created a television film for the BBC's The Culture Show entitled "The Flower Portrait". It was broadcast on 21 April 2005 and detailed the examination of the Flower portrait by Dr. Tarnya Cooper and her assistants at the National Portrait Gallery in London. John Hay sent a copy of the film, incorporating a BBC time code, to Professor Hammerschmidt-Hummel so that she was able to examine it frame by frame.*

*What was astonishing was the appearance of two versions of the portrait, neither of which corresponded in detail to the version the author had seen in 1996 and had reproduced in 'The True Face' (144). One of the televised versions resembled the portrait which she later examined in Stratford on 26 January 2007. More disturbing, however, was the appearance of an, as yet, unremarked version, the upper edge of which showed solid, light-colored, untreated wood without the friable irregularities observed in the 1996 "original".[6] This upper edge seemed to be of freshly cut wood without suggestions of aging or crumbling. By contrast, the Stratford 2007 version had some brown staining on all four edges. Also notable was the entire absence of stain on the upper right-hand edge of the "new" version where the portrait seen on 26 January 2007 showed brown stain. Even the apparently older version now in Stratford, however, looked in better condition than Marion Spielmann's description of the Flower portrait's "worm-eaten panel".*

*The Hays television film showed the preparation of the "unstained" version to be X-rayed. The reproduction of the X-ray in 'Searching for Shakespeare' resembles the Courtauld Institute photograph of 1966, reproduced in Religion and the Arts Volume 7- 1/2 (2003), 169. In both cases the batten on the back of the panel appears as a light, horizontal band approximately half-way down the X-ray. Both photographs show a diagonal band, about as wide as the batten, on the upper half of the painting and to the left of the long vertical fissure. This corresponds with a band of wood on the back of the panel of the January 2007 portrait in Stratford. However, in the X-ray in 'Searching for Shakespeare' (74), as well as the 1966 Courtauld X-ray, the diagonal batten joins the fissure with an acute point at its upper end, whereas the reverse side of the 2007 portrait seems to show the point broken off. ...*

*Certainly carbon dating would confirm the putative age of the wooden panel of the Flower portrait on display in Stratford and thus confirm its age of 450 years. Dating the batten would presumably establish that it was added at a later date when the fissure became apparent. Should scientific dating confirm the antiquity of the panel, then it could no longer be regarded as a copy, but as an over painting of the portrait which was restored in 1979. This, in turn, might weigh against 'The True Face of William Shakespeare', were it not for the fact that an over painting of the portrait should be plainly declared before forensic testing. The existence of the unstained copy seen in the Hays film should be explained.*

[1] There are two anomalous features in the left eye: the caruncle in the corner of the eye and the upper eyelid. When I visited Charlecote Park to inspect the marble copy of the funerary bust in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford, I saw more clearly than in Fig. 069 on page 78, a small round "socket", two or three millimeters wide, in the nasal corner of the left eye (and not in the right eye) which uncannily matches the one shown in the Flower portrait details, Figs. 115c and 116c on page 146.

[2] Cooper, 72, "The wooden panel has been tentatively identified as poplar wood, which was commonly used by artists in southern Europe during the Renaissance."

[3] Cooper, 74

[4] Cooper, 217-25. A revision of the essay published in *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, vol. 133 (1997), 29-53

[5] Hammerschmidt-Hummel, 'The True Face of William Shakespeare', 19

[6] The unstained upper edge appears on a panel with the painted portrait obliquely visible on top. Therefore it cannot be said that a blank panel was used for purposes of a television reconstruction.