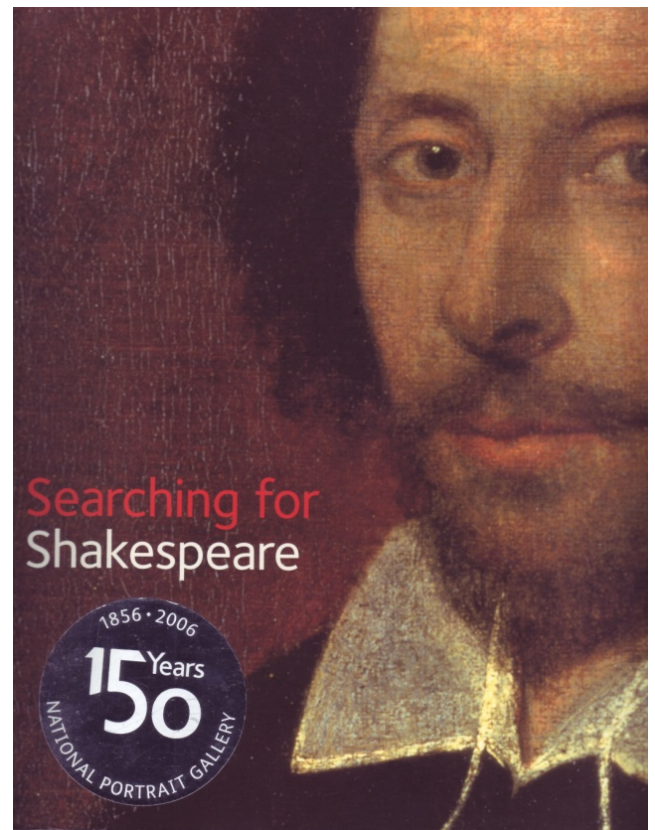
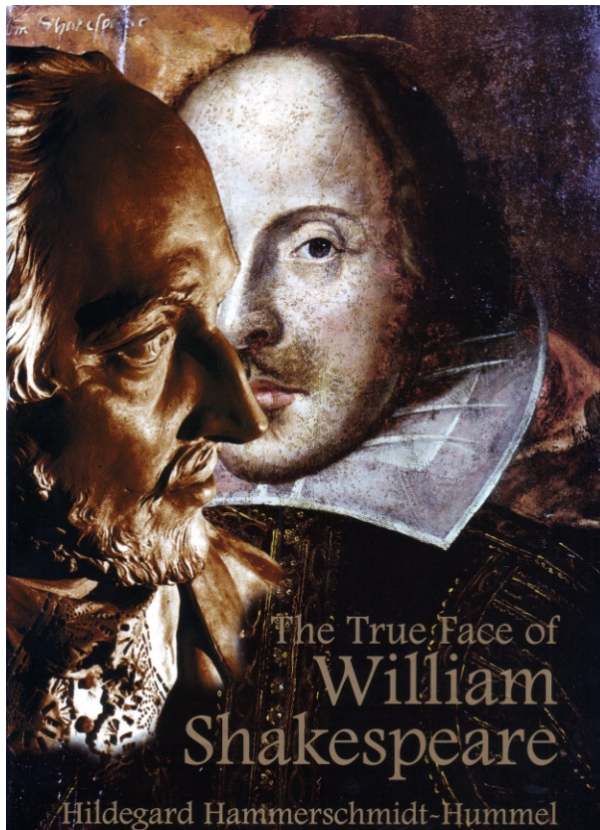


**Dr Thomas Merriam, Anglo American Shakespeare Scholar, “A Question of Authenticity” (Review Essay on Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel, *The True Face of William Shakespeare: the Poet's Death Mask and Likenesses from Three Periods of His Life*, and Tarnya Cooper, ed., with Marcia Pointon, James Shapiro and Stanley Wells, *Searching for Shakespeare*), in: *Religion and the Arts* (Boston College) 13-1 (2009), 122-135. – Extract**



*In reviewing Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel's 'Die Verborgene Existenz des William Shakespeare' (Religion and the Arts, Vol. 7-1/2 (2003), 173), I looked forward to reading the book which has now been translated as 'The True Face of William Shakespeare'. This lavishly illustrated volume presents the case for the Shakespearean authenticity and importance of the plaster of Paris death mask in Darmstadt, thought to have been taken to Germany in 1775 by Count Ludwig Von Kesselstatt. The death mask displays an enlarged left eye-lid which Professor Hammerschmidt-Hummel sees as a developing medical symptom in three other representations of Shakespeare: the Chandos portrait in the National Portrait Gallery in London, the Flower portrait as restored by Nancy Stocker in 1979, and, more controversially, the bust of Shakespeare known as the Davenant bust in the Garrick Club of London.*

*The first pillar of the author'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). ...*

*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 ..., 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.

... Professor Hammerschmidt-Hummel cites the authority of four medical experts. ...

... [She] gives an account of the painting’s [the Flower portrait’s] provenance ... [It was] donated ... 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 Encyclopedia 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) ... 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... 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 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 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). ...

The 1996 reproduction (144) shows a whitish face with conspicuous pock marks on the lower left side of 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 [director] 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 ... There is an average discrepancy of seven millimeters (slightly over a quarter of an inch) in the widths, with the portrait on display in 2007 narrower than the dimensions given in the exhibition catalogue.... Although the discrepancy is small, it is one which could be remarked upon as exceeding the limits of accuracy adopted by 'Searching for Shakespeare'.

A wooden batten is slotted horizontally into the back of the wooden panel ... to keep the left and right sides from coming apart. ... [It] shows the same brown coloration as the back of the panel, as well as the left-hand and much of the right-hand edge of the panel. Needless to say, the batten must be younger than that of the original Italian painting ... Radio-carbon dating of the panel and the batten should indicate a discrepancy in age.

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\*) 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" [Cooper, 218]. Furthermore, "the name Shakespeare can never merely signify an individual in history, its meanings are forever changing, and forever challenging classification" [Cooper, 219].

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 [Cooper, 224]. 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" ['True Face', 19], 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" [Cooper, 224] 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.

The relevance of Marcia Pointon's essay to what follows may become apparent. 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 [Hammerschmidt-Hummel] 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". 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 existence of the unstained copy seen in the Hays film should be explained [see inserted image below].

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

\*\*"naïve realism" is defined in the OED as "the belief, usually attributed to non-philosophers, that a perceived object is not only real but has a reality in all its perceived attributes."



[Left: Original Flower portrait, 1609, detail, inscription, date & crack – Right, above: Copy, shown in BBC film (2005), upper edge & surface – Right, below: Another copy, inspected by the author of 'The True Face of William Shakespeare' in Stratford in 2007, detail, upper edge]