

When Hildegard Hammerschmidt began her studies of English, American Studies, History, and Politics in Marburg in the winter semester of 1967/68, she was the beneficiary of the flowering of the humanities in the first two post-war decades, as academics sought to recuperate and advance the humanist and Christian traditions of Europe. Her choice of teachers at her university, including Karl Christ, Helmut Beumann, Andreas Hillgruber, and the 'rebels' Wolfgang Abendroth and Ernst Nolte, is testimony to Hildegard Hammerschmidt's critical focus on history. Apart from the scholar of English studies, Horst Oppel, for her the most influential teacher was without doubt the Ancient Historian Karl Christ. So it was no coincidence that the topic she proposed to her supervisor, Oppel, early in 1970 for her Ph.D dissertation was on recent English historical drama, drawing comparisons with the history plays of Shakespeare's era.

She owed her first contact with Canada to an essay competition on 'German-Canadian Relations: Past, Present, Future' (1969). She won the first prize, a ten-day trip to Quebec and Ontario. Her first publication, the account of an excursion, was commissioned by her teacher Karl Christ for *Alma Mater Philippina* (1970) and concerned the Romans in Provence. In April 1970 she received a scholarship from the *Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes* (German National Scholarship Foundation), and in August 1970 she attended for the first time the International Shakespeare Conference in Stratford-upon-Avon. It was there that she met Samuel Schoenbaum, whose work *Shakespeare's Lives* had just appeared; as much as it fascinated her, in later years she was to point out a series of contradictions in the book.

In July 1972 she gained her doctorate with a thesis on 'Historical Drama in England (1956-1971)' and became an Assistant in the English Department of Marburg University. The choice of topic for her Habilitation [second thesis qualifying the holder for a full university post] was also determined by her historical interests: 'The Import Commodities of the City of London and their Impact on the Life-Style, Language, and Dramatic Literature of Elizabethan England'. In 1973 the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* [DFG, German Research Council] granted her a 2½ year award for research on her Habilitation. From April 1976 she was an Assistant at the University of Mainz, where she qualified with her Habilitation in February 1977. In this interdisciplinary study she illuminated the huge expansion of Europe in the early modern period and followed the febrile process of the establishment of global English trading companies and trading stations, as well as the first English attempts at colonising. She drew up a precise list of the exotic merchandise flooding into London, and examined its unprecedented effect on the living standards, language and literature of Elizabethan England. In an annexe she sketched out the situation in the Netherlands where (under similar religious, social and economic conditions) the new delicacies and luxury goods from overseas stimulated painting, were used as symbols of Vanitas, and contributed to the rise of a new genre, the still life.

After her Habilitation Hildegard Hammerschmidt took up a series of temporary professorial posts in Marburg, and in 1978 she took the *Staatsexamen* [teaching qualification] there in English and History; in the same year she became a member of the board of the Association of Academics in Research Institutes, representing the Association inter alia at the West German *Rektorenkonferenz* [standing conference of university heads] in the Berlin Reichstag in 1979. Her successful participation in a DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) selection colloquium, in conjunction with several weeks of training in the Training Centre of the Bonn Foreign Office (1978), led to her being offered the post of head of the cultural section of the German Consulate General in Toronto. There Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel served as 'German Consul for Cultural Affairs' for three years (1979-82). She worked on important art exhibitions, organised the academic framework programme around the exhibition *German Masters of the Nineteenth Century* (New York and Toronto 1981) and published, along with the historian Modris Eksteins of the University of Toronto and with support from the Toronto Goethe Institute, the volume of essays *Nineteenth-Century Germany* (1983). She lectured at Canadian universities, brought together prominent representatives from the politics, business, academia and culture of both countries, took part in international discussions, fostered the German associations in Ontario, and explained the process of post-war democratic reconstruction in West Germany.

On her return from Toronto, at the behest of Horst Oppel's academic heirs, Hildegard Hammerschmidt took on the task of directing and editing the Shakespeare Illustration Archive. Her former teacher had founded the archive in Mainz after the Second World War and, as a member of the Mainz Academy of Science and Literature, had annexed it to the Academy in the 1960s. When he died as the result of a stroke in July 1982 she, as head, took over from him the DFG and Academy project, 'Die Shakespeare-Illustration' (Shakespearian Illustrations), collaborating with the external project directors, Rudolf Böhm, Horst W. Drescher, and Paul Goetsch as well as with Academy member Werner Habicht. Within a few years she had succeeded in increasing the holdings of the archive from about 1600 to some 7000 illustrations. The three-volume work *Die Shakespeare-Illustration (1594-2000). Bildkünstlerische Darstellungen zu den Dramen William Shakespeares* (Shakespearian Illustrations [1594-2000]: The Work of Artists on Shakespeare's Plays) appeared in

2003. It contains over 3000 illustrations with specified descriptions, a dictionary of artists, a classified bibliography, four indices, and an outline of the history, function and approaches to interpreting these works of art. Hildegard Hammerschmidt spent the winter semester of 1984/85 as Guest Professor in Kassel. While waiting for an additional tranche of funding for the DFG project to come through, Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel published the Academy pamphlet *Die Shakespeare-Illustrationen des Frankfurter Malers Victor Müller im Städelschen Kunstinstitut* (Shakespeare Illustrations in the Städel Institute of Art by the Frankfurt Painter Victor Müller, 1990), and the book *Die Traumtheorien des 20. Jahrhunderts und die Träume der Figuren Shakespeares* (Twentieth-Century Dream Theories and the Dreams of Shakespeare's Characters, 1992).

In 1995, using the most modern identification techniques available to the German Federal Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BKA), and aided by a number of medical experts, she succeeded in proving that the Darmstadt Shakespeare death mask was indeed the genuine death mask of Shakespeare. She also demonstrated that two Shakespeare portraits previously subject to dispute (the Chandos and Flower paintings) had in fact been painted from life, authentically reproducing the features of the poet, including a series of symptoms of disease. She had arranged for medical experts to diagnose and compare these pathological symptoms shown in the portraits. With the help of a BKA specialist, who applied the latest forensic identification technology, she could also prove that the poet's death mask was the basis for his funerary bust in the church in Stratford-upon-Avon. These discoveries played a special part in the author's three central books: *Das Geheimnis um Shakespeares 'Dark Lady'* (The Secret of Shakespeare's 'Dark Lady', 1999), *Die verborgene Existenz des William Shakespeare* (The Hidden Life of William Shakespeare, 2001), and *William Shakespeare. Seine Zeit – Sein Leben – Sein Werk* (The Life, Works and Times of William Shakespeare, 2003). Built on new or newly discovered historical sources and numerous expert assessments, they present a completely new, internally consistent and convincing picture of the life, personality and artistic achievement of William Shakespeare; one that is, moreover, closely linked up with English history in the Elizabethan-Jacobean period.

Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel's findings in the area of Shakespeare biography take us far beyond previously charted territory. She has succeeded in filling in most of the gaps and convincingly answered what have been open questions; for example, the question of Shakespeare's appearance, his religion, his schooling and university education, his first employer, his whereabouts in the 'lost years', his activities in the Catholic underground, and the identity of the 'Dark Lady', whom he made pregnant, and whom – together with his as yet unborn daughter – he lost to his patron, friend and rival, the Earl of Southampton. Conclusive answers were also forthcoming to the question of Shakespeare's involvement in the bitter political power-struggle at the end of Elizabeth's reign, and the reasons for his sudden turn towards the genre of tragedy. The author argues convincingly that Shakespeare's elegiac poem 'The Phoenix and the Turtle' (an imaginary requiem featuring a Catholic priest), previously resistant to interpretation, in fact represents a literary monument to the two bearers of his failed political hopes, Essex and Southampton. She also argues convincingly that it was the tragic events around Essex that dashed the hopes of the English Catholics and Shakespeare, inflicting a trauma on the poet which he attempted to come to terms with in the tragedy of Hamlet.

Today we can very largely go along with Hildegard Hammerschmidt in seeing Hamlet as a coded critique of the Elizabethan monarchy, religious oppression, and the martyrdom stemming from the persecution of English Catholics at the time. Up to a point, the English Shakespeare scholar John Dover Wilson had already speculatively put forward this reading. In the face of the rigid religious-political scenario of Elizabethan-Jacobean reality, comprehensively revealed for the first time by the German Shakespeare scholar, such conjectures now become certainty. Other plays with great contemporary relevance as commentaries on this time of developing crisis were, as the author demonstrates, Richard II, Henry V, and Julius Caesar; they became political tools for the Essex faction, and they too played a kind of key role. The author shows that Shakespeare's great turn to tragedy began with Hamlet, and that from then on the poet wrote no more comedies or histories (with the exception of Henry VIII), but only tragedies, bitter problem plays, and romances. In the tragedies of King Lear and Macbeth Shakespeare once again seems to be stressing the great sufferings of his countrymen. In the romances, to which the moment of reconciliation is central, the author brings out a dominant autobiographical motif: the 'quest for the lost daughter'.

The convincing new image of Shakespeare developed by Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel is in many ways revolutionary. It poses a great challenge, above all to the United Kingdom. Elizabeth I is thought of as the great trail-blazer of the English nation. She laid the foundations of England's sea-power and the British Empire. She made the final break with Rome, and firmly based her country on a fundamental protestant order. Excommunicated by Rome, and confronted by a secret Jesuit counter-reformation in her own country, she eventually found herself obliged to take ever more severe measures against her Catholic subjects. She achieved her aims by force where necessary. Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel has shown convincingly that Shakespeare, as a Catholic, cannot

have been on the side of the English government, and was inevitably an opponent of the English crown. But as a poet he cannot be tied down to any Catholic doctrine, since it goes without saying that his work and his world-view are universal.

The author can look back on a body of work which completely and comprehensibly re-positions and reinterprets the writings of William Shakespeare, paying critical respect to them in all their greatness and unity, their historical uniqueness and timelessness, and the singularity of their origins, and making them more accessible not only to academic circles but also to a wider readership. In doing so, she has won for herself a special standing within national and international Shakespeare studies. New insights are not accepted overnight, especially if they are uncomfortable. Frau Hammerschmidt-Hummel's colleagues will be coming to terms with this challenge for decades to come. They would be right to congratulate her on this outstanding achievement. For her and her work we wish due recognition, and for her and her family we wish good fortune, health, happiness and a productive life in future.

Heidelberg KURT OTTEN

[Professor (em.) of English,
University of Heidelberg,
Visiting Fellow, Clare Hall,
Cambridge University]