

Chaucer Press

The Life & Times

of William Shakespeare

Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel

Publication 5th November 2007

£35.00 • Illustrated Hardback • ISBN 978-1-904449-55-3

In this ground breaking biography, Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel presents a complete picture of William Shakespeare's life and times and answers the centuries-old questions that have fascinated Shakespeare scholars and theatre-goers alike.

What did Shakespeare do during his so-called 'lost years' – the period from 1585 to 1592 for which no documentary evidence of his presence in England exists? How did a man who, as it seemed, never left his country evoke Renaissance Italy so vividly? Why did he abruptly switch from writing comedies and histories to writing tragedies? Who was the 'Dark Lady'? Why has so much secrecy surrounded the life of the bard that many believe that someone else must have written the plays?

Hammerschmidt-Hummel reveals that Shakespeare's 'lost years' may not be as lost as we think. She traces Shakespeare's movements from Stratford Grammar School to the then only Catholic English College on the continent, and from there to time spent as a tutor to the prominent de Hoghton family in Lancashire, who supported the Catholic underground. She presents evidence that Shakespeare travelled to Rome (1585, 1587, 1589) where many eminent English Catholics living in exile met in 1585 to discuss their strategies. She finds evidence of his presence there under a pseudonym. She also records that he revisited Rome in 1613, the same year he bought the eastern gatehouse in Blackfriars, a secret refuge for Catholics.

The Shakespeare scholar establishes the true identity of the poet's 'Dark Lady', a figure who is loved, hated, cajoled and railed against within Shakespeare's sonnets. By identifying the heavily pregnant subject of the famous Elizabethan painting, *The Persian Lady*, and the author of its inscribed sonnet, Hammerschmidt-Hummel presents exciting new source material and historical documentation which indicates that there still exists a direct bloodline from Shakespeare through to the present day, with the line of descent passing through the Spencer family of Althorp, meaning that our Princes, William and Harry, have Shakespearean blood running in their veins.

Supported by new documentary evidence, written and pictorial authentic sources and hitherto overlooked facts and details, *The Life & Times of William Shakespeare 1564-1616* is a major addition to our understanding of the life, times and work of the iconic poet and playwright.

Professor Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel has taught English Literature and Culture at the Universities of Marburg and Mainz since 1977 and is the long-standing senior research scholar and editor of *The Shakespeare Illustration* collection. She has published widely in scholarly periodicals and newspapers and is the author of the seminal three volume study *Shakespeare Illustrations from 1594 to 2000*, as well as a number of other books on Shakespeare including *The Secret Surrounding Shakespeare's Dark Lady* and *The Secret Life of William Shakespeare: Poet and Rebel in the Catholic Underground*. *The True Face of William Shakespeare*, in which she was the first scholar to apply state of the art forensic techniques to the study of Shakespeare's portraits, received blanket coverage in the national newspapers and on Radio 4's *Today* when it was published by Chaucer Press in 2006.

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