

Professor E.A.J. Honigmann, F.B.A., 1927-2011.

E.A.J. Honigmann, Joseph Cowen Professor of English Literature at Newcastle University 1970-1989, was one of the most innovative and distinguished Shakespeare scholars of his generation. Ernst Anselm Joachim Honigmann was born in Breslau, in Silesia (now Wrocław in Poland). His father was director of the Breslau Zoo, and his childhood home was a place for nurturing young animals. Ernst's father was particularly interested in exploring the intellectual capacity of higher mammals, and Ernst always liked to tell the story of his 'brother,' 'Clever Moritz', who was a chimpanzee with whom the infant Ernst was sometimes obliged to share his cot in the cause of his father's research.

The story of 'Clever Moritz' is in the autobiographical sketches, written with striking vividness and particularity, which Ernst collected as *Togetherness: Episodes from the Life of a Refugee* (2006). Because his father came from a Jewish family life became hard, and then intolerable, for the Honigmanns in Germany in the 1930s. In 1935 Ernst's parents with their three young sons moved to Britain where Dr Honigmann found work in London and then at Dudley Zoo near Birmingham before settling in Glasgow where Ernst, now aged seven, learnt his first words of English. Dr Honigmann was briefly interned as an 'enemy alien' in 1941. His health had always been fragile and he died in 1943.

His father advised Ernst to 'go where the best minds are' in their adopted country, and Ernst went to Glasgow University (1944-48), where he was a student of the great Shakespeare scholar and editor Peter Alexander. As a postgraduate he went to Oxford to write a B Litt thesis on the chronology of Shakespeare's plays, and in 1951 he became a founding Fellow of Birmingham University's Shakespeare Institute, and from 1954 to 1967 he returned to Glasgow University as a lecturer. Following a fruitful year of academic exchange with an American university he moved to Newcastle in 1968 as Reader in English, and two years later he was appointed to the Joseph Cowen Chair.

Ernst Honigmann's work as critic, textual editor and archival and historical researcher steadily expanded existing knowledge of theatrical cultures in the early modern period. His study of the textual problems of *Othello* made him a familiar name to undergraduates, and his edition of *King John* shone light on a play which tends to be neglected. Two historical and biographical studies, *Shakespeare's Impact on his Contemporaries* (1982) and *Shakespeare: The Lost Years* (1985) had a transformative impact on the scholarly discussion of Shakespeare. His thesis in *The Lost Years* followed E.K. Chambers's suggestion that the young Shakespeare might have been 'William Shakeshaft,' a player known to have been active in Lancashire in the 1580s. Honigmann published this as an 'interim report' on the possibility that Shakespeare/Shakeshaft worked as a schoolmaster for a noble Catholic family in Lancashire (and may himself have been a Catholic at this date). This attracted wide

publicity and stirred up much debate. Honigmann defended his thesis confidently but with consistent courtesy and grace, and the debate is still current. Professor Tom Cain points out that the lasting importance of the thesis is that it provides a platform for further research both into the Lancashire connection and more importantly into the consequent argument that Shakespeare began working in London as early as 1586-7.

A colleague from another university writes of Ernst's work as a whole that it 'contributed significantly to the early movement to integrate Shakespeare more firmly in a theatrical environment surrounded by competitors, imitators and collaborators,' and that 'rather than subscribing to a fusty bardolatry, he reminded readers of the rich diversity of early modern theatrical life.' Ernst Honigmann was prodigiously productive and hard-working to the end, publishing nine monographs, several editions of Shakespeare plays and other texts from the period, and a large number of major articles, one of which has yet to be published. At the same time during most of his Newcastle years he was Head of the Department of English Literature, and in addition he served from 1976 to 2000 as joint General Editor of the Revels Plays. In 1989 he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy.

Ernst was a demanding and brilliant teacher, and after his retirement in 1989 his spell-binding public lectures ensured that he continued to be recognised as a major intellectual force in the university. A volume of essays published in his honour for his 70th birthday comprised ten essays from members of the School and also fourteen contributions from some of the most prominent Shakespeare scholars world-wide, all of whom were friends of Ernst Honigmann. His memory and his reputation will be kept alive by friends, colleagues, former students, and the whole scholarly community, and his impact on literary studies in this country is permanent.