

HONORARY GRADUATE

Edith Hildegard Raidt

Edith Hildegard Raidt was born in Ellwangen, Germany, on 29 December 1932. In 1952 she became a member of the Secular Institute of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary. In 1954 the Institute sent her to South Africa to become a teacher. She wrote the examinations for the Joint Matriculation Board in 1955 and then registered at the University of Cape Town for a Bachelor of Arts degree with the two official languages as majors.

Edith Raidt never became a teacher. From her first year of study at UCT she showed a talent for academic study and independent research, which would lead her into an academic career during which she has become the foremost authority on the history of the Afrikaans language. After obtaining a BA degree in 1958, she proceeded to BA Honours in 1959, Bachelor of Education in 1969, and a Masters degree in 1960, achieving distinctions in all of these. In 1961 she became a lecturer in the department of Afrikaans and Nederlands at UCT, and in 1965 she was awarded a PhD degree.

While Edith Raidt initially specialised in Afrikaans literature, she rapidly developed into a leading exponent of historical linguistics under the guidance of Professor J du P Scholz, who established this discipline as a scholarly enterprise. Her first book, *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaans Byvoeglike Verbuiging*, was published in 1968. *Afrikaans en sy Europese Verlede*, first published in 1971 and twice revised since then, remains to this day the most thorough and authoritative account of the history of Afrikaans. It is still used as a textbook in Afrikaans departments in virtually all South African universities and formed the basis for *Einführung in Geschichte und Struktur des Afrikaans*, which was published in 1983 by the internationally renowned Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft in Darmstadt and did more than any other single publication to encourage linguists across the world to pursue further research into the unique genealogy of the Afrikaans language. Edith Raidt is one of those rare scholars who singlehandedly inspired a whole tradition of research.

In 1971, the year in which her book on the European history of Afrikaans first appeared, Edith Raidt joined the staff of the Department of Afrikaans en Nederlands at the University of the Witwatersrand as Senior Lecturer. Five years later she became Associate Professor and Reader, and from 1980 to her retirement at the end of 1996 she served as *ad hominem* Professor of Historical and Afrikaans Linguistics, a position she occupied with growing distinction. Apart from editing two volumes of Francois Valentyn's *Beschryvinge van de Kaap der Goede Hoop* (1971 and 1973), she published more than seventy articles in scholarly journals. These were a continuation of her previous work but also an expansion into new areas, taking into account new theories about the genesis of languages and showing a greater awareness of the roots of Afrikaans in Africa and the social context within which the language came into being at the Cape. She broke new ground in her analysis of 'women's language' by demonstrating how women writers, because of their particular social positions, were the first to reflect in their documents or their reported speech the extent to which Dutch had already changed into Afrikaans. Many of these new directions are evident in Edith Raidt's *Historiese Taalkunde: Studies oor die Geskiedenis van Afrikaans* (1994), a work for which she was awarded the C J Langenhoven Prize for Linguistics by the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns.

Edith Raidt's sound philological investigations and her undogmatic evaluation of the available evidence have assured her an unassailable position as leader in her field. Her membership of numerous editorial boards, national and international academies and scholarly associations, and the fact that for almost twenty years she edited the Akademie's *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, attest to the high respect she commands from colleagues here and abroad. When in 1994 a *Festschrift* was compiled for her, a large number of experts contributed fresh perspectives on the history of Afrikaans, paying tribute to the new possibilities that were created by her basic research. A singular honour was her election in 1993 as an international honorary member of the Koninklijke Akademie voor Taal- en Letterkunde in Ghent. She holds an honorary doctorate from the Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys.

Apart from being a dedicated and productive scholar, Edith Raidt has also played an enormous role in the administration of the University and the Faculty of Arts. She headed several departments, initiated the es-

tablishment of the language laboratories and the Postgraduate School of Translators and Interpreters, and for many years tirelessly served on a large number of Faculty and University committees. What is less commonly known is that as Director of the Schoenstatt Institute Edith Raidt also managed to sustain a very active participation in community work. More specifically, she has lectured and written extensively on Christian Business Management, publishing an enormous work on *Christlike Unternehmensführung nach der Konzeption P Josef Kennenichs* in 1994. Her expertise in this field has led to invitations to lecture extensively in South America, Europe and Africa, and in 1989 she was nominated as 'Business Personality of the Week' by *The Sunday Star*. In addition, she was translation editor for the Afrikaans version of the Catholic Liturgy and a member of the Committee for the Prescribing of Books of the Transvaal Education Department, and currently serves on the Religious Broadcasting Panel of the SABC.

Edith Raidt retired from Wits at the end of 1996 at the close of a very distinguished career. It is a great privilege for the University to award her its highest honour, the degree of Doctor of Literature *honoris causa*, in recognition of her enormous contribution to knowledge, her untiring service to the University community, and her contribution to the material and spiritual wellbeing of society.