



**My Lord of Oxenford's Maske:
Edward de Vere and his Circle**

Ron Andrico, lute, Donna Stewart voice

Label: Mignarda (003) 68 minutes 31 seconds AISN:
B000MQ3T2S \$15, available on Amazon
or from www.mignarda.com

For listeners interested in the musicality of both Shakespeare and Edward de Vere, this CD is most welcome, particularly as it contains the elusive 'Lord Oxford's Galliard', which up till now has been so difficult to winkle out of the Folger. A year or so ago, Philip Picket, the famous Early Music specialist, whom I had met at Utrecht, tried to get it for me, only to be put off with the excuse that there was 'Not much of it', and that it was 'not very good!' Neither of which comments seemed relevant then, nor do they now. Congratulations to Ron Andrico and Donna Stewart, for obtaining it for this collection (track 12), along with 27 other pieces: a goodly number. The inclusion of the Horestes songs is very welcome.

The performances are highly pleasing. Donna Stewart is a mezzo-soprano with a clear yet rich voice which injects life and appeal into the most doleful pieces of Dowland, such as 'Flow my tears'. Sadness becomes meditation in her skilful tones. I could not help thinking that songs like 'In commendation of music' were composed for just such an interpretation.

The lute, too, is a calming, reflective instrument, easily tinged with melancholy. Ron Andrico's strong and sensitive performance brings out these qualities, while articulating the structure and tempo of the pieces with fine determination. For some of the more robust numbers, such as 'Lord Willoughby's welcome home', the metal-stringed cittern might have more easily brought out the swagger and rhythm required. I felt also that there could have been more passion injected into 'O mistress mine'.

The 8-page booklet with this CD gives the words to the songs and makes a good starting point for linking the pieces and composers with Edward de Vere. Some links are more tenuous than others, and some points are missed out: such as that Lord Willoughby was Oxford's brother-in-law, but the obvious dedication required to produce this very charming collection will win your applause. For Christmas presents, definitely. E.I.

The Wonder Mind

a review by Richard Malim

SHAKESPEARE THE THINKER

by Prof. A. D. Nuttall

Yale University Press 2007 pp.383.

This is a most important book deservedly given rave reviews by John Carey and Jonathan Carey. It should be read by every Shakespeare lover of whatever persuasion.

The late Professor Nuttall wrote, 'I have assumed throughout this book that Shakespeare's plays are the product of a singularly remarkable mind, that Shakespeare wrote "Shakespeare".' Unfortunately for anti-Stratfordians this basic assumption appears not on page 1 but on page 377, but the implication is clear: as the point is assumed, it need not necessarily be accepted as proved.

The question for anti-Stratfordians is whether Professor Nuttall was justified in adopting this assumption or not. *Hamlet*, he tells us, was written around 1600. The only biographical allusion in the book advances claims that the name of the play comes from the accidental drowning in 1579 in the Avon 3 miles upstream from Stratford of one Katherine Hamlett.

However 'we know that there was an earlier play with the Hamlet story, perhaps by Thomas Kyd' (p. 196). Leaving aside that Eddi Jolly has recently demonstrated that this Ur-Hamlet (Nuttall dodges using any name for it) is a figment by Malone in the 1820s followed by some other scholars to fit with his dating perception of the author's life, Nuttall ignores the famous reference in Nashe's *Introduction to Menaphon* (1589), 'and if you entreat him faire on a frosty morning hee will afford you whole Hamlets I should say handfulls of Tragicall speeches'. Presumably, that is the *Hamlet* conjured up by poor Katherine Hamlet's death: in logic Nuttall must have thought there was a second but earlier playwright from Stratford who knew of the tragedy, and of such competence for Nashe be able to joke on the name of a well known play by this author.

Nuttall deals with the unresolvable contradictions in 'his' playwright: '[Brutus's] love for his wife and his grief at her death, affections Brutus is proud to be able to repress, actually redeem him as a human being. The social climbing Shakespeare who emerges from Katherine Duncan-Jones's biography, *Ungentle Shakespeare*, seems as a personality ethically thin, far from admirable. But the Shakespeare who can uncover so much frailty and continue to perceive goodness, the Shakespeare behind the plays, is a figure of immense, intelligent charity' (p.185). This clear analysis demonstrates that the characters are those of two different people, but Nuttall does not

provide any further comment, which if he had (or could) might have been illuminating.

Nuttall has re-read the plays and re-analysed them, leaving out *Henry VIII* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*, which the Asquith extreme Catholic school of thought will find significant. He provides no explanation for the near-incredible erudition displayed by the playwright, but he is quite happy, unlike the less classically-literate critics, to cite several examples: -The doubt on the claim of Lucentio in *The Taming of the Shrew* (III i 27-8) to noble ancestry is buried in an allusion to Ovid on genealogy;- Cicero's remark in Greek on the preservation of piety in revolutionary times is merely referred to without being set out (*Julius Caesar* I iii 78-84) - The Greek for 'Et tu, Brute?' translates as, 'You, child, as well' in Suetonius and as Nuttall says the Greek imports intimacy rather than gravity. Both the Latin and the Greek appear in Suetonius but neither in Plutarch, Shakespeare's principal source. - Speaking of Troilus and Cressida Nuttall writes 'While concrete history is now set aside, Shakespeare's sensitivity to Greek literary "structures" is astonishing' (p.208), and devotes space to developing this argument.

The point is that, in each case, 'Shakespeare, who says nothing to help the audience, evidently has the original before his mind with complete clarity. Never was learning more lightly worn.' (pp.84-5) Nuttall realises that scholastic self-exhibitionism is never a feature of the writer and points up the complete difference between him and Jonson and other contemporaries, 'Shakespeare writes like one who can afford not to show off. His academic exercise retains no smell of the classroom. It is pure fun.' (p.57)

It is clear that he is light years more competent and complete a classicist than his contemporaries. Where did he get his education and have access to the texts both printed and manuscript? Shakespeare for a reply to this question can only provide a closed book to Nuttall. Oxford gives us a good grasp of the answers.

Why then do I first write, 'This is a most important book'? Its importance lies not in the pointing up of some of the crucial deficiencies in the Shakespeare dramatist biography but in Nuttall's analysis of the nature and achievements of the playwright as demonstrated by the plays.

In particular the analysis of the part played by religion is brilliant. It might be a simplistic generalisation, but by 1585 almost all Englishmen had to decide publicly for or against the Pope or to dissemble or be under the protection of some favoured Roman Catholic aristocrat. The playwright is different: 'He does not write as if he needs to hide his pre-Reformation materials; he writes as if the Reformation hasn't even happened - and we are all friends.

This is not the missionary Catholicism of a Champion, nor is it strenuous evasiveness. It is something else.' (p.20). Of course Nuttall cannot supply that 'something else', which would seem to be Oxford's self exclusion from the politico-religion cockpit. As a prominent nobleman yet with no political aspiration or power he could afford to stand above and adopt a non-combatant position (yet protecting the actors), and yet not be prosecuted for doing so.

The position would suit his own attitude to all large problems: 'We have no idea what Shakespeare thought, finally, about any major question. The man is elusive - one might say, systematically elusive. There is something eerie about a figure who can write so much and give away so little.' (p.1)

Nuttall reviews a wide spectrum of human behaviour as revealed in the plays, but he believes the moments of major philosophical importance are 'the exploration of the ontological status of the imagination in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Anthony and Cleopatra", and the analysis of identity and ethical subjectivism in "Troilus and Cressida"'. Here indeed Shakespeare, though working with maximal intellectual power, finds no terminus to his thought. He was simply too intelligent to persuade himself that the problems were completely solved, but it would be absurd to conclude that nothing has been achieved; he gets further - much further - than anyone else I have ever read. And in his love for the "just-possible" he scores, over and over again, as a dramatist (as distinct from a sage). By this means he joins verisimilitude to wonder.' (pp.382-3).

The great importance of this book is that Professor Nuttall effectively identifies the root question of the authorship problem: who could and did write and think in this way? We have a writer who in writing could afford not to show off his superior learning, who in religion does not need to hide his pre-Reformation materials and in philosophy pushes the boundaries further than anyone before or since, and yet does not provide or feel the need to provide termini to his thought: he is a man on a high pinnacle looking down at the rest of us, but on himself as well.

Nuttall assumes without analysis that the man is Shakespeare from Stratford, but, using his own brilliant interpretation of the candidates, only Oxford provides a full coherent answer to that root question.

R.M.

Eddi Jolly: *De Vere Society Newsletter* Nov. 2006

Katherine Duncan-Jones: *Ungentle Shakespeare*, Arden 2001

Claire Asquith: *Shadowlands*, Perseus 2001