

Book Review by Eddi Jolly*The Shakespeare Secret* by J.L. Carrell

Sphere, £6.99 paperback pp 480

ISBN 978-0-7515-4035-2

Read this book. Buy it for your friends and local library. No, this reviewer is not related to Jennifer Lee Carrell, and does not have shares in Sphere. But if those who doubt Shaksper of Stratford would like a fictional exposé of those doubts, this is an ingenious and intelligent read.

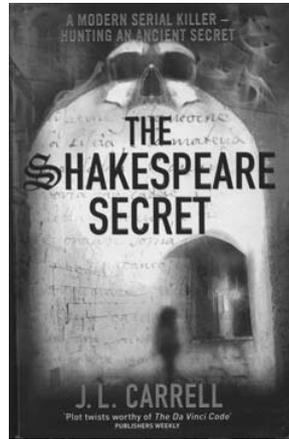
Carrell is clearly familiar with the historical personages of late Elizabethan and early Jacobean England, and with writings of that time including the King James Bible. Moreover, she's aware of the gaps in the records, and missing plays such as *Cardenio*. Her book's geographical range takes us from the Globe, past and present, to Wilton House, to Valladolid, and to America, inevitably including the Folger.

Plot twists worthy of *The Da Vinci Code* says the blurb, and certainly there are at least as many. And that book and this share some tongue-in-cheek names. Meet the twenty-first century Sir Henry Lee, knight of the stage, and – wait for it – Athenaide Dever. Test your own knowledge of the plays by identifying quotations, and while you're trying to keep track of the pile of corpses on stage and the methods of their killing, enjoy the name dropping. Chambers, whose four volumes inspired the book, Ophelia, Delia Bacon, Daniel Defoe, the Earl of Oxford, and even Sir Henry Neville are among them.

This book is faction, and a thoroughly good read. It gives enough exposure to the problems of Shaksper and A.N. Other to be fun without being polemical. Its 'Author's Note' shows her immersion in the period, and she is very fair in her use of it. The ending, at one level, is very much 'Love's Labours Wonne'. If a few more readers are introduced to the question, to *Verò nihil verius*, and how doggedly some want to believe in a genius who came from 'nuffink', that's brilliant.

This could be a thriller in search of a script editor and a film director. Is Stoppard twiddling his thumbs?

E.J.

**Rene Weis : *Shakespeare Revealed***

John Murray 2007

Review by Richard Malim

This book opened by chance for me at Chapter 25 which begins: 'On Easter Sunday, 20th April 1606, Susanna Shakespeare refused to take the Eucharist. Her father was just then deeply into writing *King Lear*.' The first statement of a fact is not differentiated in mood from the mere speculation of the second I was right in thinking that I was in for the usual Stanley Wells-type mixture of speculation turning into fact puffed out into 393 pages.

There are however interesting ideas even for an Oxfordian. A great deal of the book appears to depend on proof that William Shakespeare was effectively expelled from Stratford-upon-Avon as a result of the alleged Lucy Charleccote Park poaching incident. While this is of minimal interest to Oxfordians, the evidence that Professor Weis adduces will at least amuse. He quotes the Old Shepherd in *The Winter's Tale* ; 'I would that there were no ages between ten and three-and-twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest; for there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing, fighting -'

'Getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry' (one example of each) of course match the career of William Shakespeare. The playwright goes on to depict the two characters of the Old Shepherd and his son (especially) as figures of social climbing fun.

The Professor then discusses two scurrilous poems attributed to the 23-year-old Shakespeare - apparently his first recorded and belated effort at literature. Some Oxfordians identify the Old Shepherd and his son with John and William Shakespeare and will be pleased that in effect some 'orthodox' scholars are doing the same

However it is clear that Oxford's view of Shakespeare the man was that of amused contempt. This escapes Weis, who calls in aid the William Page education scene from *Merry Wives of Windsor* (Act IV Sc.1) to show how the playwright's development. Anyone who began his/her studies of Latin at the age of eight can see that William Page's attainments are very limited indeed, especially if his part is actor over ten years of age, and a source of hilarity to the well educated members of the Court and the audience at a contemporary public theatre.

'Orthodox' scholars tell us of William Shakespeare's social climbing and personal pride in his writing. Weis writes, 'Shakespeare did not take

a modest view of his own gifts and achievements' (p.2), and this rules him out as the author of the (self-) denigratory passages referred to.

Perhaps the most controversial section of the book is Professor Weis's proposition that some half of the Sonnets were written before Marlowe's death in May 159 : Marlowe is the 'rival poet'. 'Venus and Adonis' appeared at the same time and 'The Rape of Lucrece' in 1594 and these are generally agreed to be less competent and therefore earlier productions than the Sonnets. Marlowe is bizarrely considered as a considerable influence on the early Shakespeare, tenuously based on the one direct quotation and one reference in *As You Like It*, and the use by Jonson and Shakespeare of 'might' and 'mighty' when apparently referring to Marlowe

Oxfordians can help the Professor when he writes that, 'If a quarto of *The Shrew* were ever to turn up it might contain that part of the induction that seems so oddly missing at the end of the comedy in its present state in Folio' (p.159). No, it won't: Sly is left at the end of the play in charge of all the lord's riches - a clear allegory for William Shakespeare left as keeper of all Oxford's literary glories.

Florio, says the Professor, 'could have taught Shakespeare about Italy, Italian customs and the topograohy of the peninsula' (p.162). No, he could not. As the English son of an exiled Italian Protestant, Florio never went to Italy and would not as suggested by Weis, tell Shakespeare that Verona and Milan are not separated by water - canal was the usual method of travel between the two cities. Perhaps then the Professor will tell us how he reconciles, ' Venice for Shakespeare is a real place, one that he appears to know, so intimately in fact that it seems as though he must have been there' (p.289).

Weis departs on his own set of rails when he seeks to connect the death of Hamnet the twin son of Shakespeare in 1596 with references to the re-united sets of twins in the various plays. He goes so far as to surmise that Hamnet might have drowned in the Avon as this suggests that *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night* and *Comedy of Errors* (written by 'orthodox' dating in 1589) were all affected by such a tragedy.

Again like Oxfordians, he believes that the writer had a physical limp. In contrast to the absence of extrinsic evidence for William Shakespeare's limp, that for Oxford is incontrovertible and presents a link with the canon the 'orthodox' would no doubt appreciate very much were it their man's.

It is easy to point out from every chapter other such assumptions, the product not of historical

research but of the misapplication of a richly endowed mind. My favourite comes on pp. 89-90 when he quotes 'magotie-headed' Aubrey; ' the humour of ... the constable in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* he happened to take at Grendon in Bucks'. Aubrey was no doubt referring to Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*. There is apparently no 'Dogberry' in Grendon at that time, but 'there is a name that might have inspired (Shakespeare): a William Soulberry is listed in 1642 'apparently christened in 1599 the son of Humphrey Soulberry. Marlowe and atheistic coteries enjoyed word games, such as spelling 'God' as 'dog'. "' If 'God' becomes 'dog', then 'soul' might too' writes the Professor (p.90).

Words fail.

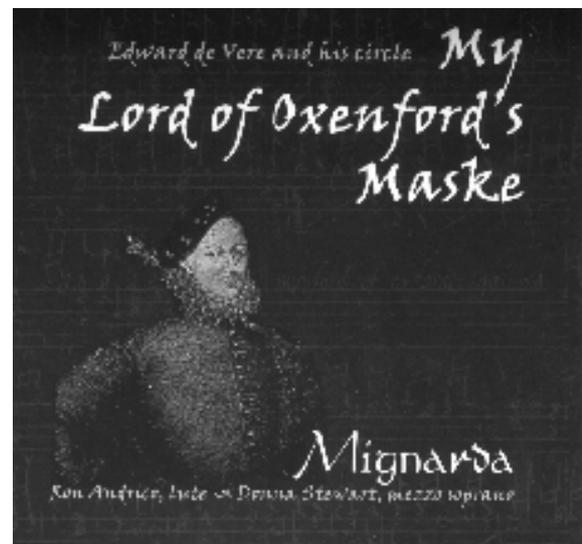
R.M.

**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 AINS:
B000MQ3T2S \$15, available on Amazon

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