

Comparisons of Oxford's Poetry with Shakespeare's:

Five Letters from J. Thomas Looney to *The New Age* (1920-1921) and *The Outlook* (1921)

Introduction and annotations by James A. Warren

Five letters by J. Thomas Looney addressing the similarities and differences between Oxford's early poems and those generally regarded as "Shakespeare's" were part of a cache of Looney's papers discovered in 2019, seventy-five years after his death. It is perhaps appropriate to explain just how the papers came to light before addressing the content of the letters.

Early in 2019, Kathryn Sharpe, Chair of the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship's "*Shakespeare*" Identified 100th Anniversary Committee, asked Alan Bodell, J. Thomas Looney's grandson, if he had any more photographs of his grandfather that he would be willing to share with the Fellowship in addition to those he had already sent. He responded that he didn't think he did, but there was one place he had not yet checked, an old desk in the attic of his house.

A week later he contacted Kathryn to say that he had found additional photos of his grandfather, and discovered a cache of hundreds of his grandfather's papers that he hadn't known about. And so were discovered, seventy-five years after his death, the only known surviving papers of the man who wrote "*Shakespeare*" Identified.

These papers had an interesting history. They had survived in that desk drawer in that unheated attic in Looney's grandson's house in southern Scotland for more than fifty years, ever since he and his wife had purchased it in

1968. Before then the desk sat in his mother's house—Looney's daughter's house—for sixteen years. And for eight years before that, the desk had been in the house of his widow, Elizabeth Looney, the same house where Looney had written his book.

These newly discovered papers were only a small fraction of the materials Looney had accumulated during his decades of research into the authorship question and the correspondence he had carried on with countless people interested in Edward de Vere's authorship. But they are all that is left, and we must be immensely grateful that they have come to light.

Kathryn Sharpe had introduced me to Alan Bodell at the same time she asked him about the photographs, and I had corresponded with him about my research into his grandfather's work. When I mentioned the excitement the discovery of his grandfather's papers had generated among Oxfordian scholars, he invited me to review them in his home. Then he added that "you would be very welcome to do what you wish with them." Since he didn't feel comfortable mailing such irreplaceable items, I decided to travel to Scotland to meet him and to retrieve the papers in person.

At the end of June 2019, I flew to London and then drove up to Scotland to meet Alan and his daughter Helen. We had an enjoyable visit together before going out for lunch at an outdoor restaurant near the Teviot River. After we returned to their house, Alan brought out a big box full of his grandfather's papers. As I looked through its contents, I recognized some of the materials, such as a few issues of the *Shakespeare Fellowship News-Letter* and articles from *The Bookman's Journal*, but most of the documents consisted of articles, correspondence and handwritten manuscripts I had never seen before—even though I had spent the past four years researching the early years of the Oxfordian movement.

I found that the cache of papers consisted of 386 items totaling about 1,940 pages. About half of it was Oxfordian in nature and half related to personal

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or Positivist matters that had occupied Looney's thoughts earlier in his life. The Oxfordian materials included 249 items totaling 1,017 pages, consisting of:

- 36 clippings (10 by Looney)
- 145 letters (5 by Looney)
- 43 handwritten articles or fragments totaling 200 (small) pages (all by Looney)
- A copy of *The Poems of Edward de Vere* with handwritten notes in the margins
- 24 other items

Included in the 36 clippings were five letters that Looney had sent to two publications in response to reviews they had published of his books. Three of the letters were to *The New Age*, where they formed part of a seven-part exchange of views initiated by R.H.C.'s review of Looney first book, "*Shakespeare Identified* (1920). The other two letters were to *The Outlook: A Weekly Review of Politics, Art, Literature and Finance*, where they formed two parts of a four-part exchange of views launched by Solomon Eagle's review of his second book, *The Poems of Edward de Vere* (1921).

Interestingly, both reviewers had used pseudonyms. R.H.C. was actually Alfred R. Orage, editor of *The New Age*, a weekly newsmagazine noted for its influence in literature and the arts. Solomon Eagle was the pen name of John Collins Squire, editor of *The Observer*. Looney and Squire were to engage each other again two years later when Squire's review of Col. Bernard R. Ward's *The Mystery of "Mr. W. H."* was answered by Looney.¹

Both reviews, and the following exchanges of letters in both publications, address the similarities and differences between the early poems of Edward de Vere and those of "Shakespeare." Looney cites "identity of conception" and "parallels in phrasing" in support of his belief that the two bodies of work came from the same pen. The differences between them were just what should be expected, he explains, given two factors that he presents. The first is that Oxford's



Looney's papers as I began to sort them out.

early poems were for the most part “hasty ephemeral products of his diletante courtier days,” and as such would surely differ from “Shakespeare’s,” which “had undergone a lengthy process of most exacting revision and vast enrichment.”

The second factor, even more decisive, is “historical.”

It was absolutely impossible for the greatest genius to have produced, in 1576, literature at all resembling, either in form or quality, the work which came from Shakespeare’s pen eighteen years later, [because, Looney explains] in the whole history of England there never has been, and there never can be again, anything like the phenomenally rapid expansion, that took place at that time, in literary craftsmanship, and even in the English language itself.... The rich veins of phrase and figure created by two abnormal decades of national poetical enthusiasm, the intense stimulus given to many phases of intellectual interest, the free and even licentious probing of life and human nature, furnished the ’nineties with literary powers and possibilities far beyond the highest hopes of the ’seventies.²

So, for reasons both personal and historical, the differences between Oxford’s early work and his later work, now known as “Shakespeare’s,” are similar in, and differ in, just those ways that scholars should expect. But it’s best for Looney himself to explain it all further.



J. Thomas Looney—R.H.C. Published Correspondence in <i>The New Age</i>		
1920, December 2	R.H.C.	"Readers & Writers" [Review of " <i>Shakespeare</i> " Identified], Vol. 28/5: 55–56
1920, December 23	J. Thomas Looney	"Readers & Writers" [Letter], Vol. 28/8: 91–92.
	R.H.C.	"Readers & Writers" [Reply to Looney], Vol. 28/8: 92.
1921, January 20	J. Thomas Looney	"Readers & Writers" [Letter], Vol. 28/12: 139.
	R.H.C.	"Readers & Writers" [Reply to Looney], Vol. 28/12: 139.
1921, January 27	R.H.C.	"Readers & Writers" [Additional reply to Looney], Vol. 28/13: 155–56.
1921, February 17	J. Thomas Looney	"Shakespeare Identified" [Letter], Vol. 28/16: 192.
J. Thomas Looney—Solomon Eagle Correspondence in <i>The Outlook</i>		
1921, March 12	Solomon Eagle	"Mr. Looney and Lord Oxford," Vol. 47/1206: 231.
1921, June 25	J. Thomas Looney	"Shakespeare, Lord Oxford, Solomon Eagle and Mr. Looney" [Letter], Vol. 47/1221: 543–44.
1921, July 2	Solomon Eagle	"The Critic at Large," Vol. 48/1223: 15.
1921, July 16	J. Thomas Looney	"Mr. Looney Replies" [Letter], Vol. 48/1225: 58–59.

LETTERS IN *THE NEW AGE*

"Readers and Writers,"³ *The New Age*, vol. 28/8: 91–92. (December 23, 1920)

Readers and Writers

SIR, Most of my critics have been writers acquainted with all the leading facts of the Shakespeare controversy, who have yet been able to preserve a steadfast orthodoxy. From them I feel separated as by a wall of *constitutional* mental difference—not of knowledge or of capacity—against which argument would be unavailing. My critic in *THE NEW AGE* (December 2) stands, however, in a totally different relationship, both to the problem and to my researches. He rejects alike the Stratfordian and the Baconian theory: and is therefore predisposed to adopt a reasonable alternative; he frankly admits that the general mass of my evidence is "striking," but he feels obliged to reject the De Vere solution absolutely on very definite grounds. He presents, therefore, a case which calls for a serious answer.

Difficulties, of course, are bound to appear in any proposed solution, however true. A secrecy deliberately planned by one of the most ingenious of minds might have proved forever impenetrable, and the true author's claims might have been set aside explicitly on the ground of difficulties of his own devising. To explain away objections must, therefore, form part of any solution; my own wonder has been that in Oxford's case the difficulties have turned out to be so few and so easily disposed of.

The insuperable obstacle in "R.H.C.'s" opinion is that the poetry left by Edward de Vere makes it clear that "Edward de Vere could not have possibly written a single true Shakespeare line."

Let me say, first, that when many distinct lines of evidence, involving a vast accumulation of details, all support in a "striking" way a given solution to any problem, whilst one point raises a difficulty, *the presumption is against the one*; and not until that one point has been exhaustively investigated, and the matter placed beyond dispute, is it sound wisdom, or scientific, to set aside "for ever and ever" a conclusion otherwise so well supported?

For such an investigation in this case certain things are necessary: it is necessary to know the poetry of Edward de Vere as a whole; it is necessary to have "a canon" of Edward de Vere; and it is necessary to have "a canon of Shakespeare." It is necessary to know whether a given passage was written at the age of 15 or 50; whether during the conventional period of the early court poets, or the vigorous realistic period of the later dramatic poets; and, whether it was written before or after the writer had passed through his stimulating experiences in the Bohemian world of Elizabethan drama. As little or none of this material is as yet available, a definite rejection of all the other evidence on the grounds of poetic incompatibility is at any rate premature and places the whole issue at the mercy of mere caprice. Shakespearean matters have certainly proved how elusive and capricious may be these estimates of literary values; and whilst "R.H.C." rejects de Vere unreservedly on poetic grounds, other competent literary men have not only praised the poetry in terms appropriate to Shakespeare, but have gone as far as to admit that the poetry is "such as Shakespeare might have written."⁴

The instances of parallel passages which "R.H.C." quotes are, however, instructive. Because of their identity of *conception*, and as parts of an argument on the "haggard," I have placed together two passages, one from Edward de Vere's poem on Women, and the other from Shakespeare's *Othello*. One is from a lyric poem, the other from a drama; one deals in generalities, the other is a passionate explosion; one was in print many years before a single line was published under Shakespeare's name, the other is usually dated about the time of Oxford's death. From every point of view, then, a difference of *metrical* treatment was not only to be expected but was actually required.

Yet it is on this precise ground of metrical difference that the de Vere work is rejected as un-Shakespearean. Moreover, the change from the metrical smoothness of the one to the more rugged and forceful diction of the other is a common poetic evolution, very marked in Shakespeare.

It is with *Venus* and *Lucrece*—although even these were published much later than Oxford's poem—that the last should have been compared metrically. If the reader will first memorize Oxford's poem (*Golden Treasury*)⁵ and then read *Venus*, which is in the identical meter, he will probably feel that, if the Shakespeare plays were not in Oxford, neither were they in the author of *Venus and Adonis*. It is, indeed, the phenomenal expansion which took place in Shakespeare's genius as he passed from pure lyric to drama that amazes us; and no canon of Shakespeare which does not begin with the clear recognition of this can be of any service to us. As then the reader proceeds with *Venus* he will be interested to find himself rubbing up against parallel lines like these:

(Oxford): "To play with fools, O! what a fool was I."
 (Shakespeare): "O! Jove, quoth she, how much a fool was I."
 (Oxford): "Till weary of their wiles ourselves we ease."
 (Shakespeare): "Thus weary of the world away she lies."

When he has analysed the latter parallel letter by letter, syllable by syllable, and phrase by phrase, he may be able to judge whether or not the music of Oxford's poems moves in unison with the early Shakespeare lyrics. When, moreover, he has the whole of Oxford's acknowledged verses before him—which we hope to issue shortly—he will hardly be able to read Shakespeare's lyrics and early dramas for five minutes without meeting with something reminiscent of Oxford. Yet many of these verses of Oxford's were never published and have only been rescued in modern times from private manuscripts. I give one example just noticed in an interval with writing the above.

(Oxford): "Therefore, go, go, go—importune me no more."
 (M.S. Miscellany.)
 (Shakespeare): "Therefore, be gone, solicit me no more."
 (*Two Gent.*, V.4.)

Venus and Adonis, as the first work published under Shakespeare's name, is, certainly, of fundamental importance in any scientific investigation of our problem; and as my critic twice refers to an outstanding passage in this poem as being in the sonnets—a slip which, no doubt, anyone might have made—it is evident at any rate that the lyric question has not yet been sufficiently studied to justify the unqualified rejection of a mass of "striking" biographical evidence, and the summary dismissal of Edward de Vere.

J. THOMAS LOONEY



"Readers and Writers,"⁶ *The New Age*, vol. 28/12: 138–39. (January 20, 1921)

Readers and Writers

Sir, The reply of "R.H.C." to my letter in the *NEW AGE* (December 23) furnishes distinctly new and important material, from the negative point of view, respecting the bearing of Oxford's poetry upon the question of Shakespearean authorship. For the first time this issue has been moved from the realm of literary empiricism and placed upon a basis of measurable fact. As this is precisely what has long been wanted, I am naturally anxious that the matter should be taken up seriously and thoroughly tested. The line, "Till weary of their wiles *ourselves we ease*," is quoted as a typical example of "de Vere's characteristic habit of inversion," and is contrasted with "Shakespeare's profound respect for the natural or spoken order of words... Shakespeare would have written:

Till weary of their wiles *we ease ourselves*."

Here, then, we have a clearly defined issue.

First, we notice that it is at the end of a rhymed line that Oxford's inversion occurs. In other positions he never inverts a reflexive clause; in this case the obvious purpose is to place the verb "ease" at the end of the line to rhyme with "please." Is this un-Shakespearean?

I have most carefully examined many thousands of Shakespeare's line terminations, rhymed and blank verse alike, and in the recognized Shakespeare work *I have not found a single example of a rhymed line ending in a reflexive pronoun*—single examples in the non-Shakespearean work of *Pericles* and *Timon* only serve to emphasize the Shakespeare rule.

Whenever the spoken order of words would have placed a reflexive pronoun at the end of the line, and so hampered the rhyme, Shakespeare invariably inverts the natural order. He does, that is, precisely what "R.H.C." charges against Oxford; he adapts his words to poetic form instead of adapting the form to natural rhythm.

De Vere has two such inversions in the 520 lines of his recognized work; in Shakespeare's *Venus* I have counted five such inversions in the 1,200 lines; in *Lucrece* 11 inversions in the 1,855 lines; in the *Sonnets* 13 clear inversions and two others modified in the 2,156 lines. In addition, there are two examples in the *Sonnets* of inversions at the beginnings of lines (S. 87 and 80); so that "Shakespeare" is, in this, more un-Shakespearean than Oxford.

Venus (stanza 189): Two glasses where herself herself beheld.

Lucrece (stanza 23): For himself he must himself forsake.

Sonnet 47: The heart in love, with sighs himself doth smother.

From the figures I have given it will be seen that the proportion is fairly even throughout.

I have similarly examined the other forms of inversion employed by de Vere. Nearly all are due to the exigencies of rhyme, and all are adequately represented in the lyric work of Shakespeare: particularly in *Lucrece* and the *Sonnets*. They are very unevenly distributed; but the general frequency is about equal in the two sets. Contrary to expectations, *Venus* has fewer in proportion than *Lucrece*, and the *Sonnets* have most. The proportion in the de Vere poems is about that in *Lucrece*. It is impossible to represent things adequately by quotations; but if the reader will devote an hour or two to the study specially of the Verb endings in the middle section of *Lucrece* (from stanza 16 onwards) and count those verbs that are preceded by their Accusatives, he will probably come to feel that Oxford's habit of inversion has a value even for the positive side of the question.

I have but one example because of its interest from other points of view.

Oxford: If care or skill could conquer vain desire,

Or Reason's reins *my strong affection stay*.

Lucrece (stanza 72): But nothing can *affection's course control*,

Or stop the headlong fury of his speed.

The whole conception, imagery, and workmanship are so similar that they might easily have been taken for two parts of one poem; and in this case the parallel is actually strengthened by a common inversion of the natural or spoken order of words.

"R.H.C.'s" objection to de Vere's expressions "go, go, go," as being weaker than Shakespeare's "be gone," in the parallel passage, is due to the disadvantage of his having only my quotation by him at the time of writing. For Oxford's "go, go, go" occurs as part of a refrain of a type not uncommon in Shakespeare's songs. Moreover, in an earlier part of the play in which the parallel passage occurs (*Two Gent.*) there actually occurs the expression, "Go, go, be gone."

The natural directness and strength of Shakespeare's expression belong in a peculiar degree to his dramatic blank verse; and the contrast it presents to the inversions of his rhymed verse only emphasizes the insufficiency of evidence resting upon literary style alone. Literary subject to the influence of fashion;

and in the work of several contemporary poets I find a larger proportion of inversions than in the de Vere and Shakespeare lyrics. It is of first importance, therefore, to get beneath verbal forms to underlying mental correspondences; and it is here that the de Vere case is especially strong. There is nothing rarer in poetry, or more indicative of mental constitution; and nothing more distinctive of "Shakespeare," than what Professor Courthope calls, in Edward de Vere, his "studied concinnity of style."⁷ No better example of how ideas all hang on to one another could be suggested than the poem on Women in the *Golden Treasury*; nor can I find in the whole of Elizabethan poetry another lyric which, if freed from the limitations of lyric, and presented as blank verse as "R.H.C." has dealt with one of its lines, would have been more readily "accepted as Shakespeare's without a qualm."

J. Thomas Looney.



"Shakespeare Identified,"⁸ *The New Age*, vol. 28/16: 192. (February 17, 1921)

Readers and Writers

Sir, I wish to thank you for the opportunity you so readily granted me of replying to some of "R.H.C.'s" remarks upon the earl of Oxford's poetry. It is to me a matter of very keen regret that your space will not permit a continuance of the controversy. Perhaps, however, you may be able to find room for placing the following facts before your readers.

Of the 520 lines of Oxford's recognized verse 222 were published in 1576, when he was but twenty-six years of age, and before his literary and dramatic career had begun; 226 lines, much of it belonging evidently to the same early period, have been gathered together in recent years from miscellaneous pieces of MS. never prepared for publication. The trifling remainder had become the prey of collectors during his lifetime. It is certain, therefore, that most of what is known as Oxford's poetry was written at least 17 years before a single "Shakespeare" line was published; and it is highly probable that the whole of it belongs to about the same time.

After 1580 his real literary career began. In 1589 he is spoken of as the chief of some writers whose doings could not "be found out or made known." In 1593 Shakespeare's *Venus* made his appearance; and up to the present there has been nothing whatever to show for Oxford's literary period.

J. Thomas Looney.



LETTERS IN *THE OUTLOOK*

“Shakespeare, Lord Oxford, Solomon Eagle and Mr. Looney,”⁹
The Outlook: A Weekly Review of Politics, Art, Literature and Finance,
 vol. 47/1221: 543–44. (June 25, 1921)

SHAKESPEARE, LORD OXFORD,
 SOLOMON EAGLE AND MR. LOONEY.

TO THE EDITOR OF *THE OUTLOOK*

Sir, Those who have only a limited leisure in which to serve the causes they espouse must frequently be content to do things when they can, not when they would. I hope, therefore, it may not appear belated if I offer now some comment upon the very pleasing and open-minded criticism of my Shakespeare research published in your columns on March 12th. The theme itself is, certainly, of more than passing interest.

Let me say at once that it is quite impossible to associate Solomon Eagle with those who are resolved to oppose my views at any cost, or who, possibly because of the strength of the case itself, prefer to attack its hapless advocate. I welcome specially his confession: “The day on which Mr. Looney satisfied my cool reason that Lord Oxford wrote these poems would be one of the happiest in my life.” The indifference to the issue professed by some of the critics seldom rings true; for everybody interested in literature knows that the general adoption of any of the solutions offered to this problem would be one of the biggest events in literary history. Moreover, the adoption of the De Vere solution, particularly, would revolutionize Shakespeare study, by converting the great dramas into the most directly personal literature.

To make the best use of your space, however, I shall confine myself to your contributor’s principal objection; the only real difficulty, I hold, that has, so far, been urged by competent writers:

I am quite unshaken in my belief that Oxford did not write Shakespeare.... What slight weakening there may have been on my part... disappeared when I was confronted with Oxford’s...poetry.

The difference in age, he considers, will not account for the difference in the work: Oxford was 26 (in 1576) when, so far as can be judged, he sanctioned

for once the publication of verses above his own initials; he was 43 when the first Shakespeare poem, and 47 when the first plays were published—an interval quite adequate, in view of his circumstances, for the unfolding of quite unsuspected gifts. There are, however, other very decisive factors in the problem, and I question whether a single one of my critics has weighed these carefully.

The 1576 poems were a contribution to a poetic miscellany, published just at the time of the incidents in Oxford's life to which his verses apparently refer. Most of the others are fugitive poems of the "occasional" type, salvaged in modern times from old defective manuscripts. All, therefore, are almost certainly the hasty ephemeral product of his dilettante courtier days, before, possibly, the thought of producing enduring literature had even entered his mind; and what negligent stuff might not have survived in consequence! Thirteen years later, even, Puttenham represents him as seriously occupied with literary work which could not "be found out or made known."

On the other hand, recent Shakespeare study tends to show that the great writings had undergone a lengthy process of most exacting revision and vast enrichment. The point cannot be fully elaborated here, and, therefore, I would urge a careful weighing of Professor Raleigh's words on this subject.¹⁰ The enormous gulf which may separate the extempore from the finished work of the same writer is common knowledge; and verse, especially, offers scope for transforming beyond recognition, when the poet, freed from the difficult tasks of initial conception, is able to concentrate a refreshed mind upon the improvement of his expression. In addition to what Professor Raleigh says respecting the two plays, *The Taming of a Shrew* (pub. anon. 1594) and *The Taming of the Shrew* (Shakespeare Folio 1623), I have exhaustively compared the phrasing, and I feel convinced that both are substantially from the same pen; but what an extraordinary faculty, for making literary transformation of his earlier work, is disclosed!

Again, it is very necessary to consider the great change in Oxford's life after 1576. From Court life he plunged into the strange Bohemian world (with all its rough contact with naked human realities) in which the materials of the later Elizabethan literature and drama were elaborated. This was "Shakespeare's" school, and who shall fix the limits of what an original mind might have learnt in it? The Oxford verses were written before he entered that school, and Shakespeare work after his education had been completed.

By far the most important considerations, however, are historical; and these are not recondite, but may be gathered from any text-book of literature history (say, Stopford Brook's *Primer*, Ch. IV).¹¹ An hour spent seriously in this study will, I am sure, convince most people, that it was absolutely impossible

for the greatest genius to have produced, in 1576, literature at all resembling, either in form or quality, the work which came from Shakespeare's pen eighteen years later. And, conversely, it was equally impossible for Shakespeare, whoever he was, to have sent forth, in his special period, the same type of work as he might have produced even ten years before. In the whole history of England there never has been, and there never can be again, anything like the phenomenally rapid expansion, that took place at that time, in literary craftsmanship, and even in the English language itself. The copious vocabulary wielded by Shakespeare with such marvelous effect in the nineties did not so much as exist in the seventies. The opulence of new words and the passing into currency of new variations and inflexions, not only modified all literary structure, and energized expression, but was itself the symptom and the reagent of a strenuous mental activity. The rich veins of phrase and figure created by two abnormal decades of national poetical enthusiasm, the intense stimulus given to many phases of intellectual interest, the free and even licentious probing of life and human nature, furnished the 'nineties with literary powers and possibilities far beyond the highest hopes of the 'seventies.

With the exception of the translations made by Oxford's own tutor, Arthur Golding, the English books by which, all authorities agree, the mind of "Shakespeare" was chiefly influenced, had not yet appeared. Holinshed's *Chronicles* and North's *Plutarch*, which inspired and guided his work in history, were not published till 1578 and 1579. They were followed closely by Lyly's and Spenser's first works; and, not till some years later, by the special band of poets and dramatists of whose combined labors "Shakespeare's" work is the summary and consummation. These things illustrate the utter futility of any test based upon literary values which does not take full account of the historic factor.

Once, however, the historic position is clearly grasped, I doubt whether any expert judge of evidence would be willing to set aside, solely on grounds of poetic disparity, the extraordinary evidence supporting the claims of Edward de Vere. An eminent English statistician, who has studied the case, I am assured on the best authority, "regards the cumulative evidence as convincingly strong."¹² The extraordinary thing is that, despite the magnitude of inevitable difference, the poetry supplies its own distinctive quota of positive evidence. So much that is characteristic of Oxford's writing, even of his defects, is reflected in the Shakespeare work that a literary scholar and research expert writes to me:

You have made the most important discovery *re* the Shakespeare literature that has yet come to light; for here, in De Vere, is a poet

who, if not Shakespeare, was Shakespeare's *model*, and exercised indubitably the most profound influence on his style and thought.¹³

Yet several of Oxford's poems that have left traces in Shakespeare then existed only in private manuscripts.

Yours, etc.,
J. Thomas Looney.



"Mr. Looney Replies,"¹⁴ *The Outlook*, vol. 48/1225: 58–59. (July 16, 1921)

CORRESPONDENCE
MR. LOONEY REPLIES.
TO THE EDITOR OF *THE OUTLOOK*

Sir, My present object is not so much to continue the controversy with Solomon Eagle respecting Edward de Vere's poetry as to correct an inadvertent misrepresentation of my attitude towards the question, on a point which goes to the root of the problem of Shakespeare identification. He remarks:

My main point was that Oxford's poetry was distinctly un-Shakespearean. And at long last Mr. Looney seems to admit this. He no longer produces passages to show resemblance. His argument now is all the other way. He is concerned to show that Oxford's verses were bound to be *unlike* Shakespeare's.... What is this but an admission that the poems are so unlike Shakespeare's that they ought never to have been dragged into the discussion.

The change of front here imputed to me is wholly imaginary and is misleading both as regards my recent letter in *The Outlook*, and, less excusably, what I have most explicitly stated in my books. From the first I have made it quite plain, as any student of the problem was bound to do, that the problem raised by Oxford's poetry involved, throughout, the concurrent consideration of both resemblances and differences. The line of argument in my letter, far from being new, appears in all its essentials in my first book. One or two sentences from this will suffice:

A special caution.... It will still be necessary to distinguish between his work as Edward de Vere and his work as Shakespeare.... How vast may be the difference between a man's early and his later literary

style.... We must not expect to find Oxford ranked spontaneously with Shakespeare.... Another very important fact...a very marked change had come over English literature as a whole. (Dean Church's description of the great Elizabethan transition is then quoted.)¹⁵ Such a change we must expect to find reflected in his writings.... The Shakespeare work...represents the triumph of his matured conceptions over his youthful compliance and conventional standards. (*"Shakespeare" Identified*, 157–62)¹⁶

It is only after thus premising the inevitable differences, and indicating precisely those causes emphasized in my recent letter, that I proceed to trace and collect persisting and characteristic resemblances. Any student of personal identity problems will recognize this as the course proper to the investigations. Identity cannot, of course, be established by harping upon differences; and, therefore, my special task required that the main effort should be directed to the correspondences; and it is this to which Solomon Eagle refers.

So much for the past. My letter of June 25th, on the other hand, made no pretense of stating the positive evidence of literary identity. It was an answer given to a specific objection based upon the *recognized difference* between the two writings, and, as such, aimed at being at any rate relevant to the issue Solomon Eagle had raised. It was the only relevant answer that could be given; whilst the quoting of similar passages would have been wholly irrelevant. To construe this as an abandonment of the "resemblance" evidence is not only unwarranted but seems to imply a misconception of the whole process of identification. Let me indicate this briefly.

However vast the change in a person's outlook, equipment, and style of expression, he carries forward into this journeyman work distinctive marks of his prentice hand. The unconscious association of ideas, the recurrent trains of thought and phraseology, constitute a fatality from which he can never wholly free himself. In works as far asunder as the poles he may betray himself by unsuspected self-imitation, and the multiplication of these likenesses amid unlikeness may ultimately furnish a body of practically irresistible proof. The working out of such resemblances is a task of patient, discriminating research, the precise value of which can only be estimated when the results are viewed in the aggregate. There is no way, however, in which this can be represented in a letter, and so I can only refer your readers to what I have written elsewhere, assuring them at the same time that, far from abandoning this department of evidence, I find it ever increasing in volume. Perhaps, however, you may be able to afford me space for a single illustration of this principle of resemblance in difference, with associated conceptions and phrasing.

Comparisons of Oxford's Poetry with Shakespeare's

In 1576 Oxford wrote a poem in which the closing stanza takes the form of a malediction:

And let her feel the power of all your might,
And let her have her most desire with speed,
And let her pine away both day and night,
And let her moan and none lament her need,
And let all those that shall her see,
Despise her state and pity me.

In 1594 Shakespeare published his *Lucrece*, in which one set of verses again winds up with a malediction in the identical manner:

Let him have time to tear his curlèd hair,
Let him have time against himself to rave,
Let him have time of Time's help to despair,
Let him have time to live a loathèd slave –
Let him have time a beggar's arts to crave.
And times to see one that by alms doth live
Disdain to him disdainèd scraps to give.

Now I have spent much time in searching Elizabethan poetry for another example, so far without success. The resemblance is manifest; but so, also, is the difference, as one would naturally expect, both from the dates and also because the former stanza is taken from what is probably the weakest and hastiest of Oxford's poems. Oxford's succession of "ands," however, has its counterpart in another stanza in *Lucrece*. Now comes the striking fact. In the stanza immediately preceding that from *Lucrece* there occurs the line:

To make him moan but pity not his moans,

which is almost identical with Oxford's line:

And let her moan and none lament her need.

In this case, however, it is the Shakespeare line that is the weaker.

Yours, etc.,
J. Thomas Looney.



Endnotes

1. J. Thomas Looney, "The Oxford Movement" [Letter], Hackney Spectator, April 13, 1923, p. 8. The letter was reprinted in "*Shakespeare*" *Revealed: The Collected Articles and Published Letters of J. Thomas Looney*. James A. Warren, (ed.). Cary, NC: Veritas Publications. 2019.
2. J. Thomas Looney, "Shakespeare, Lord Oxford, Solomon Eagle and Mr. Looney" [letter] *The Outlook*, June 25, 1921, p. 543–55. That letter was reprinted in "*Shakespeare*" *Revealed*. The other four letters printed here have never been reprinted.
3. A letter written in response to R.H.C.'s December 2, 1920 review of "*Shakespeare*" *Identified*: "Readers and Writers," *The New Age*, vol. 28/5: 55–56.
4. In "*Shakespeare*" *Identified* (2018, p. 259), Looney quoted Rev. Ronald Bayne using a similar phrase:

"[One of] Munday's plays is a humble variation of the dramatic type of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and we find in [another of Munday's plays] phrases that may have rested in the mind of Shakespeare."

Rev. Ronald Bayne, "Lesser Elizabethan Dramatists," in *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. 5, Chapter 13, pp. 315–16, 317, 318 (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1907).

On page 279 Looney himself uses the exact phrase he quotes in this article. Regarding Lyly's lyrics, he writes, although "we may hesitate to affirm definitively that they are from the same pen as the lyrics of 'Shakespeare,' no one who knows the best of them will hesitate to say that they are such as 'Shakespeare' might have written."
5. *Palgrave's Golden Treasury* is an anthology of British poetry compiled by Francis Turner Palgrave in 1861. There are many editions and reprintings.
6. A letter written in response to R.H.C.'s December 23, 1920 reply, "Readers and Writers," *The New Age*, vol. 28/8: 91–92.
7. W. J. Courthope, *History of English Poetry*, vol. II, pp. 311–12, quoted in "*Shakespeare*" *Identified*, p. 122 (2018).

8. A letter written in response to R.H.C.'s January 20 and 27 replies, "Readers and Writers," *The New Age*, vol. 28/12: 139 and vol. 28/13: 155–56.
9. A letter written in response to Solomon Eagle's March 12, 1921 review of "*Shakespeare*" *Identified*, "Mr. Looney and Lord Oxford," *The Outlook*, Vol. 47/1206: 231.
10. Sir Walter Raleigh, *Shakespeare* [in the *English Men of Letters* series edited by Raleigh], pp. 110-14. London: Macmillan and Co., 1906.
11. Stopford A. Brooke, *English Literature*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1880. Republished in 1891 in the "Literature Primers" series of books. Chapter IV in both editions is titled "From 1559 to 1603."
12. I am unable to determine who the statistician was or who conveyed the statement to Looney.
13. I am unable to identify the scholar.
14. A letter written in response to Solomon Eagle's July 2 reply, "The Critic at Large," *The Outlook*, vol. 48/1223: 15.
15. Looney's reference is to Richard W. Church, *Spenser*, pp. 34, 35. London: Macmillan and Co., 1879.
16. Looney's reference is to the 1920 Cecil Palmer edition of "*Shakespeare*" *Identified*. The corresponding pages in all four U.S. editions are 127–29.