

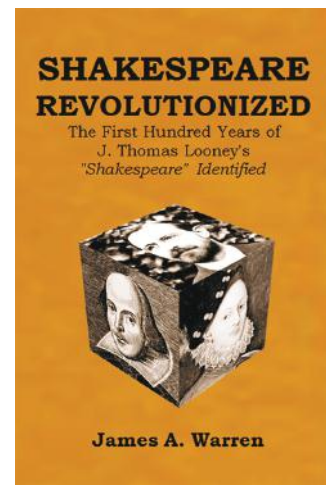
Shakespeare Revolutionized

Reviewed by Gary Goldstein

SHAKESPEARE REVOLUTIONIZED: The First Hundred Years of J. Thomas Looney's "Shakespeare" Identified. By James Warren. Cary, NC: Veritas Publications, July 2021, 784 pages (paperback \$40).

The latest book by James Warren is unique, being the first history of the Oxfordian movement on a global scale from its inception in 1920 with publication of J. Thomas Looney's *'Shakespeare' Identified in Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford*. The author, a retired member of the US diplomatic service, invested six years into its research and composition and the results of that commitment just became available this summer in print and Kindle editions via Amazon. What merits this kind of investment is the nature of the dispute, one that precludes compromise, according to Warren:

Shakespearean authorship is winner take all. The shift from Shakspeare to Oxford is similar to the shift from the Ptolemaic geo-centric system to that of the Copernican heliocentric system. Both cannot be right.



That understanding permeates the entire book, which makes Warren's analysis of the situation and his detailed recommendations invaluable.

Another part of its value lies in its design: the book is organized chronologically based on select time periods in the US, Great Britain and other

countries, highlighting the scholarly achievements from each era—along with critical responses from the news media, academia, even popular culture. It therefore provides readers with a fully rounded perspective of the post-Stratfordian movement as it centers on the Oxfordian hypothesis, its various societies, and its efforts to engage scholars, librarians, and journalists.

Given its scope, the book also serves as an excellent reference source for Shakespeareans since it describes the complete cycle of public engagement, employing relevant excerpts from interviews, book publications, television and film reviews, and more. Its presentation is supported by extensive footnotes and appendices: a complete listing of Looney's Oxfordian writings, a comparison of the five editions of *'Shakespeare' Identified*, a calendar of Shakespeare Fellowship officers and events from 1922–1946 in Great Britain, a comprehensive bibliography as well as an index.

The main body of the book is structured in six clusters: Chapters 1-5 summarize the intellectual environment in Great Britain which led J. Thomas Looney to launch his investigation into the authorship, describes his methodology, delineates the book's publication by Cecil Palmer and responses to it in the public square, then lays out why it was so difficult for many people to accept the Oxfordian thesis at the time.

Chapters 6–10 examine the rise of the Oxfordian movement under the umbrella of the Shakespeare Fellowship and trace its activities from 1922 to 1936. Chapters 11–13 report how academia and traditional Shakespeare scholars first responded to the Oxfordian challenge globally. Chapters 14–18 then examine the activities of the Oxfordian movement in Britain through 1945 and in North America through 1948.

Moving into the modern era are Chapters 19–24, which assess the state of the Oxfordian case today internationally, while Chapters 25–26 provide an analysis of why the authorship matters both intellectually and socially—while the concluding chapter provides an action plan for completing the Oxfordian revolution initiated by J. Thomas Looney 100 years ago.

A major discovery made by Warren was locating a large cache of new materials regarding Looney's research and letters through his grandson in Scotland. At the same time, Warren resuscitates the scholarly reputations of early Oxfordian researchers such as Eva Turner Clark and Hugh Holland, as well as Percy Allen, Charles Wisner Barrell, Colonel B.R. Ward and his son, Captain B.M. Ward.

A vital contribution of Warren's work is his assessment as to why the Oxfordian hypothesis was not able to gain greater acceptance by scholars and the general public in the past. In the chapter "The Dozen Mental Revolutions"

he lays out the social psychology that has impeded such acceptance, labeling them Human Resistance, Cognitive Resistance, and Institutional Resistance.

The first hurdle is the “natural human resistance to changing any long-held belief.... Most people accept as true the ideas prevalent in the society around them. Very few have the time or inclination to think things through for themselves.” The second challenge:

arises from the need to change the specific beliefs involved in the subject of Shakespearean authorship. There are two parts.... One arises from the complexities of the Oxfordian claim itself, the other from the consequences that flow from it. The weight of the two is so heavy that it is hard for the human mind to process it all.... Accepting the Oxfordian thesis required abandoning not mere isolated beliefs, but a tapestry of tightly woven beliefs.

Lastly, there is the ongoing issue of institutional resistance in academia, where professors in English, History and Theatre must otherwise explain how they could be incorrect regarding Shakespeare’s true identity for 400 years—with the possibility of losing professional standing before their colleagues and students as scholars. Their effective censorship of the subject continues to act as a bulwark against authorship research and free debate.

He further breaks down these three categories into 12 distinct areas that need to be addressed successfully before Edward de Vere can be accepted as the dramatist William Shakespeare. They are: change in the identity of the author, internal and external aspects of the Shakespeare plays, chains of influence on Shakespeare, Shakespeare’s knowledge, the Elizabethan Era and the development of Elizabethan drama, the nature of genius, nature of literary creativity, inner emotional life of Shakespeare, Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, and William Shakspeare.

In one area, however, Warren appears to have overlooked significant progress recently made with academic institutions. He writes that “The Oxfordian movement has made little progress in overcoming Institutional Resistance.”

In classrooms, conference halls and peer reviewed journals, that continues to be the case. On the other hand, this journal—*The Oxfordian*—has its contents indexed by the three leading bibliographies in the humanities: the World Shakespeare Bibliography (the Folger Library); the Modern Language Association International Bibliography; and the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature on ProQuest.

Further, Oxfordian books are now found in many university libraries, according to the World Catalog of Libraries (worldcat.org). Looking at several titles,

The Mysterious William Shakespeare by Charlton Ogburn Jr. is in 625 libraries, *Alias Shakespeare* by Joseph Sobran is in 575 libraries, *Shakespeare: Who Was He?* by Richard Whalen is in 515 libraries; *“Shakespeare” by Another Name* by Mark Anderson is in 450 libraries, and J. Thomas Looney’s *‘Shakespeare’ Identified* is in 400 libraries.

Intriguingly, Warren agrees with J. Thomas Looney on identifying the final authority in deciding the Shakespeare controversy, writing that “Ultimately, the general public, not Oxfordian or Stratfordian scholars, will determine the fate of the Oxfordian claim.”

To that end, Warren offers a multilayered strategic plan which Oxfordian organizations in the US, Great Britain and Germany can execute. Rather than synopsise it here, I recommend readers review the plan in detail to judge its applicability and support its implementation.

The extraordinary achievement of *Shakespeare Revolutionized* represents a milestone in the history of the Oxfordian movement. Not only can its sophisticated action plan help advance the movement worldwide, the book can help educate a new generation of scholars, theatre professionals and Shakespeare aficionados on the most compelling issue currently facing the humanities.