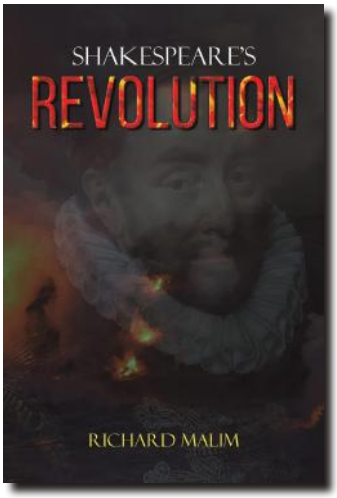
Was Shakespeare a Literary Revolutionary?

Reviewed by Gary Goldstein

Shakespeare's Revolution. *By Richard Malim, Austin Macauley (2022), 466 pages. (hardcover $36.51, paperback $25.95, and Kindle $4.50)*

Shakespeare's Revolution, published earlier this summer, is the latest book by Richard Malim. A retired solicitor, Malim is author of *The Earl of Oxford and the Making of Shakespeare*, published by McFarland Publishers in 2011. Having studied the Shakespeare Authorship Question for the past 30 years (and served for 15 years as secretary of The De Vere Society), Malim provides readers of his new book a sophisticated knowledge of both the Elizabethan era and the critical literature of the authorship controversy.



Malim's method in the current book is laid out with precision: "my target is the failure of modern literary critics' biographical method, especially when they apply them unscientifically to try to justify the modern fads of collaboration and stylometrics." He emphasizes that the Oxfordian case he presents offers "superior evidence and superior logic" in validating Edward de Vere as the only authorship candidate "with the requisite education, talent, social standing and leisure opportunities, in the right place at right time" to be William Shakespeare.

He redefines the modern assessment of Shakespeare as the greatest dramatist in Western culture by judging Shakespeare's importance in history as "that of a revolutionary presiding over a revolution" in theatre and poetry in Great Britain during the period 1576-1590. To Malim, "the whole question of

'Shakespeare's' identity demands a solution, so that we may correctly comprehend and appreciate this marvel of history…"

To accomplish that he has organized his book into four parts: Learning (1550–1576); the "Shakespeare" Revolution (1576–1590); Aftermath of the Revolution (1590–1604); and Post Mortem Reputation. Also provided is a lengthy appendix entitled, "William Shakespeare: an Irrelevant Life," demonstrating how William Shakspere's biography and lack of education and talent undermine his candidacy. In support of his case, Malim supplies us with 90 pages of endnotes along with an extensive bibliography. There is also an index of Shakespeare plays in the text, and 16 pages of illustrations.

Part of Malim's methodology includes delineating the large number of public events to which Shakespeare did not participate as national poet and playwright: his refusal to offer eulogies or encomiums for the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603, the death of Prince Henry in 1612 and the marriage of Princess Elizabeth in 1613. Such a willful refusal to participate in national events by someone employed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men and then The King's Men constitutes negative evidence that Shakespeare the author was no longer alive.

One of Malim's contentions is that 17th Earl of Oxford not only was the playwright William Shakespeare and the sponsor of two acting troupes—Oxford's Boys and Oxford's Men—as pointed out a century ago by Sir E.K. Chambers, he was also an actor who *regularly* performed on the Elizabethan stage, the latter activity the likely cause of Shakespeare's confession in Sonnet 110:

> Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there
> And made myself a motley to the view,
> Gor'd mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
> Made old offences of affections new. (1–4)

Malim also proposes that Oxford was the translator of a small collection of Greek poetry which first appeared in 1588: *The Sixe Idylla of Theocritus*. The translator is not revealed on the book's title page; the sole surviving copy is in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University. Yet C.S. Lewis highly praised the translator as both sensitive and original—"this version sounds far more like Greek poetry than anything that was to be written in English before the nineteenth century." And, coincidentally, the translator uses the word "verie" six times in the six poems.

Occasionally, there are lapses in accuracy, as when Malim states that the publication of the anthology collection, *The Paradise of Dainty Devices*, was 1573, when the first edition actually appeared in 1576.

In sum, Malim's updated investigation into the Oxfordian case is a needed corrective to the continuing refusal of modern academics, literary critics and historians to examine the true authorship of the Shakespeare cannon.