

# *Is This Shakespeare's Dramatic Juvenilia?*

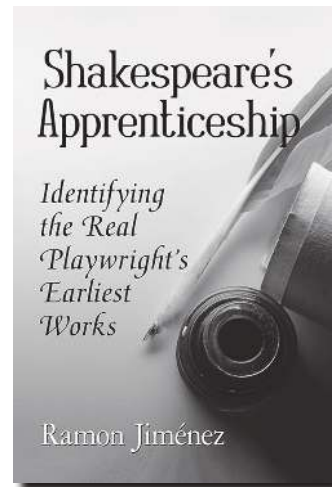
Reviewed by Felicia Hardison Londré

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Shakespeare's Apprenticeship: Identifying the Real Playwright's Earliest Plays. By Ramon Jiménez. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, September 2018, 275 pages, (paperback \$39.95).

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Ramon Jiménez has made a valuable contribution to scholarship with his exhaustive culling of examples of plot, character, vocabulary, ideas and images shared by plays in the Shakespeare canon and earlier anonymous plays on the same subjects. Drawing on findings from a wealth of studies and archival materials to which he added his own insights, Jiménez convincingly demonstrates relationships that are best explained as works by the same author, with the earlier plays serving as apprenticeship pieces for the mature works. The corollary case that the author was Edward de Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, is treated almost as a foregone conclusion, a logical assumption given the fact that the apprenticeship plays would have been written during William of Stratford's childhood years. Jiménez marshals multiple strands of both internal and external evidence to arrive at his dating of the apprenticeship plays, all between 1563 and 1570.



After a Preface, an Introduction, and a brief survey of the case for Edward de Vere as author of the Shakespeare canon, Jiménez devotes one chapter to each of the five apprenticeship plays, with reference to its mature version:

- *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* and the Prince Hal plays,
- *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third* and *The Tragedy of Richard III*,
- *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* and *King John*,
- *The Taming of a Shrew* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, and
- *The True Chronicle History of King Leir* and *The Tragedy of King Lear*.

In each chapter, Jiménez examines the sources, the performance and publication history, the context (including relationships to other canonical plays),

the evidence for dating the plays, and the counter-arguments. Since each of the five apprenticeship plays presents its own mysteries and its own tortured history of scholarly investigation, Jiménez allows some flexibility in the chapters' sub-categories. For example, most chapters conclude with a refreshingly objective presentation of contrary evidence, but *The Troublesome Reign of John* gets instead fifteen pages devoted to the claim that it was written by George Peele.

Traditional arguments for designating the apprenticeship plays as pirated versions of the canonical plays or as work by later authors who borrowed from Shakespeare are handily refuted, especially by means of dispassionate examination of the external evidence. Still, there is much here that even die-hard orthodox Shakespeareans should appreciate. First, there is the readiness to acknowledge scholarly groundwork by those who accepted Shakespeare as author (as opposed to today's orthodox practice of distorting or refusing to consider evidence that might call one's prior beliefs into question). Secondly, it is always instructive to have access to a major author's juvenilia as a way of understanding an artistic learning curve. The most obvious examples of maturing skills, unsurprisingly, are more coherent plotting and enriched characterizations in the canonical versions; those variations are concisely reported.

More crucial to this work is Jiménez's juxtaposition of turns of phrase and expressions of thought from the apprentice plays with the remarkably close (sometimes even identical) wording in their revised versions—as well as in other Shakespeare plays. Perhaps most compelling of all for the claim that the early and late plays on these five subjects flowed from the same pen are the fictional or invented elements that appear in both versions: elements not found in sources nor in treatments of the subject by other authors. For example, a subplot involving the invented character Philip Falconbridge in *The Troublesome Reign* not only is retained in *King John*, but also offers parallels with a wrenching episode in the life of the Earl of Oxford.

Chapter I, the book's longest chapter, covers *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* and ties it to *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*, and *Henry V*. Jiménez notes that "the ten different Quartos of these four plays present a messy and uneven publication history that includes six different owners and seven different printers," and he wades into the morass to make sense of it. From the twenty

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scenes of *Famous Victories* (expanded into a total of fifty-seven scenes in the three Prince Hal plays), Jiménez extracts sixteen specific plot points, dozens of action and character details (including comic characters), and numerous examples of specific phrases that are carried over from the apprenticeship play. He examines the amalgamation and transformation of Oldcastle and Derick from *Famous Victories* into Falstaff. The presence of a relatively obscure Earl of Oxford in *Famous Victories* is analyzed with reference to other de Veres who figure elsewhere in the canon. Thorough attention to topical references and other internal as well as external evidence leads Jiménez to date the apprenticeship play to 1563 or 1564, when Oxford was in his early teens, and to give “a secure date for the composition of *Henry V* in 1583.” Another interesting feature of this chapter is the close study of the personal and literary relationship between Edward de Vere and Sir Philip Sidney.

Chapter II focuses on *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third*, which Jiménez also ascribes to the early 1560s following *The Famous Victories*. Throughout this chapter it is satisfying to note how many traditional scholars have pointed out the close similarities between *The True Tragedy* and *Richard III*, although none took those observations to the logical next step of attributing them to the same author. Among many interesting details, I was struck by the point that both of these plays erroneously identify Thomas, Lord Grey, as little Prince Edward’s uncle, although historically, he was a half-brother. “None of the sources contains this error.”

*The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*, which Ramon Jiménez sees as the third surviving play of de Vere’s teenage ventures into writing and much improved over the earlier two, is the focus of the third chapter. This apprenticeship work “has been ascribed to as many as eight different playwrights, including William Shakespeare.” The Stratfordian attribution to George Peele is thoughtfully reviewed by comparison of parallel passages as well as stylistic mannerisms. Jiménez further examines differences as well as similarities between the Bastard Falconbridge in *The Troublesome Reign* and the title character of *Richard III*. He dates *The Troublesome Reign* no later than 1567 on the basis that Oxford’s law studies thenceforth infused the plays with legal language and points of law.

Chapter IV, the shortest, takes up the familiar compare-and-contrast approach to *The Taming of a Shrew* and the popular canonical comedy of *the Shrew*. Folkloric, Latin, and Italian sources as well as Gascoigne’s *Supposes* are investigated. The Christopher Sly frame story in the apprenticeship play, condensed down to the Induction of *The Taming of the Shrew*, gets its due attention. Subplots, character names, Italian geography, and vocabulary (including legal language) offer clues to support the claim that both plays are by the same author, and further, that they fit with known dates and activities in Edward de Vere’s life.

In the final chapter, Jiménez asserts that “the anonymous *King Leir* and the canonical *King Lear* are perhaps the clearest example of Shakespeare's transformation of a simple and thinly-drawn apprenticeship play into one of the masterpieces of the canon.” The analysis parallels that of the other chapters, but ventures more extensively into echoes of *King Leir* throughout the rest of the Shakespeare canon.

In his summing up section, Jiménez acknowledges the traditional resistance to the obvious conclusion that the five apprenticeship plays were written by Shakespeare, since acceptance of this evidence would necessarily disqualify William of Stratford as the author. On the other hand, Jiménez offers the exciting prospect of adding “more than ten thousand new lines” to the canon, while revealing “Shakespeare's thought processes, especially his second thoughts, and his increasing skill as a dramatist, as he built new plays on the plot structures of his earliest efforts.”

While many anecdotal passages—such as the Gad's Hill robbery—will be familiar to Oxfordians, the writing is lively and engaging enough to hold interest. Some repetitions are unavoidable, as certain themes or word clusters prove applicable to plays covered in different chapters. The book includes both end-of-chapter notes and an excellent bibliography of more than twenty pages.