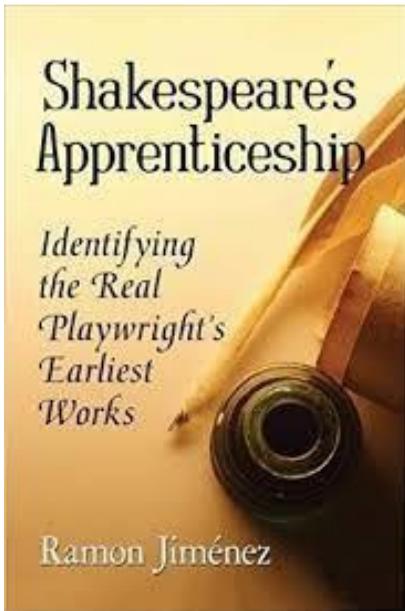


## Shakespeare's Apprenticeship

by Ramon Jiménez

### Review by Amanda Hinds



*Shakespeare's Apprenticeship* by Ramon Jiménez led to the well-deserved award of *Oxfordians of the Year 2018* jointly to the author and his wife Joan Leon at the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship conference in Oakland. This extensively researched book concerns five plays that Jiménez convincingly argues were early works by Edward de Vere 17th Earl of Oxford later revised as well-known canonical plays (the first as the trilogy *Henry IV I & II* and *Henry V*): *Famous Victories of Henry V*, *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, *The True Tragedy of Richard III*, *The Taming of a Shrew* and *The True Chronicle History*

*of King Leir*. The author greatly expands on his previous article in the *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* (Winter 2008) and provides evidence for perhaps surprisingly early dates for these plays (when Oxford was a teenager in the 1560s) that explain their immaturity and lack of legal terminology (in all except *Leir*) or Italian influence. The latter is obvious in *The Taming of a Shrew*, set in Athens, which is rewritten as *The Taming of the Shrew*, set in Padua soon after Oxford's visit to that city. Jiménez claims that similarities between the early and equivalent later play, between the early plays themselves, and numerous echoes of phraseology in later canonical plays has only one alternative explanation: 'that Shakespeare was guilty of 'multiple acts of blatant plagiarism' (p.10).

Jiménez explains that most orthodox scholars regard these five plays as ‘worthless’ (or similar terms) and written by unknown authors (clear evidence of plagiarism) with the exception of Seymour Pitcher and Eric Sams, who accepted at least some of them as early plays of Shakespeare written during his ‘lost years’. The similarities quoted in *Shakespeare’s Apprenticeship* show that the early and canonical versions are essentially the same play – sharing historical background, plot, characters and language but with major improvements in the later play. One minor criticism is that it might have been easier to follow if the long passages of quotations had been separated in a smaller font or indented but the book can be read, as intended by the author, as a narrative.

Most of the early plays lacked divisions into acts and scenes, several were printed in prose as verse and some had multiple printing errors. They seem more like early drafts or even memorial reconstructions than actual plays. Except *Leir*, they had been played by the Queen’s Men and were published in 1594 or 1591 (*Troublesome Reign*) when anonymous canonical plays were beginning to be published. Jiménez does not explain that or how Oxford, who published poems of ‘great lyric beauty’ when very young and may even have translated early parts of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, could have written passages that he describes as ‘vapid and clanking prose’ (p.145). This and the lack of legal terminology (as evidence for their being written before Oxford was enrolled at Gray’s Inn) begs two questions: first, do *The First Part of the Contention* (1594) and *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York* (1595) share this difference from the canonical *Henry VI* plays? Jiménez omitted them from his previous publication because they were generally accepted as written by Shakespeare; and, second, has he considered Mark Anderson’s suggestion that although de Vere was ‘the master craftsman’ behind these plays he might (as for paintings from Titian’s studio) have ‘supplied an outline, character sketches, and assorted speeches and lines, and left

one or more of his “lewd” friends to fill in the blanks’ (*Shakespeare by Another Name*, p.249)?

Whether or not these plays were all written as early as the 1560s, which seems possible for *Troublesome Reign* bearing in mind Oxford’s association with John Bale’s *King Johan*, Jiménez provides extensive evidence for *Henry V* being published in the early 1580s, before Philip Sidney died in 1586, in view of several instances of Oxford’s response to *An Apology for Poetry* and his lampooning of Sidney in this and other plays. As *Henry V* is agreed to be the last history play (except *Henry VIII*) this pushes the *Henry IV* plays and the *Henry VI* (referred to in *Henry V*) / *Richard III* tetralogy back into the 1570s, which has implications for other Oxfordian dating projects, such as dates proposed by Kevin Gilvary in *Dating Shakespeare’s Plays*.

*Shakespeare’s Apprenticeship* is an important book, which deserves to be taken seriously by Oxfordians and Stratfordians alike: militant ones as well as those with an open mind. It includes a useful summary of the authorship question for the uninitiated. Jiménez puts paid to Shakespeare as a plagiarist and provides a chronology incompatible with the plays having been written by William of Stratford, as well as giving further evidence for their having been written by Edward de Vere 17th Earl of Oxford.

## References

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3. Hess Ron. Shakespeare’s Dates: Their Effects on Stylistic Analysis. *The Oxfordian* Vol II 1999.
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