



Cardenio between Cervantes and Shakespeare: The Story of a Lost Play

By Roger Chartier

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Cardenio between Cervantes and Shakespeare: The Story of a Lost Play By Roger Chartier

How should we read a text that does not exist, or present a play the manuscript of which is lost and the identity of whose author cannot be established for certain?

Such is the enigma posed by *Cardenio* – a play performed in England for the first time in 1612 or 1613 and attributed forty years later to Shakespeare (and Fletcher). Its plot is that of a ‘novella’ inserted into *Don Quixote*, a work that circulated throughout the major countries of Europe, where it was translated and adapted for the theatre. In England, Cervantes’ novel was known and cited even before it was translated in 1612 and had inspired *Cardenio*.

But there is more at stake in this enigma. This was a time when, thanks mainly to the invention of the printing press, there was a proliferation of discourses. There was often a reaction when it was feared that this proliferation would become excessive, and many writings were weeded out. Not all were destined to survive, in particular plays for the theatre, which, in many cases, were never published. This genre, situated at the bottom of the literary hierarchy, was well suited to the existence of ephemeral works. However, if an author became famous, the desire for an archive of his works prompted the invention of textual relics, the restoration of remainders ruined by the passing of time or, in order to fill in the gaps, in some cases, even the fabrication of forgeries. Such was the fate of *Cardenio* in the eighteenth century.

Retracing the history of this play therefore leads one to wonder about the status, in the past, of works today judged to be canonical. In this book the reader will rediscover the malleability of texts, transformed as they were by translations and adaptations, their migrations from one genre to another, and their changing meanings constructed by their various publics. Thanks to Roger Chartier’s forensic skills, fresh light is cast upon the mystery of a play lacking a text but not an author.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Intriguing ... Chartier's elegant analysis of 'the story of a lost play' is predicated upon the disjunction between Renaissance literary production and post-Romantic ideas of authorship that obsess about the creative genius of the single author who breathes originality into a work that remains recognisably and forever, his own."

Times Higher Education

"Roger Chartier is one of our most enthralling historians of the book. *Cardenio between Cervantes and Shakespeare* is a brilliant investigation of elusive textual traces across borders, languages, and centuries. Chartier has written an essential case study of the pleasures and perils of cultural mobility."

Stephen Greenblatt, Harvard University

"In this magnificent new book, Roger Chartier extends cultural history into unexplored territory, a pre-modern world where texts proliferated promiscuously, crossing genres, languages, and publics in ways undreamt of today, except by writers like Borges. Chartier challenges the notions of fixed authorship and authoritative texts in a tour of literature between Cervantes and Shakespeare that will surprise and delight readers inside and outside the Academy."

Robert Darnton, Harvard University

"The great contribution of Chartier's book is to treat the Shakespearean and Theobaldian Cardenios as two among many versions of this story, for it seems that Cervantes's convoluted novella caught the imaginations of readers and spectators across Europe and even in the New World."

Adrian Johns, University of Chicago

About the Author

Roger Chartier is Professor of History at the Collège de France, Directeur d'Études at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris and Annenberg Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania.

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