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A BABBLE
OF
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Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Theobald

by

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*To the Memory of
Joella Owens Brown (1936-1965)
and
Edward Emley (1916-1966)*

**Genius, all over the world, stands hand in hand, and one
shock of recognition runs the whole circle round.**

Herman Melville

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Harriet C. Frazier

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INTRODUCTORY

In recent years there has been a renewed effort to expand the Shakespeare canon. It has long been impermissible to suggest that Shakespeare authored neither *Titus Andronicus* nor the *Henry VI* plays, and the critically minded have been dispelling the legend through most of this century that Shakespeare bid farewell to his art in *The Tempest*. Instead, one finds arguments for Shakespeare's authorship of *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* cropping up with increasing regularity. Running through recent works of attribution with weed-like regularity has been the suggestion that another late possibility of the canon, a work entitled *Cardenio* (1613) may exist in altered form in Lewis Theobald's *The Double Falsehood* (1727). Indeed it may, or just as likely but not nearly so pleasing to the expansionist-minded, it may not.

Trends about the dimensions of Shakespeare's work begin to take shape in the late Sixteenth Century. To his contemporaries, most assuredly including unscrupulous stationers, he was London's most popular playwright, and his name appears on the title page of more than one play which everyone knows he never wrote. In the pioneer days, material gain would seem to have played an inordinately large part in the motives of the attributionists. *The London Prodigal*, *The History of Thomas Lord Cromwell*, *Sir John Oldcastle*, *Lord Cobham*, *The Puritan Widow*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, and *The Tragedy of Locrine* are all fluttering about during or shortly after Shakespeare's lifetime, and in 1664 they are included in the Third Folio edition of his plays. Throughout the early Eighteenth Century these additional seven plays reappear in standard editions of Shakespeare such as Rowe's in 1709 and



SHAKESPEARE

Appeared as a frontispiece in Pope's 1723 edition of Shakespeare. Note the similarity between this plate and that of Cervantes, including such detail as the escutcheons.



CERVANTES

Appeared as a frontispiece in the first Spanish language edition of *Don Quixote* published in London in 1738.

1714 and Pope's in 1728 and 1734-6. Theobald excludes the vagrant seven, and thereafter they are at times printed as a supplement to the widely agreed upon canon and at others neglected. Malone in 1780, Hazlitt in 1852, and Collier in 1878 are still suggesting that Shakespeare might have authored at least one of these orphans.

Meanwhile entries in the Stationers' Register which connect Shakespeare's name with yet other uncanonical plays begin to haunt the truthful-minded in the Seventeenth Century. "*The History of Cardenio* by Mr. Fletcher & Shakespeare" is first entered in the Stationers' Register in 1653, and it is but one of many Shakespearian entries which has no solid counterpart in the world of extant texts. By 1691, the literary historian Gerard Langbaine is confidently asserting in his *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* that Shakespeare wrote about forty-six plays. Since Langbaine is unencumbered by the most rudimentary evidence, one easily forgives his imprecision in numerical matters and remembers only the plethora of seventeenth-century attributions to Shakespeare by others innocent of evidence.

The Eighteenth Century believed that poetic merit was mighty armour to take into the attribution arena, and it occurs in contemporary statements about Shakespeare's authorship of *Cardenio-Double Falsehood* as well as a number of other eighteenth-century arguments for an apocryphal play joining the canon. The source of the questionable play looms large in Theobald's preface to *The Double Falsehood*, and it also occurs in every other eighteenth-century discussion of attribution I encountered. But the most lethal weapon of the Theobalds, Capells, Stevens, and Malones is parallel passages. *The Double Falsehood* abounds in them, and both Capell's arguments for Shakespeare's authorship of *Edward III* in 1760 and Stevens' for *The York-Shire Tragedy* in 1780 endlessly remind that phrasing from both these plays has its counterpart in canonical Shakespeare. Frequent reference to Elizabethan proverbs makes it perfectly obvious that so many of these so-called parallels have a common source, the proverbs. Equally significant is the certainty that Shakespeare was frequently imitated, not only by his contemporaries but by later admirers as well.