

The winter's tale and
cardenio: evaluating
and attributing
shakespeare's "lost"
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When a transcript of Cardenio emerged and was soon labeled one of Shakespeare's "lost plays," several critics and scholars nodded their heads in a unified disagreement while others became instantly interested in analyzing its contents. Throughout the years just as many agree that is in fact one of Shakespeare's lost plays as those who dismiss it as someone who was trying to duplicate Shakespeare and thus capitalize on this respected and well-liked style. Whatever the case, specific attention must be given to the erroneous ways in which Cardenio deals with setting in the context of Shakespeare's later works, language and style, characters and stage direction, which when examined weaken any claim that Cardenio was indeed written by the world's most famous playwright himself.

Shakespeare's later plays, which include Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest, are all notable for distinguishing characteristics common in varying degrees to them all. They all, with the exception of The Tempest which stays in one setting, have scenes in many places and countries, and their events take place over a lengthy period of time. The Winter's Tale, for instance goes from Sicily to the Bohemian coast then back to Sicily then to Paulina's house in the country, all in the midst of a sixteen year jump in the play's middle. Cymbeline follows its characters on a long trek throughout Britain and Italy, showing the play's passage of time through the changing age of the characters, and Pericles finds its setting in half a dozen different kingdoms. Shakespeare during this time obviously had an attraction to movement and settings. He is particularly interested at this time in giving his characters room to run around in, which is not the case for his earlier works or more notably in Cardenio, which is thought to have been

written by Shakespeare during his later period. If one were to make the case that Cardenio is in fact a work of Shakespeare, one must note that the theme of movement is not present. Cardenio has one setting and lacks a feeling of time relapse. Although several houses are accounted for, many of the settings are repeated throughout the play. Hence, Cardenio lacks the depth in setting that is so pivotal to Shakespeare's last works.

As an interpreter of Shakespeare's language, one must pay close attention to the style and language Shakespeare uses. In *The Winter's Tale*, the play is mostly blank verse with some prose, the only rhyme being in the speech of Time and the songs. The style, in the more emotional passages, is heightened. It becomes grandeur, sometimes wild, swelling. It is also more concentrated, rapid, varied and less regular in its construction. It is not easy or lucid and is sometimes in the more ordinary dialogue obscure. On the other hand it is always full of life and movement and in more of the dramatic passages produces sudden, strange, electrifying effects. For instance, in the Shepherd's speech about Doricles: "...for never gaz'd the moon / Upon the water as he'll stand and read / As 'twere my daughter's eyes: and, to be plain, / I think there is not half a kiss to choose / Who loves another best" (IV, IV, 99). Although mostly in blank verse, the language does not lose its lyrical charm that Shakespeare is so fond of using. The unity of *The Winter's Tale* in style and language is not simply that of a play mainly in blank verse: it is a profound and rhythmic unity in which the language not only occurs with plot, theme, character and incident, but also characterizes, helps to fix, all these; and it also characterizes and produces a dramatic effect.

Language in itself is subtle enough when used ordinarily, yet with *The Winter's Tale* its subtlety is profound. It flows in a dreamlike way across the page, cosmic and mysterious. Its difficulty is submerged so that one may have to spend the right amount of time on a passage to understand its full meaning, but so is the case for most of Shakespeare's works. *Cardenio*, on the other hand, once again lacks this characteristic that is a crucial section of Shakespeare's style. The language is sloppy and is more telling than showing. Such is the case for a particularly condescending line by Sophonirus, in which he states, "How quickly now my death will be revenged, / Before the king's first sleep! I depart laughing / To think upon to deed" (III, 1112-1113). Even more humorous is the line uttered by the servant in the same scene, which reads, "Their eyes still fixed upon the doors and windows" (III, 1124). Not only does this not sound like something Shakespeare would write at all, but it certainly seems to not belong to this time period in the least. Other particularly stupid or unclear phrases, which include "All-ass" (III, 1252), or alas, a terrible pun, and "hide that book" (I, 187), prove to go against any claim that Shakespeare penned this play. Another case is the frequency at which minor characters speak. In most of Shakespeare's plays minor characters speak one or two words and are never seen again, whereas in *Cardenio*, two men who are named first fellow and second fellow babble on for several lines across several pages. Shakespeare has never given more than a few lines to his minor players, so it would be peculiar that if one were to make a case for *Cardenio* to not mention the speech, style and language as counteracting that claim.

A final comment on the authenticity (or lack of) of Cardenio is the stage directions. Shakespeare's other works have stage directions that are limited to exits and entrances and little action (such as stabbing or falling). The Winter's Tale is limited to speech; nowhere do you see the words, or something like the words, " Enter Tyrant, wondrous discontentedly" (IV, II), " wondrous passionately" (IV, IV, 1714), (whatever that means), " Enter Lord Anselmus, the deposed king's brother, with his friend, Votarius" (I, II) and most importantly a lengthy stage direction which reads, " On a sudden, in a kind of noise like a wind, the doors clattering, the tombstone flies open, and a great light appears in the midst of the tomb; his Lady as went out, standing just before him all in white, stuck with jewels, and a great crucifix on her breast" (IV, IV, 1746-1751). These directions cheapen the play and make it weak and borderline ridiculous. If Shakespeare were to put two friends in a scene together, he would not have to tell us they were friends. Instead, he would let their dialogue speak for itself because he has the audacity and talent to do so. It seems that whoever wrote this play was trying to copy Shakespeare's work and not doing a very good job of it; thus, the stage directions are just another instance that speaks against Cardenio as being Shakespeare's work.

These weighty cases against Cardenio as a part of Shakespeare's canon are important claims and can certainly be a start in this argument. However, there is no way for sure we can say this isn't Shakespeare unless we had huge circumstantial evidence. Although the setting, language and style do not match up, that is not to say this isn't an early draft (we cannot assume Shakespeare wrote a perfect draft his very first try) or a starter draft and

that Shakespeare later would have revised and carved it out to a perfect work like his other plays. Shakespeare cannot be duplicated. Upon reading Cardenio, the typical reader may not get the feeling that there is anything that ranks it, in terms of transcendent imagination or insight, among Shakespeare's masterpieces. Simply, it generates a certain admiration for speech and style, and nothing more.