

TRIPLE FALSEHOOD

A space for wonder in uncertain times: Writer's note

Eight years ago, I became fascinated by the lost Shakespeare play 'Cardenio' – I even contemplated doing a Masters degree to grapple with it. While that didn't work out, the idea stuck around, never quite seeming to coalesce – why was I telling that story at that time? I was deep in the final week of rehearsals for my play at La Mama Explorations when this play demanded I take notice of it now. 'This is how it goes....,' it said.

The beauty of 'Cardenio' is that no one knows what it was like. Reportedly based on a fragmented story from Part I of 'Don Quixote,' it is a story about friendship and betrayal, honour and deceit, disguise and righting injustices, set in 1600s Spain. As in Shakespeare's late plays, a bruised kind of love ultimately triumphs over adversity, but at what cost? A manuscript hasn't survived (so far as we know) and it was never published; an eighteenth-century adaptation called 'Double Falsehood' does exist however, but it's been cut and trimmed, rewritten, and doesn't *quite* work.

Around the same time as I was reshaping this story, the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, Virginia, opened submissions for the third year of its Shakespeare's New Contemporaries program – responses to Shakespeare's plays to be staged in a replica indoor playhouse in almost-Jacobethan conditions. The coincidence was far too neat to ignore, so I started to dream of a play for a dozen actors.

I hunted down every journal article, book, or chapter I could get my hands on, and dove headfirst into the mad world of lost plays, adaptations, and twenty-first century interrogations of it. It had taken me seven-and-a-half years to realise the tension in this obsession wasn't so much the lost play itself, but its journey – the story of the play throughout history, rather than its plot. What had started out as a mild curiosity in a bookshop had steadily become something rather (appropriately) quixotic.

And I had questions, too: what was the socio-political context in London 1612? Why was there a sudden boom in Spanish literature in the early 1600s, when Spain had been England's mortal enemy barely twenty years earlier? Why are there gaps in 'Double Falsehood,' what is missing? Is 'Double Falsehood' an adaptation of an actual Shakespearean play, or is it a well-disguised fake? Were Don Quixote and Sancho in 'Cardenio,' or was the story a more linear telling in the same vein as 'Double Falsehood'? These gaps in the literature became my sandpit – my space for wonder.

This play is not an attempt to recreate the lost play or fill in the gaps of the eighteenth-century adaptation – there's no fun in that. Rather, It is a love letter to the world of Shakespeareana and academia; my response to 'doing' Shakespeare in the twenty-first century, its intersection with the #metoo movement, and about finding allies in unlikely places in uncertain times. Embracing a bit of Jacobethan dramaturgy and fluidity, I'm interested in why these plays were written then, why they might still be relevant three or four hundred years later, what we can glean and learn from them, what they can tell us about us now, and how we can grow because of them.

GS

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