The imprint of Shakespearean authorship

Prelude: Shakespeare, Cervantes, Petrarch

"One of the things," said Don Quixote in reply, "which shall give the greatest pleasure to a virtuous and eminent man is to see himself in his lifetime printed and in the press, and with a good name on people's tongues."

"Poetry . . . is fashioned of an alchemy of such power that anyone who knows how to treat her will transmute her into the purest gold of inestimable price. He who possesses her must . . . not let . . . her descend to base lampoons or impious sonnets; she must not be displayed for sale, unless in heroic poems, in mournful tragedies, or in merry and artificial comedies."

(Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, Part 2 [1615]: chapter 3, p. 546 and chapter 16, pp. 635–36)

These two excerpts from Part 2 of *Don Quixote* address two major coordinates of the present book. In the first, during a discussion between the Don and the Bachelor, Sanson Carrasco, Cervantes narrativizes the literal making of the "book" we are reading (544): from its inspiration in other books of chivalry, to the enactment of those books on the myriad roads of La Mancha, to the writing of the book itself by one Cid Hamete Benengeli, to its printing in the nascent medium of print, to the reception of Part 1, and finally to its continuation in Part 2. In the second excerpt, when the Don defends "Poetry" before his new friend, Don Diego de Miranda, Cervantes introduces another one of those great moments when the author pauses to reflect on his medium, including its value for the Spanish "people" or what Cervantes earlier widens to "the universal entertainment of mankind" (545). Cervantes does not divide the literary art into poetic and theatrical forms but rather into those like "base lampoons or impious sonnets" that are impure ethically and those like epic, tragedy, and comedy that are pure. Yet in the process we may discern how naturally Cervantes combines reference to forms associated with the theatre and forms usually called "non-dramatic."

Such a combination takes on resonance when we recall that Cervantes himself was not merely the great inventor of the modern novel but simultaneously an early modern poet-playwright. Born in 1547, in 1566–67 he began to write poetry and published his first sonnet, celebrating the birth

of Princess Catalina Michaela, daughter of Phillip II and Isabel of Valois. In 1581, he attempted to establish himself as a dramatist, but only two plays from this period survive: the historical tragedy *La Numancia* (*Numantia: A Tragedy*) and *El trato de Argel* (*The Traffic of Algiers*). In 1585, he published a prose pastoral romance modeled on the Ovidian story of Polyphemus and Galatea, *La Galatea*. Later, between the two installments of *Don Quixote*, he published a long allegorical poem in a satiric mode titled *Viage del Parnaso* (1614; *Voyage To Parnassus*). In 1615, a year before he died, he published a collection of plays titled *Ocho comedias, y ocho entremeses nuevos* (*Eight Plays and Eight New Interludes*). In 1617, a year after he died, a prose work in the heroic vein of Heliodrous' *Aetheopica*, *Los Trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda* (*The Trials of Persiles and Sigismunda*), was published.[1]

On the surface, the pattern of Cervantes' publications, like Shakespeare's, looks arbitrary, the product simply of exigencies characterizing the author's own often-taxing professional career. Yet the eclectic nature of Cervantes' wide generic practice is also a fundamentally Renaissance practice, indebted most obviously to Petrarch, whose career combined such genres as epic, pastoral, sonnet sequence, triumph, letters, and prose dialogue – in no set order. Nonetheless, embedded deeply in Petrarch's wide formal experimentation is his commitment to Virgil, including practice of the two genres that make up the Renaissance version of the Virgilian progression: pastoral and epic (Fowler, *Kinds* 240; see Coolidge, "Great Things"). Yet Petrarch began composing the *Africa* before he attempted the *Bucolicum carmen*, and only the pastoral appeared during his lifetime – late in his lifetime. Altogether, then, Petrarch's career is notable for its prodigious mixing of two contradictory career models: a haphazard generic eclecticism, which shows his interest in wide formal experimentation; and the Virgilian progression, which shows his interest in presenting himself to Europe as the modern heir to Virgil.[2] The fact is: Petrarch's major heirs in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe reproduce their own versions of such mixing, from Sannazaro and Tasso in Italy, to Ronsard in France, to Spenser and Milton in England. What has escaped notice until recently is that Cervantes' eclectic career also subscribes to a Virgilian pattern (de Armas, "Wheel").

Recently, Harold Bloom has reminded us that the lost play *Cardenio*, coauthored by Shakespeare and John Fletcher, is modeled on an episode in Part 2 of *Don Quixote* – giving Bloom his prompt to match the Spanish with

[1] See Cascardi, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Cervantes*, including Cascardi's Introduction; de Armas, "Italian"; McKendrick, "Writings."
[2] For details, see Cheney, *Flight* 59–62; Kennedy, "Career."

the English author in his 100-author "mosaic" of literary genius, for reasons that the present book tries to complicate: "Shakespeare usurps all modern drama, Cervantes the novel" (*Genius* 15).[3] Although Shakespeare wrote some of the most gifted prose in English (most notably, for Falstaff), he is not known to have composed a prose fiction in the manner of Cervantes – or Marguerite de Navarre, or Sir Philip Sidney, even Robert Greene or Thomas Nashe. What Shakespeare does share with Cervantes is certainly what Thomas Carlyle called "superiority of intellect" (quoted in Bloom, *Genius*, 9) but also the early modern mixing of career models. The first is his seemingly haphazard combination of poems and plays within a single literary career – a combination we will characterize in chapter 1 as "Ovidian" and find practiced most prominently in England by Marlowe. The second career model emerges from Shakespeare's interest in Renaissance Virgilianism, especially the genres of pastoral and epic within a national frame. As we will see, Shakespeare tends to attenuate Virgil with his favorite author, Ovid, and to understand this Ovidian project in terms of Marlowe's similar attempt to attenuate the Virgilian Spenser.

This first part to the book divides into two chapters that set up subsequent chapters on individual poems by laying out necessary historical material for contextualizing Shakespeare's Ovidian combination of poems and plays within a nationalist, Virgilian, or Spenserian frame. The first chapter, "The Sixteenth-Century Poet-Playwright," provides a more detailed orientation to the project; it reviews the details of Shakespeare's professional career, inventories critical models on it, and introduces the main features of the argument. The second chapter, "Francis Meres, the Ovidian Poet-Playwright, and Shakespeare Criticism," views five sets of evidence external to Shakespeare's works to support the general argument.

[3] For evidence that Thomas Shelton's English translation of *Don Quixote*, though not published in 1612, circulated in manuscript as early as 1607, see Bliss, "Don Quixote." For parallels between the love triangles in *Don Quixote* and Shakespeare's Sonnets, see Erne, "Mark."

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