

THE SHAKESPEARE CLUB OF STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

The 863rd meeting of the Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon took place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 13 September 2011. The Chair for the evening, Dr Susan Brock, introduced Peter Kirwan whose subject was 'Chasing Windmills: What Next for *Cardenio*?' Mr Kirwan had just completed his doctoral thesis on the Shakespeare Apocrypha and had been recently been appointed Teaching Associate in Shakespeare and Early Modern Drama at the University of Nottingham.

Mr Kirwan began by stating his intention to avoid the question of Shakespeare's authorship of the play being staged at the RSC as *Cardenio*. Instead he described the title pages of two recent editions of the play, the Arden Shakespeare edition (2010) and the acting text published by Nick Hern (2011). The first is titled *Double Falsehood* (2010) and credits Lewis Theobald who published the play in 1727; the second is titled *Cardenio: Shakespeare's Lost Play Re-imagined* which illustrates the complexity of authorship, revision and adaptation. He traced the history of the play from a collaboration between John Fletcher and Shakespeare performed by the King's Men in 1612/13, through a conjectured Restoration adaptation which Theobald then reworked from MSS he claimed to have acquired from an illegitimate daughter of Shakespeare. He argued that it was the publication of the Arden edition with its association with Shakespeare that revived interest in the play, inspiring six productions including the RSC's. **But** stepping away from the 'who dunnit' Kirwan asked 'What does the play do for the Shakespeare canon'?

With the help of members of the Shakespeare Institute players, Kirwan examined three scenes from the play, the Prologue, the central speech by Henriquez describing his seduction (or rape) of Violante, and the 18th century Epilogue which has not been included in modern productions, arguing that each text reflected contemporary theatrical and moral culture as well as Shakespeare's status as a writer. Comparing the play to *Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, at either end of Shakespeare's career, Kirwan concluded that treatment of the rape scene determined the character of the play for each generation and that the inclusion of *Cardenio* could only enrich the Shakespeare canon.

After questions from the floor and a vote of thanks from the Chair, the meeting closed at about 9pm.