

QUESTION 13

Was Shakespeare's name used as a selling point on works we now don't believe he wrote?

Andrew Murphy

Yes, it was.

When plays first began to be published, writers were rarely credited on the title pages. For example, the first play of Shakespeare's that survives — the 1594 edition of *Titus Andronicus* — makes no mention of him as author.

However, his name *did* very quickly become a selling point, so the title page of the 1608 edition of *King Lear*, for instance, features Shakespeare's name at the very top of the page, in large, bold letters.

Some publishers do seem to have tried to cash in on Shakespeare's growing popularity by issuing texts under his name that he hadn't actually written. In 1599, a collection of poems titled *The Passionate Pilgrime* was identified as being by Shakespeare when, in fact, only a small number of the poems were his.

Likewise, various plays, such as *The London Prodigal* (in 1605) and *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (in 1608), appeared with Shakespeare's name on the title pages, though evidence suggests that he hadn't actually written them.