

## Question 11

Do writers of Shakespeare's time dispraise his work.

Emma Smith

Do contemporary writers dispraise Shakespeare? Not much. There's that early reference, perhaps by Robert Greene describing Shakespeare as 'an upstart Crow beautified with our feathers' – but by quoting Shakespeare this is an anxious compliment to the newcomer's ability.

From some writers he gets faint praise: fellow playwright John Webster, writing in 1612, admires 'the right happy and copious industry of Master Shakespeare, Master Dekker, and Master Heywood'.

The most explicit criticism of Shakespeare comes from his rival Ben Jonson. Jonson is scornful of Shakespeare's error in giving Bohemia a seacoast in *The Winter's Tale*, and laughs at a line from *Julius Caesar* – the remark seems to have stung, since the text of the play doesn't include the offending line – he wishes, in contrast to the claim that he never blotted a line, that he 'had blotted a thousand'. In the end Jonson notes that there 'was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned'.