

## *From the Editor:*

### *What's in a Name?*

The key axiom of Shakespeare scholarship is that “Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare” because the name is on the title pages of 56 editions of his plays and poems printed during his lifetime. Once you accept this axiomatic truth, all logical deductions follow. Since axioms are intuitively obvious, any contradictory evidence would invalidate their basic premise through the rule of inference known as “universal instantiation.” So let us review the bibliographic evidence.

Of the 20 plays by William Shakespeare published in quarto and octavo editions during his lifetime, approximately half did not include his name on the title page. Early quartos such as *Titus Andronicus* (1594), *Henry VI, Part 2* (1594), *Henry VI, Part 3* (1595), *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), and *Richard II* (1597) were printed without attribution to any author.

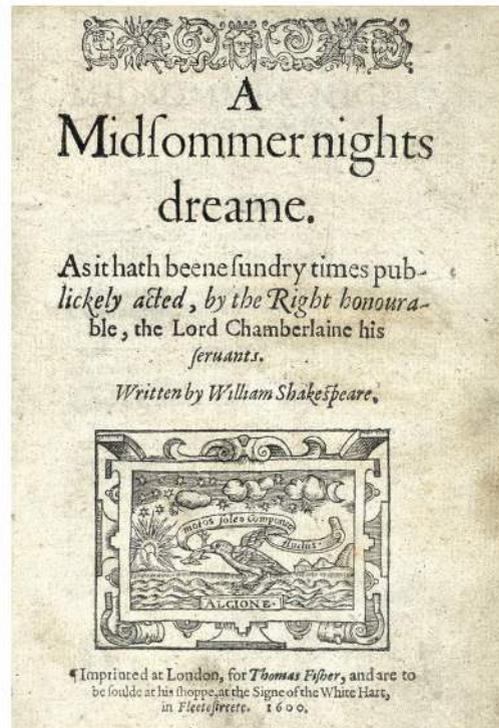
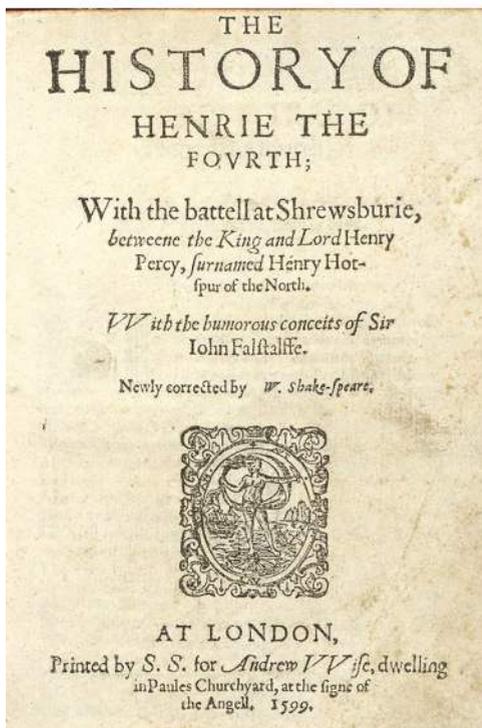
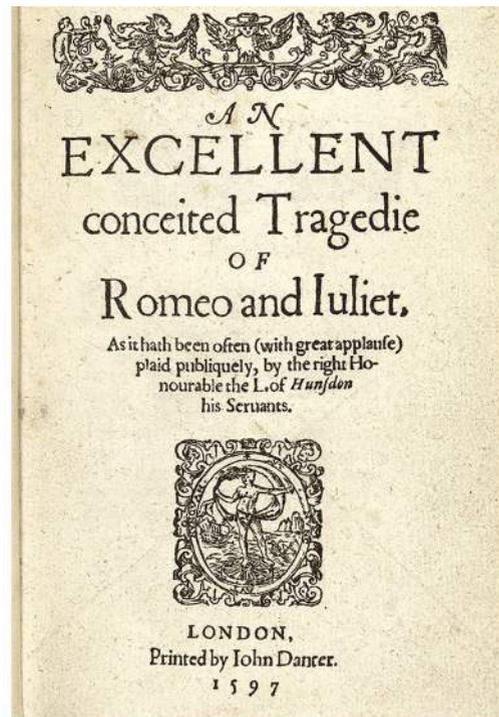
The first play to bear his name was *Love's Labour's Lost* in 1598, which marked a shift in naming practices for his works. Thus, at least nine of Shakespeare's quartos lacked his name on their title pages.

Moreover, ten editions of *Venus and Adonis* and five editions of *The Rape of Lucrece* were published during Shakespeare's lifetime. Not one edition had Shakespeare's name on the title page, though his name was appended to the two dedications to the Earl of Southampton.

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On the other hand, the hyphenated form “Shake-speare” is documented on the quartos of *Richard II* (1598), *Richard III* (1598), and *Henry IV, Part 1* (1598), among others. In total, 18 instances of the hyphenated “Shake-speare” appear in quartos and octavos attributed to Shake-speare during his lifetime, including the *Sonnets*.

This was not a superficial mistake given the numerous instances of its use on multiple editions of the plays. Indeed, the literary practice of Elizabethan and Jacobean authors seeking the protection of anonymity often employed the use of a hyphenated surname. Several examples illustrate the practice.



## Martin Mar-prelate

This famous Elizabethan pseudonym, used in seven anticlerical pamphlets, appeared with a hyphen in editions of the Mar-prelate tracts in 1588–89, all of which satirized bishops of the Anglican church. Shakespeare himself alludes to this in *As You Like It*, Act 5, Scene 1, in the exchange between Audrey and Touchstone.

Touchstone: We shall find a time, Audrey. Patience, gentle Audrey.  
 Audrey: Faith, the priest was good enough, for all the old gentleman's saying.  
 Touchstone: A most wicked Sir Oliver, Audrey, a most vile Mar-text.

In keeping with the clerical tenor of the tracts, the fictional character of Sir Oliver Mar-text is a country vicar.

## Tom Tell-truth

Frequently cited as a hyphenated pseudonym from the period, this name aligns with the pattern of descriptive pseudonyms like “Shake-speare.” Such names were sometimes hyphenated to emphasize their symbolic meaning (e.g., “Master Shoe-tie,” “Sir Luckless Woo-all”).

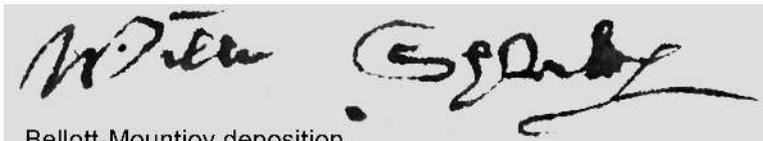
## Cuthbert Curry-knave

This is another example of a satirical hyphenated pseudonym from Elizabethan polemical literature, though less frequently documented than Mar-prelate or Tell-truth.

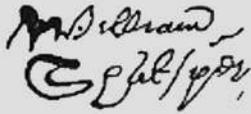
The remainder of the quartos and octavos of Shakespeare's works printed in his lifetime bear the name “William Shakespeare.”

This inconsistency in authorial attribution also appears in the six alleged signatures penned by Shakespeare on several legal documents dated 1612–1616, the last four years of his life. The first was on a court deposition in 1612. Two more appear on deeds involving a real estate purchase in 1613. The final three are on each page of Shakespeare's 1616 will (the first one badly eroded). Digitally enhanced versions are shown in the figure.

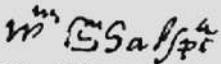
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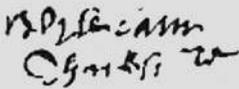
Bellott-Mountjoy deposition,  
12 June 1612, National Archives, Kew



Blackfriars Gatehouse conveyance,  
10 March 1613, Guildhall Library, London



Blackfriars mortgage,  
11 March 1616, British Library, London



First page of will (from 1809 engraving,  
original lost through wear)



Second page of will



Last page of will, 25 March 1616  
National Archives, Kew

Each one of the six signatures is spelled differently. Not one used the full surname “Shakespeare.” Spellings are given below:

- Willm Shakp
- William Shakspēr
- Wm Shakspē
- William Shakspeare
- Willm Shakspeare
- By me William Shakspear

Indeed, the British Public Office doubts that the six signatures are actually written by Shakespeare. The 1985 *Shakespeare in the Public Records*, published by the British Public Records Office, includes a chapter on “Shakespeare’s

Last Will and Signatures” by Jane Cox, who examines the alleged authentic signatures of Shakespeare. She concludes: “It is obvious at a glance that these signatures, with the exception of the last two [on pages 2 and 3 of the Will], are not the signatures of the same man. Almost every letter is formed a different way in each.... Which of the signatures reproduced here is the genuine article is anybody’s guess.”

Moreover, Shakespeare’s will does not refer to a single manuscript or book, further evidence of Shakespeare’s non-literary life. This lack of reference to such a life is further confirmed by the fact that no manuscript, letter or diary in Shakespeare’s hand has ever been found. Even the voluminous manuscript of the First Folio is non-extant.

Since there is no documentary evidence proving that Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare, historians have relied upon bibliographic records from the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras to confirm his identity. But the variations in the printing of Shakespeare’s name on numerous title pages undermines the integrity of the bibliographic evidence.

In short, these two primary sources of contemporary evidence contradict each other on the core issue of authorial identity: the spelling of the author’s own name.

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