

## QUESTION 26

Was collaboration common in Shakespeare's time?

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Collaboration was arguably the default form of writing in the early theatre. Our best source, Philip Henslowe's diary, gives us a snapshot of several decades in which nearly two thirds of plays had multiple authors. Shakespeare's contemporary Thomas Heywood claimed to have a finger in over 200 plays; and all of the major writers – including Jonson and Marlowe - worked with others.

It's not just about words, either. Anthony Munday was known as "the best plotter" of the day. Some writers specialised in stories, others patched up dialogue or worked out backstage practicalities. The manuscript of *Thomas More*, with some seven different hands, shows us the range of collaborations..

We know that the plays of Shakespeare were performed, and we also know that the sheer number of collaborators involved in creating plays meant that they were inherently social productions. The idea of a single artistic mind presiding over a whole body of work is at odds with the very nature of professional theatre.