

Shakespeare

Solitary genius or collaborator?

As we've seen, the image of Shakespeare is one that emphasises the solitude of 'genius'. Writers need to work alone and we can imagine the concentration required to produce great work. However, Shakespeare was also a man of the theatre, an actor, a producer, who wrote parts for the actors he worked with and whose plays utilised the skills of his company. It's interesting to think about him as a collaborator in the process of creating a production – did he agree to changes in the text? Did he refuse to accommodate other people's suggestions? How open was he to the idea of a shared creative process?

■ Activity – Producing a play

Consider all the people that are involved in putting together a school drama production – is it in the end one person's show or the result of an ensemble effort? How many bits of the production pie could be removed – lights, sets, costumes, before you didn't have much of anything left?

*If you have a chance to watch the whole of the film *Me and Orson Welles* – keep a sharp eye and ear out for the use of the word 'genius' – it was a term that was often applied to Orson Welles. What, in the context of that film, does the title mean? And what privileges and pressures come with such an accolade?*

Also – the film is about the putting on of a play and highlights the many individuals' efforts that go to make it happen. Would the production have been a hit if there had not been a presiding intelligence and a presiding vision there to dominate and shape the many different talents and personalities in the company? How might this issue of genius and overall control relate to the making of a film? In order to consider this question you will need to look up the term 'auteur'.