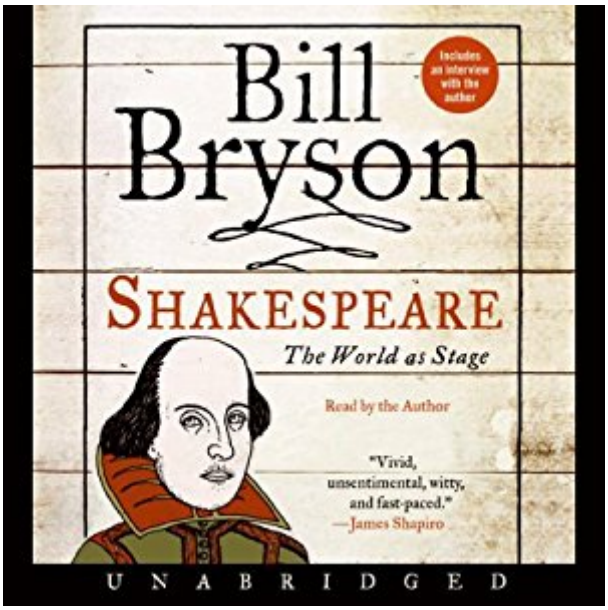
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Shakespeare: The World As Stage



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Synopsis

William Shakespeare, the most celebrated poet in the English language, left behind nearly a million words of text, but his biography has long been a thicket of wild supposition arranged around scant facts. With a steady hand and his trademark wit, Bill Bryson sorts through this colorful muddle to reveal the man himself. His Shakespeare is like no one else'sÃ¢â ¬â •the beneficiary of Bryson's genial nature, his engaging skepticism, and a gift for storytelling unrivaled in our time. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

To read Bill Bryson is to like Bill Bryson, but this is not his usual tongue-in-cheek book. For me, this was just the right book because I didn't want to read an overly-intellectualized work where it's so dry it almost spontaneously combusts while you're reading it. Bryson covers all the major questions surrounding Shakespeare including his early history, his works, his questionable personal life, multiple authorship questions, and much more. It almost reminds me of the "Don't know much about .... " books that touch on subjects and then leave the subjects as quickly as they entered the discussion. So, if you're not looking for an overly intellectual book on Shakespeare with detailed analysis of Macbeth, or even any discussion on literary analysis, but simply just want to know about Shakespeare, this is a pretty good choice.The treatment of any given topic wasn't superficial, but very few topics were more than 10-15 pages long so it's very readable. Bryson is very down to

earth, so he makes sure that the text is understandable without worrying about a bunch of 4 syllable words. I'd give this book 5 stars, but I got the sense that I wasn't getting the full story in certain instances, but I am okay with my improved knowledge combined with what may be blissful ignorance (if I ever was to wander into a Shakespreare convention or lecture, low probability for both).

Bryson ends Chapter 1 with a simple statement: "The idea [of this book] is a simple one: to see how much of Shakespeare we can know, really know, from the record.Which is one reason, of course, [that the book is] so slender."It is amazing how Shakespeare can be a household name 400 years after he died, and yet we know few facts about him. If it hadn't been for his compatriots publishing "The First Folio" posthumously, he would have been long forgotten. Actually, as Bryson points out, he almost was forgotten anyway for the first 200 years after he died.But thanks to the restoration of his reputation, and he had a good professional name while he was alive, people now comb his plays & poems and the public records for every meaning and every mention.Bryson's explanation of how pronunciation has changed from Shakespeare's day is very interesting: "Much of the language Shakespeare used is lost to us now without external guidance. In and experiment in 2005, the Globe in London staged a production of 'Troilus and Cressida' in 'Early Modern English' or "Original Pronunciation'. The critic John Lahr, writing in the 'New Yorker', estimated that he could understand only about 30 percent of what was said." This is from someone who had watched a lot of Shakespeare.I enjoyed the whole book, but the very best part is the last chapter, Chapter 9: Claimants. This covers the controversy over whether Shakespeare actually wrote Shakespeare, and in a commonsensical way debunks the claimants. I've always thought it was silly to say that Shakespeare couldn't have written "Macbeth" because he wasn't a lord or didn't go to college. He was the son of a mayor and could read and write. Why couldn't the spark of genius have shown itself?If you want to read more, I highly recommend "The Book of William". This slim book not about the man but about the First Folio. I never would have thought there was that much to know about it. It's fascinating and humorous:The Book of William: How Shakespeare's First Folio Conquered the WorldHappy Reader

A tough assignment; write a book on a topic about which we know almost nothing, the life of William Shakespeare. Better yet, make the book about the fact that we know very little about the life of William Shakespeare. Let that book compete with thousands of others about Shakespeare. Doesn't sound like a recipe for a successful book, but Bryson has truly pulled it off.Here's how.First off,

Bryson doesn't shy away from the fact that we know very little about Shakespeare, instead, he uses it to his advantage. After laying out the facts we do have about Shakespeare, Bryson turns to a description of the world in which Shakespeare lived to explain why we know so little about the man. He really brings 17th century England to life and paints a picture in which you can imagine Shakespeare operating. It's really well done and ends up being fascinating.Second, Bryson addresses the speculation that has risen up around Shakespeare's life to fill the void of knowledge that we face. Using the information we do have about Shakespeare and the times in which he lived, he categorizes the various Shakespeare theories into more fanciful and less fanciful piles and explains why they belong there. It makes for really interesting reading.My familiarity with and interest in Shakespeare are average to below average, and yet I found this book to be fascinating, readable and informative. It's made me more interested in Shakespeare.Highly recommended even for those who aren't deeply interested in Shakespeare.

I've read a fair bit of Shakespeare scholarship both as an academic and writing fiction, so I had a good background knowledge of the writer and his time. But working on a new project, I needed a good, short straightforward review of the primary sources of Shakespeare's biography and found Mr. Bryson's excellent book. Nothing could have fit the bill better. Highly recommended.

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