



Reduced Shakespeare: The Attention-impaired Readers Guide to the World's Best Playwright

Reed Martin , Austin Tichenor

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From the theater troupe whose sidesplitting production *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare [Abridged]* is the longest-running comedy in London's history comes an openly hysterical, yet surprisingly informative, guide to everything you ever wanted to know about the Bard of Avon

Love Shakespeare Youll like this book. Hate Shakespeare Youll love this book. From the theatrical company that has been cutting the Bard down to size for more than a dozen years comes a single volume boasting everything you always wanted to know about William Shakespeare's life and work -- but couldnt be bothered to ask.

In one slim volume, *Reduced Shakespeare* delivers the plays, the life, and the legend in twelve easy pieces. What's the theme of Hamlet Poop or get off the pot. What's essential preparation for an evening of outdoor Shakespeare Bring lots of coffee . . . and use the bathroom before the show. Liberally sprinkled with lists, definitions, quizzes, essential vocabulary, and the Reduced Shakespeare Company's trademark irreverence and wit, this "reduced" handbook will delight enthusiasts, skeptics, and fledgling fans alike.

Reduced Shakespeare: The Attention-impaired Readers Guide to the World's Best Playwright Details

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Aimee says

This book gives an overview of pretty much any topic you can think of regarding Shakespeare. There are chapters on his life, his plays, how people act Shakespeare's work, the sonnets and epic poems, the authorship controversies, movie versions of the plays, etc. It's pretty impressive, really. I particularly enjoyed the chapter dealing with movie adaptations. The tone is almost manic in its slapstick humor (which got to be a little much for even me, hence the 4-star rather than 5-star rating), but the authors' love of the source material clearly shines through on every page. This book has everything you ever wanted to know about Shakespeare in one handy and hilarious little volume.

Word of caution: the best fit for this book would be people who already have some familiarity with Shakespeare and his works. With the authors' sense of humor, it is sometimes difficult to tell whether they're being serious or silly in some of their less outrageous claims.

Cricket Muse says

This is as the title states: Reduced Shakespeare. And just like the irreverent troupe who entertains and surprisingly educates the audience about Shakespeare, it is witty, saucy, sassy, and amazingly informative.

It veers quite nicely from being a stuffy academic tome, there are plenty of those out there, and is a playful treatise of Shakespeare. The New York Times review blurb claims: "Intellectual vaudeville." I would agree.

Jay says

First, this book is very funny. Probably as funny as the guys planning their own little play in "Midsummer Night's Dream" when it's performed well. I enjoy funny and frequently give it 3 stars.

Second, this book has a lot of great information. I took two or three classes in Shakespeare when I was in college and this book not only covered a LOT of the history and mystery of Shakespeare that I knew, but added to what I had heard before. Yeah, while being funny. (Okay, so if you don't like getting your facts and your fun intermixed to the point where it gives you stress that you can't always figure out what's real and what's joke, this may not be the best Shakespeare textbook for you.)

Third, this book gives a great summary of all of Shakespeare's plays (including a biased rating system for how good the plays are, a rating systems that seemed to match pretty well with how I would rate the plays I've read or seen). That's going to be handy.

Finally, this books rates some of the most notable movies based on Shakespeare's work. To me, this is the best part, because I don't have a lot of time to watch movies, but I'd like to see the better versions of Shakespeare's works (because I agree with the authors of this book that the plays were written to be seen and

performed, not simply read).

I'd almost consider giving this book 5 stars. After I watch some of the movies the authors suggested, I might come back and do that.

Bruce says

If you've never seen the Reduced Shakespeare Company, you really owe it to yourself to get out to one of their performances at the first available opportunity. They're kind of like the Flying Karamazov brothers only with less props. If they don't make stops to any theaters near you, see if you can get a hand on any of their relatively recently published playscripts (or better still, their radio program as a book-on-CD).

I was inspired to borrow from the library everything of theirs I could find after a recent excursion to see their "All Hollywood" show at the Kennedy Center. (Very funny. Very campy. Tewwibwy tewwific, as awways.)

This book has much in common with Peter Schickele's *The Definitive Biography of PDQ Bach*; in that it's high-brow posing as low-brow. Don't be confused, this is not the script of the show that put RSC firmly on the traveling circuit, but rather, the principal/founding cast's survey of all things Shakespeare, including irreverent synopses of play plots and poems, a refreshingly-candid explanation for largely unknowable bard's lack-of biography, a survey of Shakespeare-inspired literature and literary criticism, and (best of all) a 60 page Roger Ebert-style guide to the best of Shakespearean movie adaptations. This last is witty, but not tongue-in-cheek; it makes a genuinely handy tool by which to update your Netflix queue.

But don't worry that this book is all comedy of erudite sans comedy. It's chock-full of such enjoyable nonsense as this (from p. 52) "Why Shakespeare's thirty-nine plays have traditionally been referred to as 'the Canon' is a mystery. Evidence suggests it derives from Shakespeare's frequent pickup line, 'Hey babe, wanna see my canon?'" There you go -- fun for the whole family.

Julie H. says

Martin and Tichenor's *Reduced Shakespeare: The Complete Guide for the Attention Impaired [abridged]* is as hilarious as it is irreverent. As a Muggle (as opposed to a literary scholar, let alone producer, actor, or adapter of Shakespearean works for stage, screen, or sock puppet), I adored this collection. This book is as silly as it is informative, and was just the right mix of fact and frivolity in an otherwise stressful week. While it would be impossible to identify a favorite bit, I will note that even the Bibliography--which includes both reference works that actually exist as well as those that *should* exist--rocks. Fun, fun stuff here.

Despite co-author Austin Tichenor's inscription to us that reads, in part: "May this occupy a place of pride in your new home! (I'm thinking the bathroom.)" it's going on the shelves with other good stuff that we'll want to loan out to friends as the occasion arises.

Shameless plug: And if you enjoy this sort of thoughtfully-researched frivolity, by all means go see any of the Reduced Shakespeare productions and check out their website (complete with podcasts) at <http://www.reducedshakespeare.com/>

Cojaysea says

I have never been attracted to reading any of Shakespeare's plays but was interested in why he has become so popular and who he was . I have read all the stories about who possibly wrote the plays and why he couldn't have been the author so I found this book by chance just wandering through the library one afternoon . Bingo! The perfect Shakespeare book for me, short to the point and written with wit this was such a surprisingly good book . So what do I know about Shakespeare now that I didn't before ? Not much it seems . This guy really kept off the radar and much of what we know is conjecture and supposition . There are many reasons why a person would want to keep quiet about writing plays in 16 th century England and I guess we will,never know the truth about him. Delightful book .

Rebekah says

I was inspired after visiting the Folger Shakespeare Library to learn more about the plays I hadn't read, seen, or performed. I wasn't feeling up to reading the complete works, so when I saw this book for a dollar at a library sale, I thought it might just a be what I was looking for. I prefer cerebral humor to slapstick and sarcasm, so the tone of this book got a little tiresome for me, but if that's your kind of humor, you'll love it. It gave a good enough overview of the plays and a decent history of what we know of Shakespeare's life that it fulfilled its purpose for me and prompted me to add a few of Shakespeare's unfamiliar plays to my TBR list.

Diana Prince says

Highly enjoyable, informational, and hilarious read.

Madeline says

Hilarious. It's a down-to-earth look at Shakespeare's works, his legacy, and how biographies of him are 90% speculation (read: bullshit). The authors describe Shakespeare's life (as much of it as is known, anyway), summarize his plays, and even discuss who might have actually been responsible for writing Shakespeare's plays, and they do it all in frank, lighthearted language. They describe *As You Like It* as "*Desperate Housewives* set in the forest of Arden" and write things like, "*Cymbeline* seems to be one of the few Shakespearean plays where he didn't steal the basic plot from someone else. Apparently, he thought this one up himself. We should be grateful he didn't do it more often." A terrific book for Shakespeare novices and hardcore fans alike.

Susan Liston says

Another overlooked tome of mine I found with a ten year old receipt inside. The usual book-about-Shakespeare...a bio, synopsis of the plays, recommendations for filmed versions. Only with jokes. Anyone familiar with the Reduced Shakespeare Co. will know what to expect...some groaners, and some extremely funny. Overall, quite entertaining. (Oh, and no overwrought reverence here, if they think a play is boring or

el stinko, they will say so.)

MacK says

My adoration of The Reduced Shakespeare Company, and the fact that I teach teenagers, led me to start using this book more than I probably ought to. It is insightful, clever and invariably honest, for instance they explain that "the entire Shakespeare industry consists of people simply guessing about who Shakespeare was and what he wrote." And refer to the whole genre as a tale "told by idiots".

Marin and Tichenor are much more than idiots. They have a comprehensive knowledge of Shakespeare (turning him into your livelihood will do that), and an equally comprehensive knowledge of dumb jokes they can tell about Shakespeare. They are undoubtable creative talents and immeasurably witty. They are also idiots...they are more than JUST idiots.

The only flaw with the book is, as is the Reduced Shakespeare Company's creed, that they do not go into enough depth with many of the plays. Hamlet is adored, but the comedies (as in their play) are woefully ignored. Perhaps, as they suggest, "the comedies aren't half as funny as the tragedies," or perhaps there's a mine of gold waiting there, one that I can steal and use for high school students yawning their way through Taming of the Shrew and Merchant of Venice (until I point out another dirty joke, that is).

Jane Greensmith says

Unadulterated fun and full of quotes like this one:

"History is filled with people you've never heard of, and every single one of them lived a life more recorded and better documented than the 'famous' William Shakespeare. It's maddening."

I liked the way the book ended--with the notion that part of Shakespeare's appeal is that we don't know much about his life. If we did, we might like him less. I think there's a lot of truth in that, and I think the same might apply to Austen, though we do know so much more about her life and opinions than Shakespeare's. For example, in my own case, I liked Dickens' novels more before I read a detailed bio of his life than after--I had a hard time with his treatment of his wife, and that colored my view of his novels.

George H says

Great fun. A fast-paced, irreverent (but educational) romp through Shakespeare's complete works. I have a greater appreciation for what I've already read/seen, and a heightened interest in working my way through Shakespeare's entire catalogue.

As an aside...if you ever get a chance to see these guys (Reduced Shakespeare Company) perform live, run (don't walk) to the theatre.

Ryan says

From two of the guys that brought us the Reduced Shakespeare Company [and the hysterical show The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)], comes this very funny and surprisingly informational book on the bard himself.

The book lampoons Shakespeare's bio, his plays, his sonnets, movies, basically everything we know about him. It also provides every important fact we know about him also (at one point even apologizing for the lack of jokes found on a page). It's very clever and parodies everything, while still respecting the playwright and his works.

The only time the book gets bogged down is in its last chapter of movie reviews, and even then, there are enough jokes to make it a worthy addition.

I definitely left believing for sure the theory of Shakespeare being a time traveler (how do all other scholars miss this theory?).

Caitlin says

I really enjoyed this book a lot. It made Shakespeare more accessible to me than I ever thought it could be. I have a starting place to see movies made from Shakespeare's plays, which plays to see live, and got a little introduction to his sonnets. My only issue with the book is that it can be difficult to tell fact from humor. I would not use this book to write a report or anything overly serious.
