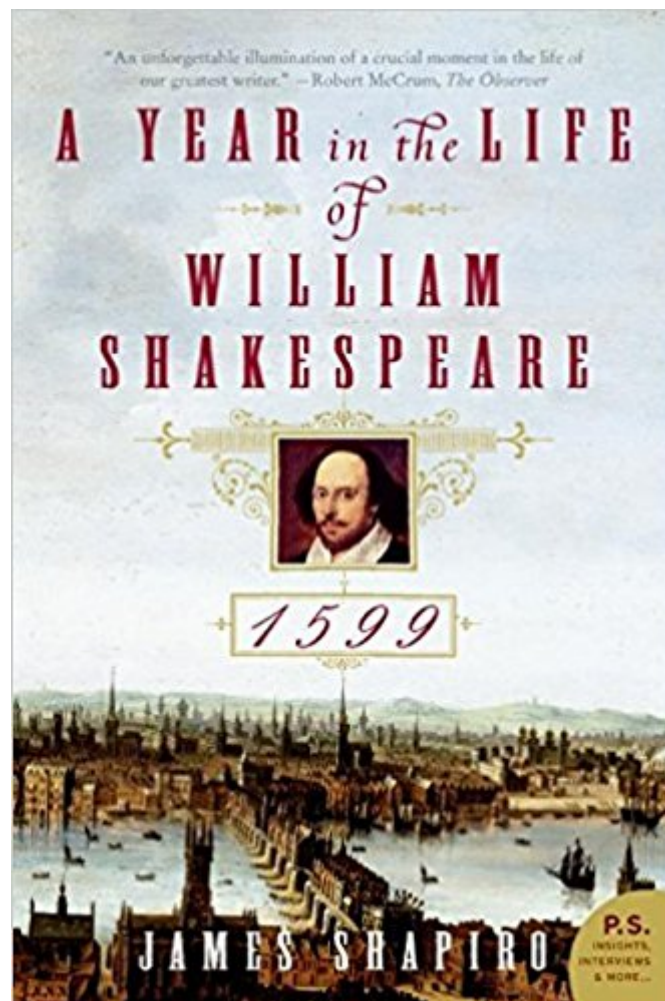




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A Year In The Life Of William Shakespeare: 1599



Synopsis

What accounts for Shakespeare's transformation from talented poet and playwright to one of the greatest writers who ever lived? In this gripping account, James Shapiro sets out to answer this question, "succeed[ing] where others have fallen short." (Boston Globe) 1599 was an epochal year for Shakespeare and England. During that year, Shakespeare wrote four of his most famous plays: Henry the Fifth, Julius Caesar, As You Like It, and, most remarkably, Hamlet; Elizabethans sent off an army to crush an Irish rebellion, weathered an Armada threat from Spain, gambled on a fledgling East India Company, and waited to see who would succeed their aging and childless queen. James Shapiro illuminates both Shakespeare's staggering achievement and what Elizabethans experienced in the course of 1599, bringing together the news and the intrigue of the times with a wonderful evocation of how Shakespeare worked as an actor, businessman, and playwright. The result is an exceptionally immediate and gripping account of an inspiring moment in history.

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Customer Reviews

The year 1599 was crucial in the Bard's artistic evolution as well as in the historical upheavals he lived through. That year's output—Henry V, Julius Caesar, As You Like It and (debatably) Hamlet—not only spans a shift in artistic direction and theatrical taste, but also echoes the intrigues of Queen Elizabeth's court and the downfall of her favorite, the Earl of Essex. Like other Shakespeare biographers, Columbia professor Shapiro notes the importance of mundane events in

Shakespeare's art, starting here with the construction of the Globe Theatre and the departure of Will Kemp, the company's popular comic actor. Having a stable venue and repertory gave Shakespeare the space to write and experiment during the turmoil created by Essex's unsuccessful military ventures in Ireland, a threatened invasion by a second Spanish Armada and, finally, Essex's disastrous return to court. Shapiro is in a minority in arguing for Shakespeare initially composing Hamlet at the same time Essex was plotting a coup; there's little textual or documentary evidence for that dating. Still, Shapiro's shrewd discussion of what is arguably Shakespeare's greatest play, particularly its multiple versions, rounds out this accessible yet erudite work. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

Instead of relying on the meagre evidence about Shakespeare's personal life, Shapiro's biography examines how public events left their mark on the four plays-"Henry V," "Julius Caesar," "As You Like It," and "Hamlet"-that Shakespeare wrote during 1599, the year in which the thirty-five-year-old playwright "went from being an exceptionally talented writer to one of the greatest who ever lived." The approach proves illuminating for the overtly political plays. Lines in "Henry V" allude to a rebellion in Ireland that Elizabeth I had recently sent the Earl of Essex to suppress. Chapters on "As You Like It" and "Hamlet" revert to more conventional textual analysis, interlarded with biographical speculations and digressions; for instance, Rosalind's journey to Arden may derive from Shakespeare's annual trip to Stratford to see his wife and daughters, and the "limbs with travel tired" of the twenty-seventh sonnet perhaps reflect the poor condition of English highways. Copyright © 2005 The New Yorker --This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

Shapiro's expansive discussion links historical events and Shakespeare's work during--and beyond--the critical year of 1599, the year of "Henry V" among other plays and the invasion of Ireland among other events. The work is scholarly but entirely accessible to the lay reader: Shapiro is a great storyteller with a keen sense of detail and atmosphere. At the same time, for Shakespeareans, Shapiro pushes the project of New Historicism in Shakespeare studies even beyond Greenblatt's "Will in the World."

An excellent history of a particular year of life in 16th Century England. It touches on the life of Shakespeare, his family's history, his writings and those of his contemporaries. A "must read" for all those interested in theater, poetry, history and society in Elizabethan England.

Informative, entertaining

A Year in the Life ... 1599, adds to the wonder of Shakespeare by detailing what was happening in his actual life, as he wrote in just that one year, HENRY V, JULIUS CAESAR, AS YOU LIKE IT and HAMLET! The book takes you on an awesome journey which I found enriching and amazing.

I purchased this book as a gift for my wife, who is English and very knowledgeable about Shakespeare. Her review: "Marathon scholarship indeed! Impressive but not for the weak of mind or faint-hearted. Cleopatra said it well, a propos this book: 'He words me'. "

This book takes me to London in 1599. The images are so well drawn I feel as I were there! It's a great review of history and superb commentary on the plays Shakespeare wrote that year. I will keep it and reread parts of it when I study the plays again.

An incredibly interesting book about all aspects of England, the Queen, political and religious affairs, and how they were reflected in Shakespeare's plays. A most engrossing book, excellent read and buy.

Finally Shakespeare is a welcoming friend and no longer a mysterious challenge beyond reach. So grateful to James Shapiro for his very readable introduction to this endless source of exceptional, magical words.

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