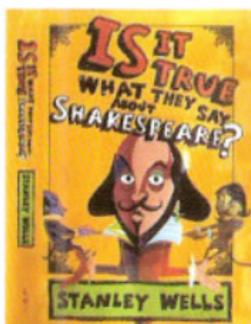


Book Review

Is It True What They Say About Shakespeare?

By Stanley Wells



Available from the Shakespeare Bookshop in Henley Street or online at www.shakespeare.org.uk/shopping priced £9.99

This is a clever idea. Stanley Wells has brought together 88 questions people ask about Shakespeare. There are 50 on his life (Was he gay? lame? Catholic?), 19 on his writings (Is *Macbeth* unlucky? Is his vocabulary large?), 10 on his Sonnets (Was there a Dark Lady?, Who is W H?), eight on the authorship question (Bacon? Oxford? Neville? anyone else?), and a final note on whether he was an ancestor of Princes William and Harry ('Sadly, no').

To each question, Wells gives us a succinct answer, usually in less than a page. He tells us where the idea came from, reviews the evidence, and reaches a verdict. The verdicts range from 'True' to 'Not true', with a host of intermediate judgements, such as 'Probably true', 'Perfectly possible', 'Unproven', 'Highly sceptical', 'Guesswork', 'Pure fiction', 'Nonsense', and 'Need you ask?' I don't think I disagreed with any of them.

The book ends with a handy summary of Shakespeare's life and some further reading. It has a jacket that any comic-book creator would be proud of, with colourful, quirky typography. Clearly it is reaching out to the mass of the population who have heard something of the myths and legends about Shakespeare, and who want a quick answer to the sort of question that turns up in conversation. I get them all the time. From now on, I shall tell questioners to read this book.

Reviewed by
David Crystal
Author of *Shakespeare's Words*