

Peter Ackroyd, famous for his bestselling biographies and television programs, has now turned his attention to Shakespeare, presenting not just a biography but, with characteristic self-confidence, *The Biography*.

This is a large, spacious book, with plenty of room in its 500 pages for speculation about Shakespeare’s appearance, the identities of the dark lady and the lovely boy of the sonnets (if indeed they existed beyond the poet’s imagination) and the roles Shakespeare might have taken in his own plays. The perennial mysteries of his life have been tackled with none of the melodrama of Michael Wood’s *In Search of Shakespeare*, recently repeated on ABC’s Sunday afternoons. Ackroyd’s Shakespeare is certainly a genius, but he is also a practical man and an astute businessman. This is a down-to-earth but riveting account of a real, working man of the theatre who just happens to be England’s greatest writer. Ackroyd puts the plays and poems in context without entertaining the romantic belief that everything in them arises from direct personal experience and that the life is straightforwardly reflected in the works. Reading the book made me hanker to see more live performances of the plays, which sadly have become rare events in Adelaide.