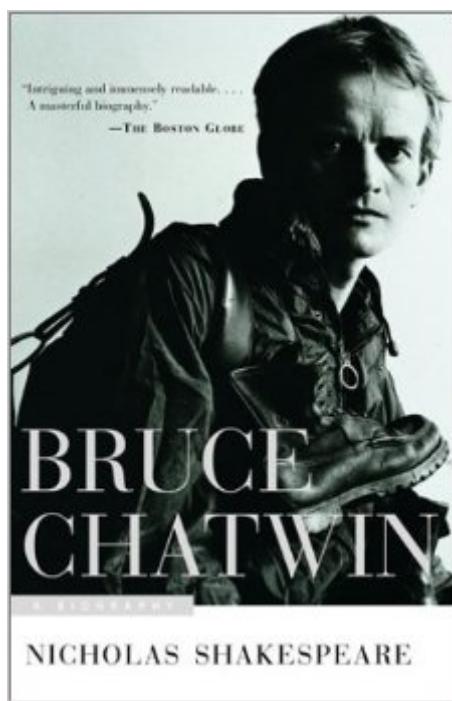


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Bruce Chatwin: A Biography



Synopsis

Award-winning novelist Nicholas Shakespeare has written the definitive biography of one of the most influential literary figures of our time: Bruce Chatwin, whose worksâ™ strangely compelling combination of research, first-hand experience, myth, and mystification may have been the real substance of his seemingly contradictory life. Chatwinâ™s first book, *In Patagonia*, became an international bestseller, revived the art of travel writing, and inspired a generation to set out in search of adventure. Chatwin became a celebrity, while remaining a conundrum. With little formal education, he had become a director of Sothebyâ™s. An avid collector, he eschewed material things and revered the nomadic life. Married for twenty-three years, he had male lovers throughout the world. And only at his death did his personal myth fail him. Nicholas Shakespeare, who was given unrestricted access to his papers, spent eight years retracing Chatwinâ™s steps and interviewing the people who knew him. The result is a biography that is at once sympathetic and revelatory.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It's hard to know if my reaction to this biography is due to the subject himself or is the fault of the biographer. Nicholas Shakespeare's "Bruce Chatwin" is long, well-researched, & has the full cooperation of Chatwin's family. Yet, all throughout the book, I never really got a sense of who Chatwin was, & why his family & friends (even casual acquaintances) viewed him so adoringly despite his cavalier treatment of them. Admittedly, this may be due to Chatwin himself. An ambiguous, intensely guarded man, it's hard to tell even from his writings such as "In Patagonia"

exactly what he thinks about a place or person. Personally although "The Songlines" is one of my favorite books, I never have cared for the other Chatwin's I have read ("In Patagonia", "On the Black Hill", "What Am I Doing Here"). Reading "Bruce Chatwin" has even made me lose some of my admiration for "The Songlines" as it turns out to be fiction, not the well-researched ethnological treatise I had believed it to be! However, this review should be of the biography, not the subject's writings, so among faults I found in Nicholas Shakespeare's "Bruce Chatwin" are:1)The author assumes knowledge the reader may not have; if a quote is in French he offers no translation. If discussing Malvert or Osip Mandelstam, no explanation of their work or significance is given.2)Although we are told Chatwin's wife Elizabeth was the instigator of this book & cooperated fully, her presence in the book is that of a shadowy background figure. Her feelings, reactions, methods of dealing with Chatwin's neglect of her, all are ignored or glossed over.

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