

The Shakespeare Stealer

By Gary Blackwood

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Widge is an orphan with a rare talent for shorthand. His fearsome master has just one demand: steal Shakespeare's play "Hamlet"--or else. Widge has no choice but to follow orders, so he works his way into the heart of the Globe Theatre, where Shakespeare's players perform. As full of twists and turns as a London alleyway, this entertaining novel is rich in period details, colorful characters, villainy, and drama."A fast-moving historical novel that introduces an important era with casual familiarity." --**School Library Journal**, starred review

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The Shakespeare Stealer By Gary Blackwood Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #8892 in Books
- Brand: Puffin
- Published on: 2000-07-01
- Released on: 2000-07-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.75" h x .57" w x 5.07" l, .37 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 216 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
This tale of a 14-year-old Yorkshire orphan sent by a rival theater manager to steal the as-yet-unpublished Hamlet in 1601 London "excels in the lively depictions of Elizabethan stagecraft and street life," wrote PW. Ages 10-14. (July)
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From School Library Journal
Grade 4-7AYoung Widge is an Elizabethan Oliver Twist with a talent for shorthand. Raised in an orphanage, he is apprenticed to an unprincipled clergyman who trains Widge to use a cryptic writing system that he's invented to pirate sermons from other rectors. Hired by a mysterious traveler, the boy is hauled off to London to attend performances of Hamlet in order to transcribe the script for another theater company. Naturally, all does not go smoothly, and in the course of trying to recover his stolen notebook, Widge goes to work at the Globe, eventually donning a dress and wig to play Ophelia before the queen. The true identity of the mysterious traveler provides a neat twist at the end. As in Wild Timothy (Atheneum, 1987; o.p.) and several of his other books, Blackwood puts a young boy in a sink-or-swim predicament in alien territory where he discovers his own strength. It's a formula with endless appeal. Not only must Widge survive physically, but he must also find his own ethical path having had no role models. When he is befriended by members of the acting company, he blossoms as he struggles with moral dilemmas that would never have dawned on him before. Tentative readers might be put off by Widge's Yorkshire dialect, but the words are explained in context. Wisely, much of the theater lingo is not explained and becomes just one more part of the vivid background through which the action moves. This is a fast-moving historical novel that introduces an important era with casual familiarity.ASally Margolis, Barton Public Library, VT
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From Kirkus Reviews
This latest from Blackwood (Beyond the Door, 1991) is a delightful and heartwarming romp through Elizabethan England. Narrator Widge, 14, resigned to leading the unremarkable life of an orphan, is bought by the self-serving Dr. Bright to learn his new ``charactery'' (shorthand), and become his secretary. Although Widge applies himself, Dr. Bright is nevertheless willing to sell the boy, for a mere ten pounds, to Simon Bass, a theatrical manager. He sends Widge to London, so that he can copy down the new play, The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, and enable Bass to perform it without paying royalties. Once within the confines of the Globe Theater, however, Widge discovers a brave new world of friendship, fun, and backstage intrigue. Welcomed into the company as an aspiring apprentice, Widge is soon learning lines, practicing sword-fighting, and avoiding Bass's henchman. The Bard himself makes a cameo appearance, as do other famous members of the company. To his credit, Blackwood limns just how Widge, who has no theatrical aspirations, proves a talented and hard-working member of the troupe. Readers will find much to like in Widge, and plenty to enjoy in this gleeful romp through olde England. (Fiction. 9-12) -- *Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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