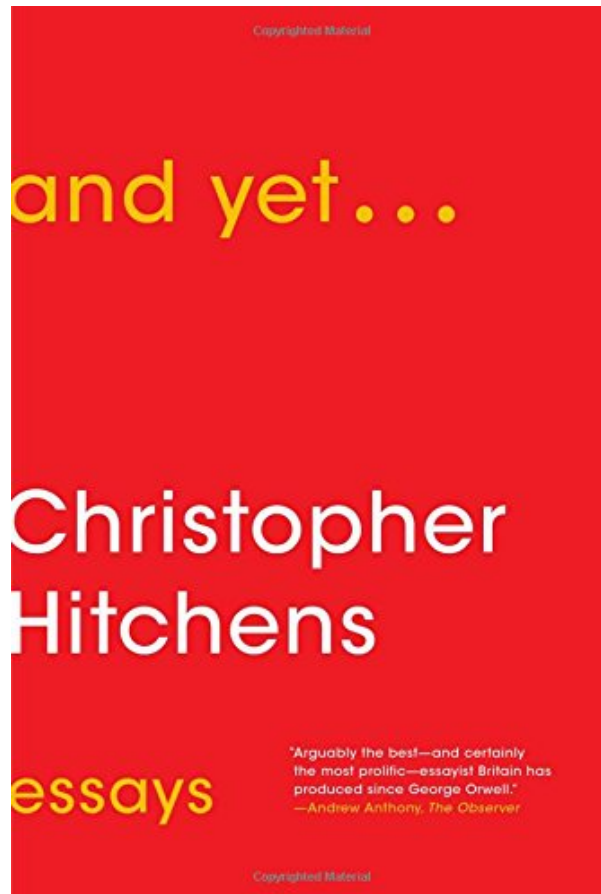


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and yet...

Christopher
Hitchens

essays

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“America’s foremost rhetorical pugilist.” —John Giuffo, *The Village Voice*

The death of Christopher Hitchens in December 2011 prematurely silenced a voice that was among the most admired of contemporary writers. For more than forty years, Hitchens delivered to numerous publications on both sides of the Atlantic essays that were astonishingly wide-ranging and provocative. The judges for the PEN/Diamonstein-Spielvogel Award for the Art of the Essay, posthumously bestowed on Hitchens, praised him for the way he wrote “with fervor about the books and writers he loved and with unbridled venom about ideas and political figures he loathed.” He could write, the judges went on to say, with “undisguised brio, mining the resources of the language as if alert to every possibility of color and inflection.” He was, as Benjamin Schwarz, his editor at *The Atlantic* magazine, recalled, “slashing and lively, biting and funny—and with a nuanced sensibility and a refined ear that he kept in tune with his encyclopedic knowledge and near photographic memory of English poetry.” And as Michael Dirda, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement*, observed, Hitchens “was a flail and a scourge, but also a gift to readers everywhere.”

The author of five previous volumes of selected writings, including the international bestseller *Arguably*, Hitchens left at his death nearly 250,000 words of essays not yet published in book form. *And Yet...* assembles a selection that usefully adds to Hitchens’s oeuvre. It ranges from the literary to the political and is, by turns, a banquet of entertaining and instructive delights, including essays on Orwell, Lermontov, Chesterton, Fleming, Naipaul, Rushdie, Pamuk, and Dickens, among others, as well as his laugh-out-loud self-mocking “makeover.” The range and quality of Hitchens’s essays transcend the particular occasions for which they were originally written. Often prescient, always pugnacious, and formidably learned, Hitchens was a polemicist for the ages. With this posthumous volume, his reputation and his readers will continue to grow.

Christopher Hitchens was the cartographer of his own literary and political explorations. He sought assiduously to affirm—and to reaffirm—the ideas of secularism, reason, libertarianism, internationalism, and solidarity, values always under siege and ever in need of defending. Henry James once remarked, “Nothing is my last word on anything.” For Hitchens, as for James, there was always more to be said.

- Sales Rank: #127792 in Books
- Published on: 2015-11-24
- Released on: 2015-11-24
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x 1.10" w x 6.25" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 352 pages

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Most helpful customer reviews

32 of 33 people found the following review helpful.

Nearly 250,000 posthumously published words of sardonic sagacity

By Bookreporter

It would be nearly impossible to read in English without at some point coming across an article or quotation by Christopher Hitchens, an American transplanted from England whose life spanned several critical phases in modern history. Hitchens was born for the role of social critic, but so much more --- acerbic yet kind at times, strict yet also forgiving. He suffered fools gladly, as grist for his mill, and the landscape of his writing is littered with fiery phrases like luminous gems. He was a professor, columnist, critic, essayist, editor and award-winning author (*HITCH-22*, *ARGUABLY*). *AND YET...* is a posthumous collection drawn from the nearly 250,000 words of sardonic sagacity he left behind.

Hitchens was an iconoclast who happily toppled all idols, from Charles Dickens to Hillary Clinton to James Bond to V. S. Naipaul to Christmas. But not always without heart. He can, for example, cite Dickens' limitations --- his contemptuous anti-Americanism, his annoying gift-card-ization of Christmas --- while

lauding his little-known largesse: Dickens revamped Fagin in OLIVER TWIST and later created a kind, helpful Jewish moneylender (Mr. Riah in OUR MUTUAL FRIEND) after receiving an anguished plea from a Jewish lady concerned with the biased characterization of her people.

In 2009, Hitchens damned the newly elected President Obama with faint praise, calling him a “cool cat” who “treads so lightly...that all impressions he has so far made are alarmingly slight.” He gleefully reported Hillary Clinton’s meeting with Sir Edmund Hillary, at which she recklessly declared that “her mother had actually named her for this famous and intrepid explorer.” Hitchens was pleased to retort that Clinton was born in 1947, six years before Sir Edmund gained worldwide acclaim for his ascent of Mt. Everest.

Hitchens denigrates the American mania for Christmas with a barrage of verbal potshots --- “obligatory generosity,” “deadening routine,” “angels and menorahs on the White House lawn” --- reminding us that our Puritans banned such blasphemies as burning logs and lit-up trees. He handles the subject with his usual articulate waggishness, making us smile a bit at ourselves. His detractors might point to the root cause of his Scrooge-like disdain for our favorite holiday: Hitchens was what he liked to call an “antitheist,” firmly convinced that the big three religions were responsible for most of the ills of the world.

But Hitchens is quite able to mock himself, as here in a three-part essay, “On the Limits of Self-Improvement,” describing his attempts to look and feel younger: seminars, dieting, smoking cessation, dentistry and the magic of photoshopping. He concludes that his smile is “no longer frightening to children,” and his hair and skin no longer look “as if harvested from a battlefield cadaver.”

Since essays are brief by nature, one must draw conclusions about the man himself from the broader evidence this collection presents. Though the world has seen the last of Hitchens in the flesh, his words live on --- and, one suspects, we have not read the last of them.

Reviewed by Barbara Bamberger Scott

60 of 72 people found the following review helpful.

Sort of Like God, This Is Not Great

By Pop Bop

This is a fairly interesting, but not particularly satisfying, collection for the reader who is already a Hitchens fan. Some bits and pieces highlight why Hitchens was an important and unpredictable voice, but the rest display the weaknesses that dogged his less inspired efforts. And much of it is rather predictable.

I enjoyed his thoughts about Thanksgiving as the most inclusive and welcoming of American holidays; it had a spark of honest feeling and a generous spirit. The Christmas bashing has its moments, but covers familiar ground. We get a generous and thoughtful treatment of Che, but then an almost fawning piece about Oriana Fallaci that fits right into that period when every serious journalist or public intellectual was required to write a worshipful piece about her.

And so it goes. Hillary bashing, obscure political observations, some Orwell, Edmund Wilson - the usual suspects. There's an odd set of pieces about aging and self-improvement that is almost literally about navel gazing.

I think the bottom line for me was this - if you admired and enjoyed Hitchens' work, and miss him, and wish he were here right now to ponder current events, this book will appeal. If you are a completest fan, this book will definitely appeal. If you are new to Hitchens, this collection might lead you to wonder what all the fuss was about. If you want a "Greatest Hits" collection, this may feel more like outtakes and lost tracks.

(Please note that I received a free advance copy of this book in exchange for a candid review. Apart from that I have no connection at all to either the author or the publisher of this book.)

19 of 22 people found the following review helpful.

These essays are a great introduction to Hitchens if you've never read his writing ...

By Peadar

I was very excited when this volume arrived today. It's a collection of essays which have not appeared in book form, but have appeared in the various columns Hitchens had over the years.

I have every book he penned, so getting my hands on this book was an obvious provision.

These essays are a great introduction to Hitchens if you've never read his writing before. It's a much easier read than some of his other collections (Arguably, Love Poverty & War).

I got through it in a couple of hours. Well worth reading.

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