



Hitch 22: A Memoir

Christopher Hitchens

Download now

Read Online ➔

Hitch 22: A Memoir

Christopher Hitchens

Hitch 22: A Memoir Christopher Hitchens

Over the course of his 60 years, Christopher Hitchens has been a citizen of both the United States and the United Kingdom. He has been both a socialist opposed to the war in Vietnam and a supporter of the U.S. war against Islamic extremism in Iraq. He has been both a foreign correspondent in some of the world's most dangerous places and a legendary bon vivant with an unquenchable thirst for alcohol and literature. He is a fervent atheist, raised as a Christian, by a mother whose Jewish heritage was not revealed to him until her suicide.

In other words, Christopher Hitchens contains multitudes. He sees all sides of an argument. And he believes the personal is political.

This is the story of his life, lived large.

Hitch 22: A Memoir Details

Date : Published 2010 by Twelve

ISBN : 9780446540339

Author : Christopher Hitchens

Format : Hardcover 435 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Biography, Autobiography, Memoir, Politics

 [Download Hitch 22: A Memoir ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Hitch 22: A Memoir ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Hitch 22: A Memoir Christopher Hitchens

From Reader Review Hitch 22: A Memoir for online ebook

A.J. Howard says

The first time I read Christopher Hitchens I thought he was completely full of shit. I don't remember the exact specifics, but I have a decent enough recall of the circumstances. My metaphorical cherry was popped by his "Fighting Words" column on Slate, and I can all but guarantee that that the topic was Iraq. This must have been at some point in the months immediately following the invasion, after the initial toppling-of-statues glow of liberation was beginning to wain. Since I had never read Hitchens before, I didn't know his backstory,* in fact, I assumed that he was a Republican ideologue. Actually, since the tone of his Iraq articles displayed such a venom to the anti-war left, which I considered myself a member of, a rather ardent Republican ideologue.

Of course, as I continued to read his weekly article, I would eventually learn the whole story**. But let me stop there to point out what was (and is) so remarkable about Hitchens writing. I loathed every sentiment he expressed in my initial encounter, but I felt compelled to come back each Monday for my weekly appointment. When he wrote about Iraq, I felt like I was doing spar work with a great boxer. My thoughts and opinions became more precise and well-worked, and eventually, much more nuanced. And there was always at least one wicked putdown or a witty aside that never failed to produce a snicker, if not a full belly laugh. I was hooked.

Depending on what I'm doing and what state of mind I'm in, my inner monologue can probably be described as a pale imitation of some varying combination of the writings of Hunter S. Thompson, David Foster Wallace, and Christopher Hitchens. In the past ten years, I've probably read more words written by Hitchens than any other writer. I believe one of the reasons Hitchens attracted so many devotees was his writing at its best simulates the kind of conversations we would like to have more often. He seemed to know more than a little about every topic under the sun, and he would always have an appropriate anecdote or personal remembrance to add to the discussion. The effect, after years of reading, allowed fans to feel as if Hitchens was an old friend. I think that feeling was behind a lot of the reaction to his death last month. It seemed more than just the usual 15 seconds of requiem for a public figure these days. It seemed like there were more than a few people who were genuinely affected. Speaking for myself, the last "celebrity" death that left me in such a state of melancholy was in 2001 when George Harrison died.

I was somewhat reluctant Hitchens' memoirs so soon after his death. Sure, I had bought a copy the day it came out (I had pre-ordered it, then forgot about it) and was planning on reading it in the very near future. But doing so then somewhat reeked of a kind of gross sentimentality that I find a little silly and that Hitchens would have probably loathed. Nevertheless, I took the risk of being made to look like one of those MJ fans who still tear up when the "She's Out of My Life" comes on, and plunged in and I'm glad I did.

I very much enjoyed *god Is Not Great*, but this book is probably the quintessential work expressing Hitchens' work and beliefs. First, a quick aside. I think some people may be turned off by Hitchens' reputation as the militant atheist who never passed up a chance to ridicule organized religion and went on Hannity and Colmes to say he was glad Jerry Falwell is dead. While this was definitely an important part of Hitchens work, it was far from his only trick. *Hitch-22* truly exhibits that Hitchens was a multi-tool writer. My personal favorite Hitchens writings are when he writes about authors and literature.

I don't have a lot to say about the book itself. It starts as a fairly conventional memoir, giving an account of his boyhood up to his Oxford years. After that, it becomes more episodic, which each chapter being devoted

to a particular topic or range of topics. Of course with Hitchens you never stay focused on one topic for too long. The man could pull off an aside written in another aside written in a book recommendation*** written in an amusing anecdote featuring Martin Amis. Hitchens seems to have read everything, travelled everywhere, pissed all the wrong (or right) people off, and been friends with exclusively fascinating people. *Hitch-22* is, without a doubt, the best tribute to his life, and maybe more importantly, the body of work he leaves behind.

*Hitchens is one of those writers where knowing a little bit of context greatly enhances the reading experience. It would almost be worthwhile preambling each essay with a short italicized blurb, something like "Previously in Hitchen..." Of course this context is absolutely nonessential to enjoying the original material, but one of the great things about this memoir is that it makes me look forward to revisiting past favorite articles with somewhat fresh eyes.

**His chapter here on his late rightward turn is one of the highlights of the book, as well as one of the more thoughtful pieces on the decision to invade Iraq I have encountered.

*** You might want to keep a tap opened to Amazon while reading this. My non-fiction wish list grew by a few pages over the last week.

Mark Desrosiers says

Let's be honest here: this glowering Trotskyist sounded and looked convincing during the War on Terror, but I couldn't help but think he was the wettest sprocket-toady around. I used to love him, don't get me wrong: his public eviscerations of Mother Theresa, Henry Kissinger, and Bill Clinton made him the ballsiest of the rads, a ham-hock in our lefty cornflakes. But then 9/11 happened, and why was Hitch suddenly hanging out with lizards like Michael Chertoff and Paul Wolfowitz, while publicly burning bridges with Noam Chomsky and Edward Said? Hoover Institute fellow, WTF? Was all that Johnnie Walker turning him into a gadfly replica of Kingsley Amis, boozy reactionary dad of his BFF Martin?

Well no, and all is explained, or explained away, here. This memoir is damn good, even great -- obviously influenced by the chatty name-dropping style of Gore Vidal (whose recurring "dauphin" blurb is finally crossed out by Hitch on the back cover). And, of course, he out-Gores Gore by adding some gossip about Vidal's own sexual tastes that hadn't occurred even to me. Still, it's a gripping, witty hill-climb through the charmed life of our weirdest public intellectual. I quite enjoyed it, and I still like him, despite his defection to the world of reptiles.

He does give us an insight into his ideological reversals, because all these charred, collapsed bridges and strange new neocon friends force him to: Hitchens has an absolute, damn near unconditional love for America, our Constitution, what we "stand for", what we represent in the world. This makes sense to me, and it illuminates his quarrel with Noam Chomsky, who is very cynical about America. But this is the thing: sure he loves America, but nothing in this memoir shows an interest in America's internal politics. The situation in Wisconsin now, for example, likely falls well under his radar... he only gives a shit, and doubts his strict red-Marxist ideology, when America is an international actor.

And that's why I read this book through wet eyes sometimes. His mother's bizarre suicide, his meeting with that repugnant Jorge Rafael Videla, wondering if such a free-ranging patriotic intellect was ever on "our"

side, the side of blue-collar Americans. (He comes close during a vivid "postscript" about the death of Mark Jennings Daily, whose decision to serve in Iraq was inspired by Hitch's writings: "I don't remember ever feeling, in every allowable sense of the word, quite so hollow," he says upon encountering one of his quotes on Daily's MySpace.) But mostly I laughed, and winced, and figured Hitchens may be ideologically wrongheaded, and oddly obsessed with his recently discovered Jewish ethnicity, but at least he's got the atheism angle covered for posterity. And hell he might turn out to be a national treasure. Plus, he still hangs a ring of garlic round his neck while reading his brother Peter.

Ana says

Will there ever be a time when I review a book of Hitchens' as a horrible piece of literature, or even a mediocre one, or even at middle-class level? Never say never, but I publicly reserve my doubts. By this point in my journey through his writing, he frightens me. It should be impossible for one to be so cunning, so witty, so ironic, so intelligent, so cultured and so literate, all in the same approx. 2 pound mammal brain that most of us share. But, alas, here comes this giant of public intellectualism, showing us all how it should be done.

In his memoir, brilliantly named as it is, Hitchens takes the reader through the highs and lows of his life, through the thick and thin. However much he seems to be a self-centered ass (which I, not even secretly, love to bits about men who can back it up), this book is ... weirdly... not about him as much as it is about others: the people he met, the characters that influenced him, the ones who fought bravely, the ones who were cowards. He has put into words what made him who he is, and I find that to be a very great achievement, in and by itself.

Give the chance, I encourage everyone to give this book ago. In fact, make this the first book you read by him; a lot of people might need an introduction to why he is who he is, and then work backwards through his religious and political essays, in order to accept his demanding tone and his cockiness.

Honestly, I aspire to be this man. I aspire to have had such a hand at creating the world, I aspire to understand how much he did about it. He would absolutely loathe my idolatry, however much he'd love the compliments, but I can't stop believing that this what a humanist should be like.

Mag says

Hitch -22, some confessions and contradictions, is an apt title for this book. Even though it starts like a regular autobiography and goes on to be one in the end, it's not linear and complete. There isn't so much of Hitchens private life there. Most of it deals with his political and social views: his convictions and reflections on democracy, totalitarianism, terrorism and religion and an explanation of his changing political views. There are great bits on his friends: Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie and Susan Sontag, and general comments on politics and political figures of our times. Most of it is excellent. There were just a couple of chapters towards the beginning that bore me since I didn't have a good reference to British politics of the sixties and early seventies. It definitely picked up as we entered the eighties. I liked his opinionated style and how he made a great argument for literature and stated, with as much authority and conviction as usual, that literature was a much better source of moral education than religion. I happen to agree with him on that...

Hadrian says

A brilliant memoir, with acidic wit and an encyclopedic description of everything. I am reminded slightly of Mencken, who had such a brilliant and acerbic way with words, and whose slight arrogance can be justified with their linguistic brilliance.

Bettie? says

Description: #1 "New York Times" bestselling author and finalist for the National Book Award -- one of the most admired and controversial public intellectuals of our time -- shares his personal life story.

Most who have observed Christopher Hitchens over the years would agree that he possesses a ferocious intellect and is unafraid to tackle the most contentious subjects. Now 60, English-born and American by adoption; all atheist and partly Jewish; bohemian (even listing "drinking" along with "disputation" as "hobbies" in "Who's Who"), he has held to a consistent thread of principle whether opposing war in Vietnam or supporting intervention in Iraq. As a foreign correspondent in some of the world's nastiest places, a lecturer and teacher and an esteemed literary critic, Hitchens manifests a style that is at once ironic, witty, and tough-minded. A legendary bon vivant with an unquenchable thirst for literature, he has sometimes ridiculed those who claim that the personal is political, though he has often seemed to illustrate that very idea. Readers will find that his own many opposites attract, as do his many sketches of friendship and ex-friendship, from Martin Amis to Noam Chomsky. Condemned to be able to see both sides of any argument, Christopher Hitchens has contradictions that contain their own multitudes.

Both Clive James and Christopher Hitchens are helping me maintain the headology required to battle through chemo, so whilst I mark this as read, cherry-picking re-read chapters is the way forward.

Todd N says

Who is the man who would risk his neck for a brother man? Hitch!
He's a complicated man and no one understands him but his mama. Chris Hitch!
Hitch is a bad mother--Shut your mouth!

All right, enough of that. This is an amazing book that I want everyone to read. To get an idea of how great it is -- finding out the identity of Deep Throat when it was still a closely guarded secret only merits a footnote in this massive memoir.

I picked it up because it was recommended to me by a lot of people. Usually when people say I would love something it's a clear sign that I will hate it. One small example: The next person who recommends Curb Your Enthusiasm to me will get stabbed in the eye. But this set of recommenders was diverse enough to intrigue me.

My vague impression of Mr. Hitchens before starting the book was that he is a bully. A bully for our side, but still a bully. After understanding his background a bit better I am a lot more sympathetic -- a mother who was such a striver and with such class consciousness that she hid her Jewish background, a father who was

involved in a decisive naval battle in WWII and then tossed aside by the Royal Navy and the Tory government that he was so loyal to, and of course the routine, institutionalized child abuse of the English school system.

Maybe he never tried his hand at fiction because he could never come up with a character as wonderfully complex as Christopher Hitchens. He straight up admits that he kept "two sets of books," by protesting with the International Socialists during the day and dining with the Establishment in the evening. He also admits that he disliked Bill Clinton, who was around Oxford at the same time, for doing the same thing he was doing. (We also learn that everyone knew Bill preferred his pot baked in brownies. Of course he didn't inhale.)

But keep in mind that you will get the Christopher Hitchens that he wants you to see. We hear plenty about his homosexual activity in boarding school and next to nothing about his two wives. When he wishes he was a better father to his kids I barely remembered that he had a family.

Reading about his literary friendships and extended circle was my favorite part. I read about the Friday lunches and postprandial word games with more than a little jealousy. Sadly, such banter is not occurring on the soccer fields or cub scout meetings of Palo Alto. My few feeble attempts to get something going at dinner parties generally results in my wife apologizing to someone later. And this is after I stopped drinking.

The mystery of the book is how our lefty Socialist pinko homo winds up being a stout supporter of the Iraq invasion with Paul Wolfowitz on speed dial. From my reading there were two steps -- First the fatwa on his buddy Salman Rushdie and his disappointment in the reaction of the left, and second 9/11 and his disappointment in the reaction of the left.

The chapters on Salman Rushdie and the fatwa were the most interesting. You can feel Hitch's raw sense of betrayal at the hypocritical reaction of many of his friends and people who were (in my opinion too) ready to ditch their Humanist values for fear of offending a totalitarian theocracy. I had forgotten that several translators for *The Satanic Verses* were attacked and one killed.

Reading what Salman went through from a post-9/11 perspective is very enlightening, and I recommend everyone at least read that section of the book. Hitch ends with some fancy but very apropos Latin: *Mutato nomine et de te fabula narratur*. (Change only the name and this story is about you.)

I haven't even touched on his mom's suicide, his atheist convictions, and some great travel stories, including receiving a beating on the streets of Beirut in his 50s. It's a great, messy, awesome book.

This is a perfect book to read on the Kindle. I jumped between my Kindle2, iPad, and iPhone while reading this book. I think my vocabulary is pretty good, mostly from working my way through Mencken in my 20s, but I had to look up a word on every other page. I wouldn't have bothered looking these up on a dead-tree book. Also the Whispersync was necessary for jumping between different devices. However, I made the fatal mistake of paging forward on a footnote page and Whispersync kept trying to sync my devices to the end of the book. I had to use bookmarks to workaround this problem.

E says

In March 2010, Rabbi David Wolpe debated Hitchens on the topic of (what else?) religion and eventually

sputtered, "Don't interrupt me! I didn't interrupt you."

Hitchens smiled. "No, you weren't quick enough."

If that sort of delicious irony makes you swoon, you'll likely adore Hitchens' memoir. If that sort of disrespectful self-regard makes you seethe, you're unlikely to enjoy less than one page of it. I find myself in the middle, possibly the one and only Person On Earth Who Feels Moderately About Christopher Hitchens.

I adore him for his wit and his relentless expounding on the value of dissidence. But I've known many a dissident who's half in it for the ego boost, and Hitchens has yet to convince me he's not one of them. He openly admits to being a Trotskyist who cannot divorce himself from the joys of the gentleman's lifestyle (books, booze and name-dropping). At times I find myself enamored of the intricacies of such a union, and other times enraged by the inherent contradictions.

He could be a little less Eurocentric in his predilections. And his insistence that work trumps experience either ignores or defends the short-sighted arrogance of many intellectuals. But his passion for a life spent arguing oneself an identity is absolutely infectious. I do hope he's around long enough to offer us more of his thoughts.

Koen Crolla says

I bought this book hoping to find out what leads a Marxist to adopt some of the more sociopathic stances of the American far right (or what leads an extremist wingnut to call himself a Marxist), and the answer is disappointing: there is absolutely nothing of substance behind the façade of pretentious vocabulary and pompous prose, and Hitchens' positions on basically anything (certainly politics, religion, and his bizarrely naïve infatuation with the US) are entirely determined by reactionary opposition to people in his life by whom he feels threatened (his father, his schoolteachers, his brother, &c.). There are no rational arguments here, just base — I would say ``cynical'', but I don't think he reaches that level of self-awareness — emotionalism clad in endless rhetoric, and if he comes to a right conclusion on anything, it is only through sheer chance. Hitchens has lived a life steeped in history and surrounded by some of the most influential people of the past century (which he certainly won't let you forget), but he hasn't managed to draw even a single significant insight or life lesson from any of it.

I don't intend to waste many more words on it, but even apart from that, *Hitch-22* is the sort of childishly self-aggrandising historical revisionism that demonstrates exactly why I don't read autobiographies. Hitchens is a viciously petty, preening tosspot and a self-righteous hypocrite.

Petra X says

Update: Look what I just found! A story in the NYPost about my little anecdote. I like he went out with the lesbian girlfriend of my friend. I don't think he ever knew the truth about Bill and inhaling. He just guessed.

Ok, I've pussyfooted around this long enough with teasing comments. Tell-all time.

Hitchens states that Clinton's famous statement on him not inhaling was correct. That he knew him at Oxford and that Clinton was allergic to smoke. This isn't true. I know by evidence of my own eyes and testimony from a rather involved participant that Clinton smoked huge joints and looked very happy about doing so! This has somewhat destroyed Hitchens' credibility although maybe increased the enjoyability of the book as I see if I can find any more 'errors'.

Hitchens, however, does mention Clinton's lesbian girlfriends, and this bit I know to be absolutely true. "Girlfriends" in the plural is correct, but they weren't all lesbians, some were bisexual, at least the ones I knew about.

This is how I know. There is a Guardian journalist who used to rent my flat in London, a very nice lady, very concerned and very left wing (aren't they all at the Grauniad*). Towards the end of Clinton's first term in office she showed me a photograph of the Pres in his Rhodes Scholarship days in bed naked with a huge joint in his mouth and his arms around two naked girls. One of the two girls was the journalist's much older lesbian lover :-) Yes he did inhale. He smoked for the same reason a lot of us like a puff at romantic times, really rather enhances it.

I said to her that she just **had** to get the photograph out there, that she would be able to retire on the proceeds, or be famous, or both. But no, she wouldn't. She said she didn't want to hurt him politically. I said that an awful lot of the youth of America don't bother voting and if they saw Bill living the Boy's Own dream - a scholarship to Oxford, in bed with two stunningly beautiful women, one of whom at least was a lezzie, smoking a big joint, they would rush to vote back in a president who they could at least relate to!

But she didn't. And I was probably wrong. Too many right wing fundamentalist killjoys in the US. But still I did see the pic and the journalist is going strong, an author now and the photo is still insurance money for her old age.

The book - oh, it's very good. Not as good as Hitchens' *Arguably: Selected Essays* but still an excellent read. He had a very interesting childhood and flitted around with his sexuality somewhat, the dalliances of which he obviously enjoyed recalling. He also found out that he was Jewish (a fact his mother had never mentioned) but it didn't temper his extremely left-wing atheism nor his also-famous brother Peter's very traditional right-wing Christianity.

As a strongly individualist intellectual, Hitchens never compromised and as a man with brilliant communication skills, he left a very interesting autobiography of his life and times. Recommended to everyone who is a bit of an iconoclast and enjoys cheering on others of that ilk.

**not a spelling mistake, the Guardian's nickname as its typos were the worst of all the newspapers*

Paul Bryant says

Stupidity and cruelty in high places can sleep a little easier now that Christopher Hitchens has gone. He was not so much a writer as a presence. He raised contempt to the level of high art. I may not have agreed with a whole lot of what he said but it gladdened the heart that he said it at all, and inspired the mind in the way that he said it. Complex sentences seemed to appear fully formed in his brain as he spoke. It was almost

frightening. In the end he showed us how the good atheist dies. The only mitigation I find for him dying at such a paltry age, a less than generous helping, is that in his 62 years he drank more, talked more, argued more, thought more, shagged more, wrote more, disbelieved more, celebrated more and inspired more than other people would have done with twice the time. He appeared not to be scared of anything. If we have to have egomaniacs, he was the best kind.

Nigeyb says

I came to this memoir fairly ignorant about Christopher Hitchens. I decided to listen to it having seen it as an Audible deal of the day offer. I'm very glad I did, and would recommend it to anyone with an interest in recent history, politics, and literature, and this despite finding some sections far more interesting than others.

In 2009 Hitchens was surprised to see the caption "the late Christopher Hitchens" beneath a photo of him. This reminder of his mortality inspired him to write this memoir. He died just two years later, rendering that inaccurate caption very fortuitous.

Christopher Hitchens was a thoughtful, intelligent and erudite commentator who rubbed shoulders with numerous interesting people and lived through changing times, and so this book has plenty of provocative opinions and revealing stories.

Kinga says

I first heard of Hitchens on the day of his death – in my defence I was still quite new to the UK and was just getting familiar with the intellectual life here (insert a self-mocking chuckle here). What I managed to gather from the news that day was that he was UK's no. 1 atheist, so that immediately put him on my radar and when I bought a Kindle this was the first book I bought for it (it was also a Kindle Daily Deal). It was an updated edition which included a heart-felt introduction Hitchens wrote when he already knew he was dying.

"When I first formed the idea of writing some memoirs, I had the customary reservations about the whole conception being perhaps "too soon." Nothing dissolves this fusion of false modesty and natural reticence more swiftly than the blunt realization that the project could become, at any moment, ruled out of the question as having been undertaken too "late.""

Of course, he also emphasises that coming to terms with his mortality did not make him find Jesus, contrary to what many religious people predicted would happen. Personally, I find it quite offensive when people imply I will 'start believing' in God once I find myself in a very difficult situation or discover I have cancer. It also speaks rather poorly of the foundation of their faith.

So, Hitchens, eh? What a guy.

Before we talk in more detail about him, let's just get one thing out the way – Hitchens was a sexist. Maybe not a militant misogynist, but most certainly sexist. The world he presents in his memoir is a world almost completely devoid of women. We will only find an idealised portrait of his glamourous mother and some paragraphs praising Susan Sontag. Other than that, it's a man's, man's world. There are influencers, thinkers, friends, gay-lovers, enemies – all described in painstaking detail, sometimes mind-numbing details (like here-is-the-first-time-I-saw-Martin-Amis and here-are-the-first-words-Martin-Amis-said-to-me) and they all

have dicks. If there is a passing mention of a woman editor or someone it is always accompanied by a qualifying adjective referring to her looks. His first wife is nowhere to be found in this book, his second wife lurks in the margins. One might hope it was done to protect her privacy but during one interview Hitchens, when asked who Carol was, couldn't really say anything other than that she was his wife (and seemingly that was her only life accomplishment).

His bromance with Martin Amis gets a lot of air time here. Hitchens even goes on describing various word-games he played with him and his other pals – they basically consisted of replacing various words in book or movie titles with expletives, something I'm sure his 11 year old readers will find very amusing. These bits are very self indulgent, but on the other hand, if there is one work where a certain self-indulgence is permitted it must be one's memoir. The same goes for all the inane name dropping (or 'carpet bombing' as one reviewer described it). Hitchens had seemingly endless caches of 'dear friends' and all were absolutely best at what they did. For example, he insists that his best mate Amis is a linguistic genius but the examples to back it up are of this sort: Amis called some men at a black tie event 'tuxed fucks'. I spent a good part of a day wondering if there was some super clever pun there I missed but sometimes Hitchens' sense of humour is just very juvenile.

I have asked many people what they thought of Hitchens and discovered that he was both disliked and respected by both the left and right. A worthy achievement, for here is a man who didn't just adopt a certain political stance and accepted it with benefit of inventory. He cherry-picked according to his own moral code and thus made enemies everywhere he went. You might disagree with some of his views (it would be unlikely for you to disagree with ALL of his views) but such a political courage must be admired (even if his dogmatism, absolute lack of any self-doubt and occasional pettiness might infuriate).

In his own words:

"I am often described to my irritation as a "contrarian" and even had the title inflicted on me by the publisher of one of my early books. (At least on that occasion I lived up to the title by ridiculing the word in my introduction to the book's first chapter.) It is actually a pity that our culture doesn't have a good vernacular word for an oppositionist or even for someone who tries to do his own thinking: the word "dissident" can't be self-conferred because it is really a title of honor that has to be won or earned, while terms like "gadfly" or "maverick" are somehow trivial and condescending as well as over-full of self-regard. And I've lost count of the number of memoirs by old comrades or ex-comrades that have titles like "Against the Stream," "Against the Current," "Minority of One," "Breaking Ranks" and so forth — all of them lending point to Harold Rosenberg's withering remark about "the herd of independent minds." Even when I was quite young I disliked being called a "rebel": it seemed to make the patronizing suggestion that "questioning authority" was part of a "phase" through which I would naturally go. On the contrary, I was a relatively well-behaved and well-mannered boy, and chose my battles with some deliberation rather than just thinking with my hormones."

All that aside, Hitchens is an intellectual of the kind that we don't often see in public life anymore (lamentably). Despite his sexism and some of his views, I will happily admit that I am insanely jealous of his erudition. When I grow up, I will be an intellectual too. His prose is marvellous – try as I might, I couldn't find any fault in it. In fact, it was just so full of quotables that despite my previously mentioned reservations, I enjoyed myself tremendously reading this book. Here are some of his clever soundbites.

On religion:

"But since then I have had every chance to become sickened by the very idea of "martyrdom." The same monotheistic religions that condemn suicide by individuals have a tendency to exalt and overpraise self-

destruction by those who kill themselves (and others) with a hymn or a prayer on their lips.”

“When the late Pope John Paul II decided to place the woman so strangely known as “Mother” Teresa on the fast track for beatification, and thus to qualify her for eventual sainthood, the Vatican felt obliged to solicit my testimony and I thus spent several hours in a closed hearing room with a priest, a deacon, and a monsignor, no doubt making their day as I told off, as from a rosary, the frightful faults and crimes of the departed fanatic. In the course of this, I discovered that the pope during his tenure had surreptitiously abolished the famous office of “Devil’s Advocate,” in order to fast-track still more of his many candidates for canonization. I can thus claim to be the only living person to have represented the Devil pro bono.”

On the very British phenomenon of the boarding school experience:

“The great J.G. Ballard, who had had the reverse of the Ian Watt experience in that he’d been interned by the Japanese (Empire of the Sun) as a small boy, before being sent to the same house in the same boarding school as me, once did jokingly say that the food at The Leys was inferior to the Lunghua camp in Shanghai, but was later to admit that he’d been agreeably surprised by how comparatively little torture there had been.”

On nationalism:

“I have often noticed that nationalism is at its strongest at the periphery. Hitler was Austrian, Bonaparte Corsican. In postwar Greece and Turkey the two most prominent ultra-right nationalists had both been born in Cyprus. The most extreme Irish Republicans are in Belfast and Derry (and Boston and New York). Sun Yat Sen, father of Chinese nationalism, was from Hong Kong. The Serbian extremists Miloševi and Karadži were from Montenegro and their most incendiary Croat counterparts in the Ustashe tended to hail from the frontier lands of Western Herzegovina. Falklands nationalism was too mild to stand comparison with any of these toxic movements, but the loyalist atmosphere on the lawn that night, with a Navy band playing and ancient settler families inquiring after one another’s descendants, was of an unquestioning and profound and rooted kind that one almost never encountered in the rest of a declining and anxious Britain. It was a bit much even for Commander Hitchens, who privately thought the islands slightly absurd and probably undefendable. When the time came when his old Royal Navy was sinking and shattering the Argentine fleet, the cadet school of which was a training camp for torture and rape, I was one of the very few socialists to support Mrs. Thatcher and he was one of the very few Tories to doubt the wisdom of the enterprise. So it goes.”

On squirrels:

“Until some time after the war, the squirrels of England had been red. I can still vaguely remember these sweet Beatrix Potter-type creatures, smaller and prettier and more agile and lacking the rat-like features that disclose themselves when you get close to a gray squirrel. These latter riffraff, once imported from America by some kind of regrettable accident, had escaped from captivity and gradually massacred and driven out the more demure and refined English breed. It was said that the gray squirrels didn’t fight fair and would with a raking motion of their back paws castrate the luckless red ones. Whatever the truth of that, the sighting of a native English squirrel was soon to be a rarity, confined to the north of Scotland and the Isle of Wight, and this seemed to be emblematic, for the anxious lower middle class, of a more general massification and degentrification and, well, Americanization of everything.”

(I really hope those squirrels never make it to Poland to replace the lovely red ones.)

The only time I really gritted my teeth was when Hitchens talked about Poland. Not because there was anything wrong with what he was saying but because he seemed to follow this outrageous trend that every English book seems to adhere to and that is of always getting the spelling of Polish names of people or places wrong. Always. Even the simple ones*:

“The first is that of Jacek Kurón, who with his colleague Karel Modzelewski had newly written a “socialist manifesto” from within the forbidding walls of a prison in Poland.”

Hitchens claims Kuro? was one his greatest heroes, and yet he misspells his name each and every time. And I’m quite positive it is Karol, not Karel. It actually really drives me crazy because it happens all the time and I don’t understand why. I have seen ‘Kapu?ci?ski’ spelled in so many different fantastic ways I started to think that if they do occasionally get it right it’s just down to statistical chance. I used to take photos of all of those misspellings in various books until I had to stop because it was too depressing. It just strikes me as seriously disrespectful because it takes about 5 seconds to check the correct spelling on Wikipedia. But oh, who cares, let’s just throw together some random consonants in a random order and it’s bound to be Polish.

“The reactionary and anti-Jewish crackdown of 1968, presaged by the arrest and imprisonment of Kurón and Modzelewski, had put all this into reverse. Kolakowski had, like so many of the intellectual leadership of Eastern Europe, been partly deported and partly self-exiled.”

Oh, congratulations. You got ‘Kolakowski’ right, although technically it should be ‘Ko?akowski’ but I’ll let you off with this one.

I think my favourite misspelling would be what Hitchens called the Polish equivalent of The Guardian:

“*Gazeta Wyborzka*,”

(I understand that this will be somewhat amusing only to people who speak Polish).

I know this review does not really have a flow to it but if I were to try to connect all these scattered thoughts into some cohesive narrative, this already long review would turn gargantuan.

What’s my final verdict on Hitchens? I guess I will take a page from his own book - he talks a lot about the danger of meeting your heroes and of finally realising you can criticise them and continue to admire them. I will leave you with this moving quote on ‘starting over’:

“I once spoke to someone who had survived the genocide in Rwanda, and she said to me that there was now nobody left on the face of the earth, either friend or relative, who knew who she was. No one who remembered her girlhood and her early mischief and family lore; no sibling or boon companion who could tease her about that first romance; no lover or pal with whom to reminisce. All her birthdays, exam results, illnesses, friendships, kinships — gone. She went on living, but with a tabula rasa as her diary and calendar and notebook. I think of this every time I hear of the callow ambition to “make a new start” or to be “born again”: Do those who talk this way truly wish for the slate to be wiped? Genocide means not just mass killing, to the level of extermination, but mass obliteration to the verge of extinction. You wish to have one more reflection on what it is to have been made the object of a “clean” sweep?”

If you would like to read an actually good review of Hitch-22, read this brilliant piece from the New York Review of Books:

The New York Review of Books

Ian Buruma’s review might be a little more critical than mine and features an especially apt dissecting of

Hitchens' Iraq stance, where (bizarrely) Hitchen's arguments and logic are so weak it could be pulled apart by a reasonably intelligent high school student.

Or if you'd like to see Hitchens ripped to shreds so completely that you almost sense something personal, delight in this New Statesman's review:

New Statesman

Actually, reading all the reviews of this book, from the left, centre and right leaning media and from both sides of the Atlantic (and even Australia) was almost as fascinating an experience as reading the book itself, as invariably every reviewer started off by declaring and justifying his position on the Hitchens' love or hate scale.

*- I realise that these errors might have appeared only in the ebook version and are not Hitchens' fault.

Nick Black says

GODDAMNIT GOODREADS YOU ATE MY WONDERFUL, LOVING, WITTY REVIEW AND I AM ABSOLUTELY INFURIATED SHIT SHIT SHIT SHIT SHIT SHIT SHIT SHIT SHIT i'm going to go drink the bathroom cleaner FUCK.

good book, though. SHIT SHIT SHIT.

Abubakar Mehdi says

If you enter the word "Hitchslap" in the search box on Youtube, you'll see thumbnail after thumbnail with the picture of a blonde-haired, blue-eyed, middle aged man who is delivering a "Hitchslap" to his opponents on and off stage. This is how I was introduced to Christopher Hitchens.

Born in Portsmouth, son of a naval officer and his beautiful young wife, Hitchens studied at Cambridge and Oxford before becoming a journalist and fulltime contributor to various magazines. Charming, eloquent, witty and very well read, Hitchens called himself a product of 1968: A time of great intellectual and political tumult. Hitchens was the public intellectual for a generation that missed the horrors of the World Wars as well as much of the Cold war, only to witness a world that is rotting and corrupting like a festering wound. It was quite early, in his Oxford days to be precise, that Hitchens was attracted to the politics and ideology of the left. He later read Trotsky and became a part of the international socialist movement as a consequence. Even later in life, when he had left behind his previous ideological convictions, he still considered himself a Marxist and a Trotskyist in more than one way.

But what always stayed with him, was his contempt for Totalitarianism in all its forms. This one ideology espoused by him early in life will become an integral part of his career as a writer and a journalist. He despised bigotry, abuse of the poor, moral corruption and absolutism. He wrote pamphlet style books against Mother Teresa, Bill Clinton and Henry Kissinger, condemning them for their hypocrisy, abuse of power and moral destitute. And also wrote biographies of his heroes Orwell, Jefferson and Paine.

Hitchens emigrated to America in early 80s and started living in Washington, where he stayed permanently for the rest of his life. He wrote books and articles at a prodigious rate publishing in leading magazines. But

the greatest turn in his career is marked by his two stands that changed the way he was perceived by the general public. Namely, his support for Iraq war and his anti-theism.

While you may disagree with him on many points, yet it is impossible to ignore Hitchens. He is the God of arguments. He always delivers his points in an articulate and convincing way, and you cannot help but be impressed by him even in your disagreement.

As eloquent on the podium as he was on page, Hitchens never shied from a debate and craved to discard his opponents with a wit and intelligence that made it all too easy for him to do so. On his book tour for 'God is not Great', he debated pastors and priests, mullahs and professors, in city after city, and won almost all of those who stood up for God. A formidable opponent and a strong advocate of scepticism and reason, he spearheaded the new atheist movement alongside Dawkins, Harris and Dennett.

Another of Hitchens astonishing feature was his friendship with the brightest minds of his age. His close circle comprised of James Fenton, Martin Amis, Ian McEwan, and Salman Rushdie, all of whom are men of letters and distinguished writers. Not to forget Edward Said, Julian Barnes, Isiah Berlin, and Clive James, with whom he had lifelong friendship.

The book contains innumerable literary references, something a bibliophile like himself could hardly control. He discusses his early childhood and his relationship with his mother and father in detail. He talks about the people and the books that influenced him and also, about the various positions he took on many issues. There is also a chapter dedicated to his Iraqi-Kurdish friends, Edward Said, Salman Rushdie, Fenton and Amis.

What he doesn't talk about is his marital life and I don't really know why he shied away from it.

I am quite sure that Hitchens will remain relevant and important for many generations to come, because the issues that he talks about will remain an integral part of the socio-political discourse.

Jeremy says

Well, I went back and tallied it up and this is the seventh book by Hitchens that I have read (so far; and only if you count *A Long Short War* as a book, but it's really more of a pamphlet). I keep up with his *Slate* column on a weekly basis and have read many Hitch articles in *Vanity Fair* and elsewhere. Despite being such a devotee, this is the first book I've rated five stars.

First, to address the complaint of a well-respected and prolific reviewer, Toe Knee, in his scathing attack of Thomas Jefferson: Author of America – Hitchens was educated at Balliol College, Oxford, and has no need of a thesaurus whatsoever. After praising the idea of expanding one's vocabulary by reading authors who use precise vocabulary in order to convey the subtle nuances of each concept, Toe suggests that the Hitch is not such an author. In so doing, he uses the term "unfamiliar" with regard to Hitchens' vocabulary and charges that Hitchens uses words of this type in order to purposefully obfuscate a topic. Toe then points out that he purposefully chose the word "unfamiliar" as opposed to "recondite" or "abstruse" to make this attack. The irony here is that "unfamiliar" language would not serve to obfuscate a topic (as would, say, esoteric diction), even if Hitchens was trying to be obscurantist by design. So, Toe would have done better to purposefully choose the words he avoided in order to make his point. This is precisely the type of mistake that Christopher Hitchens avoids in his writing.

Furthermore, Hitchens is a journalist by trade. As he explains in the memoir, only through his friendship with Martin Amis (and, to a lesser extent, with other literary types like Salman Rushdie) did he come to appreciate that language can be used in ways other than matter-of-fact reporting. In other words, the style that Toe is describing is not even Hitchens' natural inclination, but a purposefully developed infusion of literary style into non-fiction. Unfortunately for Toe, this includes some precise vocabulary when no other

word will do.

One example of Hitchens' exact use of language (and something I learned from him) is his insistence on using the term "reactionary" to describe regimes like the one in Iran, rather than the word "revolutionary." The latter describes the desire to move forward by changing the status quo into something never before achieved, whereas the former denotes having a goal of moving backward from the current state of affairs to some pre-revolutionary state. While this represents a huge difference in outlook, the media and most politicians use the terms interchangeably to the detriment of our public understanding.

Hitchens devotes a chapter to each of his parents, with whom he seems to have had complex relationships. His mother committed suicide in Israel not long after trying to contact him by phone and missing him. His father was a man of few words who proudly served in the Royal Navy. This is really as personal a glimpse as you get into the family life; there are few and vague references to the wives and kids. He does subject himself to the Proust questionnaire, which asks some favorite-least-favorite style questions, but it's not all that revealing.

I will concede Toe Knee's point that there is a vast amount of references in Hitchens' writing, but I am unwilling to complain about it. Just because I was also too lazy to read with a dictionary in one hand and an encyclopedia in the other does not mean that the burden is on Hitchens to change. His worldliness and intelligence trump my laziness all day long.

Reading this memoir will get you close to understanding one of the great minds of our time. It will take you through the development of a way of thinking. It will take you to places that you – and most other people alive today – have never been before. It will teach you that all serious people are replete with contradictions and give you encouragement that you aren't the only person holding two opposite beliefs in your mind at the same time. It will give you insight into the most pressing concern of our generation, namely that of fascism with an Islamic face. It will reawaken your devotion to free speech and free society and encourage you to be a strong advocate for both in the face of those who would extinguish them. And it will also make you laugh pretty hard a few times.

Trust me, it's worth your time, even without the reference books in hand.

Darwin8u says

"I try to deny myself any illusions or delusions, and I think that this perhaps entitles me to try and deny the same to others, at least as long as they refuse to keep their fantasies to themselves."

? Christopher Hitchens, Hitch-22: A Memoir

"A poet's work is to name the unnamable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world and stop it from going to sleep."

? Salman Rushdie

There are just a handful of people I've never met, but who I miss every day since their death*:

1. David Foster Wallace. I still remember the day he died and find myself turning to his fiction and

nonfiction frequently to sooth the sharp-edges of this mortal coil. Just like Hitchens, I've avoided finishing ALL of his books simply because the IDEA that there are words of his yet unread by me, keeps my heart pumping blood to my cold feet.

2. Hunter S. Thompson. I once door-knocked into his home in Aspen. One of my biggest regrets is I didn't come back every day and knock again, and again, and again, until he WAS home. After Thompson died I wanted to summon him back with my continual knocking at his door.

2. Christopher Hitchens. While I seldom agreed completely with what he wrote, I admired almost every word he put out into the dark, unorganized Universe. He was an example of a fighter, a thinker, and public intellectual that would take risks. He wrote because he had both passion and an opinion. I admired his ability to quarrel with friends, change his mind, upset sacred apple carts, wake sleeping giants, and push an argument up a hill until the hill, the sky, his rock-hard argument, and reader were all exhausted.

I think intuitively he grasped an order (or position?) I still cling to: life contains a beauty which exists within its many contradictions and absurdities. I loved his hatred of meanness and ideology. I loved his passion for language and literature and poetry. I loved his attempts to be fluent rather than glib, quick rather than fast, and pointed rather than sharp.

I loved how every time I read (or re-read) one of his books, I walked away with a list of books to buy/read/share. I adore how adorned with tabs and flags his books become after I've read them. I loved his gratitude for good friends, good books, good food (and wine and spirits), and a good fight. I loved his love for Martin Amis. It is unabashed, and while not unique among men, his ability to occupy a zone of love that feels closer to Abraham Lincoln's or Augustus Caesar's day. This points at just how unique and iconoclastic he was. I consider him a friend and a teacher and an many ways an ideal. He certainly wasn't perfect, but God he WAS interesting.

* I also miss Andrew Sullivan, who hasn't died just semi-retired, but it still feels a bit like he has.

Diane says

Now *this* is a memoir worth reading! We are in the Age of Memoir, but so few deserve the time. Christopher Hitchens lived enough for 10 lives -- he was a revolutionary, journalist, provocateur, vagabond, contrarian, essayist, raconteur, socialist, intellectual, atheist and he loved a good Scotch.

Hitch, as his friends called him, started writing his autobiography when he turned 60. The story goes that in 2009 he was surprised to see the phrase "the late Christopher Hitchens" beneath a photo of him at an art exhibition, and he knew that the description would eventually become true. Best not to wait too long to write my memoirs, he thought. It was fortunate that he wrote quickly because about a year later, he was diagnosed with esophageal cancer, and he died in December 2011.

Hitch was born in England but had traveled all over the world by the time he was 30. Coming of age in the 1960s, it was the perfect time to be a socialist and a revolutionary. The book has great stories of Hitch's visits to Cuba, Argentina, Iraq, Greece, Africa, Asia, and also America. Hitch emigrated to the United States in the 1980s, and I enjoyed hearing his outsider's perspective on American culture.

Hitch also has snort-out-loud tales of his friendships with Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie and James Fenton.

My favorites were when Martin took Hitch to a whorehouse as "research" for a book, and Salman's gift at word games. Those moments were a tender antidote to the stories of Hitch's contrariness.

I listened to this on audiobook and would highly recommend it to anyone who likes politics, social commentary or a lively conversationalist. Hitch has a lot of opinions, not all of which I agree with, but I loved listening to his stories.

Jeffrey Keeten says

Plato says that the unexamined life is not worth living. But what if the examined life turns out to be a clunker as well? Kurt Vonnegut: Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloons

The Young Christopher Hitchens

This is my first time reading a Christopher Hitchens's book; of course, it is not my first exposure to Hitchens. He was a favorite of talk shows. (He followed his friend Gore Vidal's advice never to turn down a chance to be on TV.) He attended rallies and protests domestic and foreign. He wrote incendiary articles that would invariably find their way into my email box or into a magazine I subscribe to. Even people who don't consider themselves right or left know who he is. As he aged he never lost the fire in his belly and always felt he could right a wrong. I didn't always agree with him, but found that he had a knack for wiggling some doubt into my own convictions.

Invariably with autobiographies, or biographies for that matter, a certain percentage of the book always has to be spent examining ones childhood. I always feel like I'm slogging through this part of the book as they make a case for critical moments at prep school or their mommy didn't love them enough or some other claptrap. (That is a broad stroke statement and certainly does not mean to say that all people have a relatively boring childhood, but most of us do even those people who eventually become famous.) With my own kids and I love them like crazy I still can't wait for them to mature intellectually. When Dr. Henry Jones says to Indiana *You left just as you were getting interesting.* I knew exactly what he was talking and fear that my experiences with my kids may be the same.

Luckily Hitchens does not spend an inordinate of time talking about his childhood. The English obsession with prep school can not be avoided, but he did make me laugh as he negotiated the agitated waters of homosexual activity at the school. He referred to it as "tummy rubbing". As it turned out he didn't have much interest at the beginning of his tenure because he matured late and didn't have the pressing hormonal driven need. As he got older and even after he graduated he did find himself more interested in sex. He was good looking as a young man and received attentions from both men and women. *Friends, somebody said, are "god's apology for relations."* *I was one of those who had tended to think of friends at school as comrades or acquaintances or co-conspirators or cronies or sex partners(or an occasional salad of all four).*

Hitchens didn't really understand the obsession of America with homosexuality. I find it comical myself whenever I hear some politician making hay out of sexual orientation. Remember Senator Larry Craig, the airport foot tapper from Idaho a firm advocate against gay rights? *Whenever I hear some bigmouth in Washington or the Christian heartland banging on about the evils of sodomy or whatever, I mentally enter his name in my notebook and contentedly set my watch. Sooner rather than later, he will be discovered down on his weary and well worn old knees in some dreary motel or latrine, with an expired Visa card, having*

tried to pay well over the odds to be peed upon by some Apache transvestite. Christopher Hitchens never pulls any punches and at one moment you might be laughing gleefully at something he said that has put someone else on the ropes and the next moment you may find yourself looking blearily upward into the craggy face of a referee hearing a ten count yourself.

Hitchens was best friends with Martin Amis and if anyone, as I am, is a fan of Martin Amis you will enjoy the stories he shares about time spent with Amis. He had a fiery friendship with Edward Said. He shared time with Gore Vidal, some would say he was the heir apparent to Vidal's acerbic style. He knew Salman Rushdie and corresponded with him for the rest of his life. I got to met Rushdie myself in San Francisco at Green Apple Books by mere chance. The Moor's Last Sigh had just been released and Rushdie arrived at our bookstore unannounced because he was still under a death threat from the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. He came in with a bodyguard and signed our books. I shook his hand and then he was gone. It gave me a brief glimpse of what his life was like being constantly on the run. Hitchens had uneasy friendships (friendship did not always keep his friends from feeling the lash of his acid pen.) with many of the leading writers and leftest leaderships of the world.

He had deep and abiding hatred for Henry Kissinger and spent a good deal of time trying to make Kissinger's life a living hell. He wrote inflammatory books and articles exposing the lies and corruptions of the man's political maneuverings. Despite liking Margaret Thatcher, which may have been based somewhat on an odd sexual attraction, he did pound away at her policies. He relates an amusing story about meeting her and apologizing for something he had wrote about her that wasn't absolutely true. He bowed to her and she asked him to bow lower. She smacked him on the rear with a rolled paper. *As she walked away, she looked back over her shoulder and gave an almost imperceptibly slight roll of the hip while mouthing the words: "Naughty boy!"* I think he may have discovered one of the ways Thatcher kept her politicians, predominately male, in line.

Hitchens really didn't like Bill Clinton. He had known him while Clinton was in England on a Rhodes Scholarship. For one, he may have known too much about Bill during his college days. The more I hear about Clinton in England the more unsavory the stories become. Hitchens took a lot of heat from the left for the shots he took at Clinton during the 1992 election. One thing everyone needs to understand about Hitchens, and I admire him for it, is that he is his own man and can be as critical of the left as he is the right.

Hitchens was summoned to the Vatican to be asked questions about Mother Theresa. I haven't read his writings on her, but from what I understand he thought she was out of her mind. The Vatican put him in the role of Devil's advocate as they decided on whether she was deserving of a sainthood. What? Hitchens, the great atheist, summoned to the center of Christian faith to be asked his opinion?

He left his mark on the world. He sliced and diced his enemies, which he truly felt were also the enemies of the world and he defended his friends when he agreed with them and vehemently disagreed with them when he had an opposing view. It must have been lonely at times being Christopher Hitchens. He died, too young, at age 62 from esophageal cancer in December 2011. The tone of this volume is jocular at times and very serious at others as he hammered home his views. Whatever your political association you will squirm reading this book. He was his own man, a man to be admired, but maybe not a man you would want to know too well unless you are someone who likes being challenged on every core principle you hold dear. I will definitely be reading more books by Christopher Hitchens. One warning after reading this book you might

find yourself voicing those opinions that normally you would keep silent. He has certainly had that influence on me.

You can read my most recent book and movie reviews at <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
Check out my Facebook bloggers page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Lisa Reads & Reviews says

Hitchens was a curiosity. I sporadically followed his interviews and writing, admired his courage travelling to world hot spots and in the face of his own mortality, yet couldn't quite keep him pinned in any one category of intellectuals. Hitchens was an Anti: Anti-theist, Anti-fascist, Anti-totalitarian, Anti-Stalin, Anti-Zionist....I didn't follow him that closely, but the list goes on. I was curious as to whether I fundamentally agreed with him or not, given that many times I had agreed, and many times I hadn't. His thinking seemed to be in a constant state of evolution as I heard him project and defend popular and unpopular opinions. I wanted to know the underlying principle in his personal map. What made this man tick?

His memoir is written in a mostly reserved fashion, with a few exceptions. First, his upbringing seemed almost Shakespearean. His pretty and ambitious mother insisted on sending her boy-king off to quality English boarding schools from the age of eight, despite her own unhappy marriage, and the financial and personal sacrifices that such ambition required. Their relationship was close. When Hitch was a young adult, his mother sought and gained his approval of her secret lover. The most sad and moving part occurred in November 1973 when Hitchens' mother committed suicide in Athens in a suicide pact with that very same, Hitch-approved, lover. At first, news had been that his mother had been murdered. Hitch then had to tell father and brother about the infidelity and suicide. He regreted he was not available when his mother called him the day she died. Beyond that, Hitch does not describe romances or marriages for a couple of reasons: he thought it not fair to disclose other people's stories, and he thought they would bore the reader. Instead, he focused on what he termed, heterosexual love between males, primarily his nonsexual love for Amis Martin. At the same time, he does not hide nor deny the homosexual acts in boarding school and after.

For most of the remaining text, Hitch describes a life as a "rebel with a cause". From the start, he sided with the working class, yet had to reconcile this allegiance with the obvious corruption of trades and unions. This, it seems to me, was the beginning of a refinement of stances that he'd take throughout his life. I believe Hitch developed a keen sense of gray. Or, a fine honing knife.

Hitch was an author and journalist for over 40 years. He was ranked among the most influential liberals in the U.S. Media, yet he was a harsh critics of Clinton and sided with the Iraq war because he wanted to see regime change. He saw the Iraq as an alliance of goons and gangsters and terrorists. However, he was genuinely surprised at the incompetence of Bush administration and he criticized the planning and execution of the war. This was a man in agreement with neo-cons and progressives, but he rejected both labels and was not a fan of either.

Hitch was an atheist who saw organized religion as "the main source of hatred in the world". He was against any state that "recognizes no limits to its authority and strives to regulate every aspect of public and private life." He believed "individual freedom, and free expression and scientific discovery should replace religion as a means of teaching ethics and defining human civilization." This, I believe was the essence of the man. He weighed all opinions and judgments and stances on the basis of that one truism. I believe much of his ambition stemmed from the need to justify and earn his mother's love and sacrifice. The man was

complicated.

Hitch's book is about battles of ideas and psychodrama. He describes countercultural and protest movements. He had ideological interests that labeled him a Trotskyist and a sort of anti-Stalinist socialist, yet he rejected socialists, as he claimed they ceased to offer a positive alternative to the capitalist system. He described himself as thinking like a Marxist, yet he thought capitalism had become the more revolutionary economic system, and he welcomed globalization. He sided in the freedom of the individual from the state, yet he had harsh words for libertarians.

I'd personally call much of what he believed as being a humanist. Despite his acerbic tongue, Hitchens believed "one must not insult or degrade or humiliate people." Hitch was terrified of being boring, or of being bored, and went to great lengths to be the center of attention. Good grief. After reading Hitch-22, I have a sense of the man as he matured. The man was complicated, but so is life and if Hitch has taught me anything, it's to not look for a side to follow blindly, but to slice and parse and think a bit more deeply about what it is I believe.
