

Hitch-22 – A Memoir by Christopher Hitchens.
Atlantic Books 2011.

This memoir was originally published in 2010 but the paperback edition carries a new foreword in which Hitchens confronts with courage and honesty the terminal cancer that will bring his life to a premature close.

The eighteen essays that comprise Hitch-22 are fine examples of a superb writer and bravura polemicist and show him at his provocative, challenging, informative and witty best.

Some of the essays, notably that on Salman Rushdie's experience after the publication of the Satanic Verses and the Ayatollah's fatwa remind readers what the courageous defence of freedom of speech really means, and as Hitchens rails against fair weather friends and religious extremists it is hard not to applaud. His essays about his father and mother, The Commander and Yvonne, are sometimes too honest for comfort and remind the reader how many compromises most children make in their relationship with their parents.

For me the outstanding essays are Thinking Thrice about the Jewish Question, in which Hitchens confronts and considers his Jewish heritage and what it means to him and Mesopotamia from Both Sides, in which he contemplates the Iraq embroglio.

The revised foreword casts a poignant shadow over the whole book, and one concludes with the sure sense that Hitchen's powers of observation and his genius for controversy will be much missed when he is gone.

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