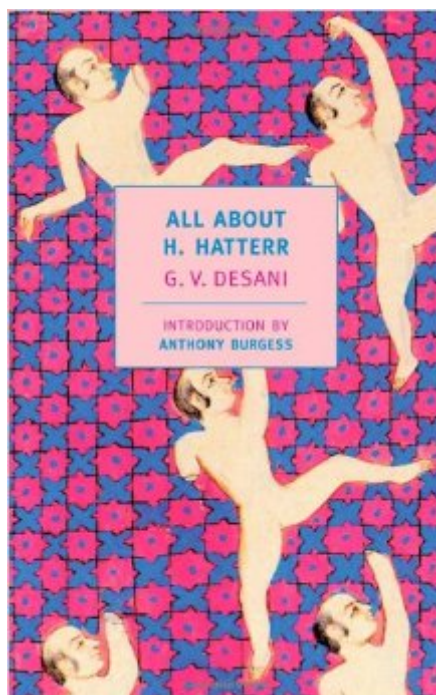


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All About H. Hatterr (New York Review Books Classics)



Synopsis

Wildly funny and wonderfully bizarre, *All About H. Hatterr* is one of the most perfectly eccentric and strangely absorbing works modern English has produced. H. Hatterr is the son of a European merchant officer and a lady from Penang who has been raised and educated in missionary schools in Calcutta. His story is of his search for enlightenment as, in the course of visiting seven Oriental cities, he consults with seven sages, each of whom specializes in a different aspect of "Living." Each teacher delivers himself of a great "Generality," each great Generality launches a new great "Adventure," from each of which Hatter escapes not so much greatly edified as by the skin of his teeth. The book is a comic extravaganza, but as Anthony Burgess writes in his introduction, "it is the language that makes the book. . . . It is not pure English; it is like Shakespeare, Joyce, and Kipling, gloriously impure."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I've had my copy of this book in my library since the year 2000. It was given to me in India by a good friend, who told me it was amazing. He was right. I finally have gotten around to reading it after being initially put off for 9 years by its strangely eclectic language and thoroughly unconventional format. I have since learned that these are just two of this book's extraordinary strengths, as G.V. Desani demonstrates a fantastically freewheeling imagination and healthy creative disregard for traditional novelistic forms. He proceeds to structure his "chapters" like a scientific treatise. However, first he gives us a "Warning!": Dear reader, this isn't a novel, it's a "gesture," but if you

can't relate to that, then call it a "novel." Then we are given a kind of preface, called "All About...", followed by ANOTHER "Warning!" and then a "Mutual Introduction." So now you know you're in for something completely different. By page 39 of my Penguin Books edition, we get to the "chapters." Each one begins with a "Digest," which is a kind of Abstract summary that gives nothing away to the reader. These Digests need to be reread after "digesting" the actual chapter. Following the Digest is the "Instruction" section, which is what we are supposed to learn. Then comes a "Presumption" as to what is assumed by the writer as he goes about relating to us the actual "Life-Encounter" of H. Hatterr, which is the heart of the chapter. H. Hatterr as a main character is a picaresque cultural mashup of western and eastern thought. He's a seeker and a cynic, a believer and an irreverent skeptic who finds more fraud and nonsense in the world than sincerity.

Warning! Melodramatic gestures against public security are a common form of self-expression in the East. For instance, an Indian peasant, whose house has been burgled, will lay a tree across a railway line, hope to derail a goods train, just to show his opinion of life. And the magistrates are far more understanding. Anglo-Indian writer So begins G. V. Desani's novel All About H. Hatterr. To say it is unique would be an understatement. Suffice to say that the event mentioned in the Warning is comparatively saner than the ones which follow. The novel is about the adventures or rather misadventures of Mr Hatterr, told in first person, at the hands of the ash smeared gurus of Rangoon (now resident in India), Madras, Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Mogalsarai-Varanasai and his naked holiness Number one the Sage of All India himself. The chapters follow an exotic framework: a Digest at the beginning of the chapter which gives away nothing, Instruction the wise words of the guru; Presumption: understanding of Mr Hindustani Hatterr and; Life Encounter - the events which were supposedly to be the learning for the hapless protagonist Mr Hatterr; but which always end up in dire circumstances for Mr Hatterr. Finally Mr Banerjee, his dear friend and one who swears by the Bard of Avon, extricates him. In the novel Shakespeare is oft quoted and copied. The novel opens with a conversation parodying a piece from Hamlet. Towards the end there is a critique of Mr Hatterr's work by Shri Y. Beliram who was Mr Hatterr's counsel and is now 504 Sriman Vairagi Parivrajaka, Vanasprathi, Acharya. (He is yet to reach the holy number of 1008 as he has not embraced celibacy).

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