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A Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago Details

Date : Published October 11th 2007 by BiblioLife (first published 1922)

ISBN : 9781426426988

Author : Ben Hecht

Format : Paperback 268 pages

Genre : Writing, Journalism, Nonfiction, Essays, History, Literary Fiction

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From Reader Review A Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago for online ebook

Paul says

Great little stories and essays and rants by this sometimes screenwriter, novelist, newspaper man, genius.

Greg says

Nice character sketches.

Peter says

An excellent collection of Hecht's Chicago Daily News columns from 1921. His essays explore the gamut of Roaring Twenties Chicago, from flappers to financiers to broken laborers. Even the most hopeless of his characters still maintains a quiet dignity.

Jan C says

I loved this book. Maybe it helps to be from Chicago.

I got it when I was working and would read it on my commute on the el. Very entertaining.

The newspaper man eyeing everybody, asking beaucoup questions.

He committed himself to writing a daily column about the people that he met in the street. Sometimes it seemed like it was a bit of a stretch.

Andy says

Not really a novel so much as a collection of sketches of people from all walks of life and how they get by in The Big City. I enjoyed most of it a great deal, however I have to admit that there's something awfully slight about them. None of the characters' profiles go into any great depth at all and there's nothing terribly enlightening about the stories, either. It's almost like the literary equivalent to television: entertaining, but don't think you'll remember much after reading it.

Christy says

absolutely fantastic. a must-read for any chicago-lover.

Tony says

A THOUSAND AND ONE AFTERNOONS IN CHICAGO. (1922). Ben Hecht. *****.

Ben Hecht (1894-1964) was one of the most talented individuals to take his place on the American scene. He started out as a journalist, but soon branched out into the other arts. A short listing of his achievements would bowl you over. He was one of those people who never seemed to be without a new idea. He became famous (and very rich) as a result of his work in the film industry. He was also successful as a playwright, co-authoring "The Front Page." His list of film credits as author or co-author reads like a history of the Hollywood film industry. To name just a few, he wrote – or directed his story ideas – for films like "Stagecoach." He divided his time between crime films and comedies. In the former category, he contributed to "Scarface," and "Notorious." For comedies, he was responsible for titles like "Twentieth Century," "Nothing Sacred," and "Monkey Business." This book – which is a marvelous read – collects a goodly number of his columns when he wrote for The Chicago Daily News. These demonstrated his talents of getting to the core of his subjects, whether people, places, or things. I can imagine that he had quite a following in his day. His prose reflected the language of the people, but every now and then he managed to slip in a quotation that illustrated his point. One of my favorites is from Chateaubriand (or, maybe Stendahl): "...the equilibrium of society rests upon the acquiescence of its oppressed and unfortunate." That says a mouthful. His early work is available on Project Gutenberg; the later stuff you can watch on the big screen. I didn't bother to count, but there are probably a hundred columns reprinted here. They are uniformly excellent. Highly recommended.

Rebecca says

I loved this book! It was probably in part because I'm from Chicago, so many of the things Hecht wrote about were familiar to me. He's a wonderful writer-when the editor says that he took journalism and made it more literary, that description was completely correct. For anyone from Chicago, some of the columns reminded me of Mike Royko who wrote for the Tribune when I was growing up (early 1980s).

He writes a lot about the faceless crowds of the city and wondering what is going on behind the faces who stare back at him. Many of his columns are the product of his wandering the streets of Chicago late at night.

While Hecht writes about the 1920s, and clearly the population was dealing with the aftermath of the first world war, what is sobering is how some things about people in cities haven't changed. The disconnect, the isolation, the search for companionship in bars (speak-easys back then), getting caught in the justice system, the cycle of poverty that is hard to break. Even the bombardment with advertising is still here, albeit on the internet.

I hope we can find a place for journalism like this in the age of the internet. Blogs aren't the same.

John says

I'm pulling the plug: this book has been on my "currently reading" shelf for almost 3 years, and I've decided I'm never going to finish it. Nevertheless, I can honestly select "I liked it" as a rating. This collection of Hecht's newspaper sketches of everyday life in interwar Chicago is highly readable and amusing in exactly the sardonic way one would expect from the (co-) author of *The Front Page* or Hecht's many, many Hollywood screenplays; that's why I picked it up. The problem is that in this form it's too much of a muchness; I can imagine a Chicago newspaper reader looking forward to the next Hecht piece, but read all at once like this they become monotonous. Of course, it's hard to fault Hecht for that; this was never the way he meant them to be read. I can imagine it's an invaluable resource for Hecht scholars, if there are such folks, but for everyone else a couple of selections will go a long way.

Leah says

A series of sketches written for the Chicago Daily News beginning in 1921. In the words of Henry Justin Smith's preface:

"Comedies, dialogues, homilies, one-act tragedies, storiettes, sepia panels, word-etchings, satires, tone-poems, fuges, bourrees, — something different every day.... Stories seemingly born out of nothing, and written — to judge by the typing — in ten minutes, but in reality, as a rule, based upon actual incident, developed by a period of soaking in the peculiar chemicals of Ben's nature, and written with much sophistication in the choice of words. There were dramatic studies often intensely subjective, lit with the moods of Ben himself, not of the things dramatized. There were self-revelations characteristically frank and provokingly debonaire. There was comment upon everything under the sun; assaults upon all the idols of antiquity, of mediaevalism, of neo-boobism. There were raw chunks of philosophy, delivered with gusto and sometimes with inaccuracy. There were subtle jabs at well-established Babbitry."

A few are still worth reading. Most of them are not. Some of them weren't even worth the newsprint they were first printed on.

You might imagine that they'd provide a portrait of Chicago of the era, but they don't — or only a very diffuse one. The fiction of authors like Edna Ferber or Frank Norris gives a much clearer picture than this soi-disant journalism.

Hecht is at his best when he concentrates on individuals or the ironies of the newspaper business — as in these vignettes:

"Don Quixote and His Last Windmill"

"The Watch Fixer"

"Vagabondia"

"The Man from Yesterday"

Barbara says

True stories from a journalist. "a lens into City life.". This is another book I keep on nightstand, and read a

chapter\story at a time.

Katie says

What a great look into the past! Hecht captured feelings and experiences of the every day person in 1920's Chicago. A lot of the stories have a somber tone, but some were surprisingly funny. And a couple stories made fun of my place of employment! I especially appreciated that, and they were still funny!

James Garner says

A wonderful window into the Chicago of 90 years ago, and a very early example of relating human interest stories in the newspaper.

Ann Fisher says

What fun! I picked this up free for the Kindle and finally started dipping into it on my 'L' rides. These are newspaper columns he wrote for the Chicago Daily News in the early 1920s. A lively, humorous, and often startlingly familiar look at life in Chicago at the beginning of Prohibition. I was sorry to finish it.

Kathryn says

This is a series of 1001 short works written one a day for 1001 days! They are very interesting, funny, thought provoking beautifully written short stories. Of course you do find yourself wishing that some of them would keep going!
