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Mysteries (Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics)



PENGUIN CLASSICS

KNUT HAMSUN

Mysteries



Synopsis

Mysteries (1892) is the story of Johan Nilsen Nagel, a mysterious stranger who suddenly turns up in a small Norwegian town one summer-and just as suddenly disappears. Nagel is a complete outsider, a sort of modern Christ treated in a spirit of near parody. He condemns the politics and thought of the age, brings comfort to the insulted and injured and gains the love of two women suggestive of the biblical Mary and Martha. But there is a sinister side of him: in his vest he carries a vial of Prussic acid. The novel creates a powerful sense of Nagel's stream of thought, as he increasingly withdraws into the torture chamber of his own subconscious psyche.

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Customer Reviews

"*Mysteries*" remains amongst the handful of pure existential novels before there was such a thing; before the very word became a contrived label. Nagel arrives in town as an eccentric outsider. He does not reveal a complete and thorough past -- partly because he guiltily enjoys the shroud of mystery people pin on him -- partly because he can not come to grips with it himself. Here is a man able to intelligently articulate (whilst drunk, mind you) on the scope of man's most pressing questions of existence, but struggles repeatedly with his own conscious and interactions with

people. The genius of the novel is found in that the way one reacts to Nagel invariably reveals something about you, the reader! Do you hold the wealthy intellect in contempt for not breaking free from the situations he creates? Or do you sympathize with this man and relate to his own pattern of self destruction? The answer does not come easy. There are arguments for both disgust and pity. And out of our own curious need to finalize our opinions, to decide what we really think, we read on and on unable to prevent ourselves from being shaped by this novel. "Mysteries" contains one of the most complex character studies in literature while being completely void of pretentious airs. Nagel has a great mind, but that's exactly the problem, he can't reason out the cynicism he holds for himself. One of Hamsun's underlying themes is an illustration of how the great thinkers of the world end up so tightly wrapped with pessimism that they are unable to function in society. He dispels any sense of romanticism that we commonly hold for the struggling artists, philosophers, and eccentrics of the world. Oh, and carefully read the lines pertaining to "The Midget." The only place you might find a greater supporting cast member is in Shakespeare's canon.

This book was the #1 hugest influence on me as a teen. I can't say enough good things about it. It's prose poetry in motion. Hamsun wrote about what nowadays we'd call a manic-depressive or bipolar man who is living on the edge of a deep, mystical Norweigan nightmare where the nights never end. A choir of a thousand voices, violin cases, apothecary smells, lifesaving medals... Johan Nilsen Nagel is the most fully-realized character of all time. This is probably literature's first paranormal, too. The Midget is unforgettable as well.

He is one of the great writers of the twentieth century, though his best works were written before 1900. He is one of the most influential European novelists of the last hundred years, yet he is not well known in the United States. Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, the most important Norwegian author since Ibsen, he is often ignored in his own country. He is Knut Hamsun -- novelist of genius... Hamsun, in "Mysteries, Pan, and Hunger", wrote three of the greatest novels of the late nineteenth century, novels which created a new literary style and which delineated a new literary hero: the alienated loner. His work was widely admired in the first half of the twentieth century, with writers as diverse as Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, and Henry Miller citing Hamsun's work as being of special importance and influence. Isaac Bashevis Singer, in his essay "Knut Hamsun, Artist of Skepticism" goes so far as to claim that "the whole modern school of fiction in the twentieth century stems from Hamsun." Henry Miller said of "Mysteries" that it "is closer to me than any other book I've read." The second of Hamsun's great early novels, and my personal second favorite...!

I honestly do not know exactly what to say about this novel, other than I am thankful I stumbled upon it. I just finished it several minutes ago and it was one of the most fascinating, thought provoking, and mesmerizing books I have ever read. The manic main character is easily one of my favorites found throughout all of fiction. His rambling, yet calculated monologues, never cease to amaze me in what direction they end up taking the reader and the audience in the book. His inner monologues are intense in their portrayal of a highly intelligent mind alternating between exuberance and utter despair. He can analyze and attack the main theories and thinkers of the day, yet in his own life he seems incapable of curbing his self destructive and impulsive actions. Frankly, I am in awe that anyone could write a novel like this without having gone over the edge from genius to madness and back again. I must admit many of the books "mysteries" remain very much unclear to me, though the ending (the last page) hit me like a smack in the face---I thought better of the particular character of whom much is revealed. I, after the novel sinks in a little bit, plan on rereading it and trying to decipher more out of it. Once again I am brought back to Hamsun....brilliant and ahead of his time.

It is one of the most beguiling and confusing novels ever written. It is not a novel for everyone, but for those of a certain mindset it clicks like a key in a lock, so for others, like as a 1890's christmas gift for Maman, maybe not. It is a complete experience of the disorienting type...ride the bull...see where he takes you. I like it.

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