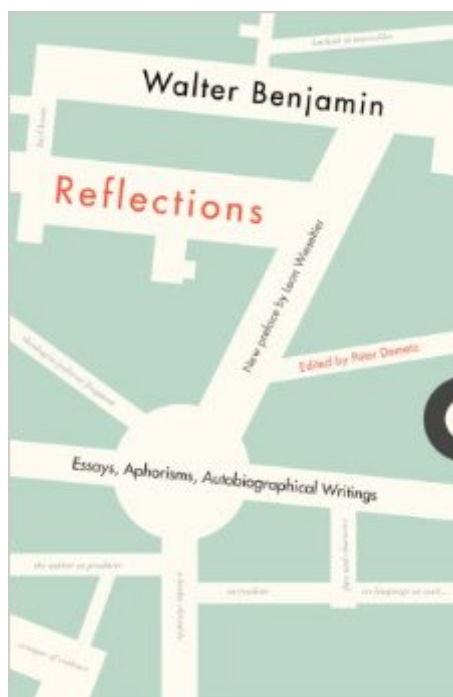


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Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings



Synopsis

A companion volume to *Illuminations*, the first collection of Walter Benjamin's writings, *Reflections* presents a further sampling of his wide-ranging work. Here Benjamin evolves a theory of language as the medium of all creation, discusses theater and surrealism, reminisces about Berlin in the 1920s, recalls conversations with Bertolt Brecht, and provides travelogues of various cities, including Moscow under Stalin. He moves seamlessly from literary criticism to autobiography to philosophical-theological speculations, cementing his reputation as one of the greatest and most versatile writers of the twentieth century. Also included is a new preface by Leon Wieseltier that explores Benjamin's continued relevance for our times.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In *Reflections*, editor Peter Demetz has taken eighteen essays by Walter Benjamin written over roughly a decade and has grouped them into four categories. Each category captures an essence of Benjamin's life that he found over-riding at that time. Benjamin's life was a whirlpool of essences that was startlingly far-reaching: the lessening of human values in post-war Europe, the ineffable quality of a work's "aura," the immediacy of memory as a means and mode of consciousness, the interlocking of barbarism and civilization in an eternal spatial and temporal bear hug, the role of Jewish Messianism, the paradoxical discrepancy between the size of a small object and its capacity to encompass the purity of a much larger essence, the greater importance of visual/tactile phenomena over their Platonic abstractions, the observant seemingly idle flâneur who strolls effortlessly amidst crowded Parisian streets, and his obsession with slowing down the pacing of a

pulsating urban scene so as to capture its inner essence in the stasis of a pseudo-photograph. These essays reveal a Benjamin who liked to travel all over Europe. In Section One, he strolls through Berlin in *A Berlin Chronicle* and assorted areas of interest throughout Germany in *One-Way Street*. Benjamin's sharp eye for detail reveals how past experiences manifest themselves in memories that are less temporal in nature but more associational in sweep. For him, the act of recalling past details is akin to Wordsworth's images recalled in tranquility though editor Demetz sees a Proustian unraveling of an onion memory at work too. His memory images are charged with a palpable sense of "thing-ness" that over-ride their concomitant abstraction.

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