



Walter Benjamin (Reaktion Books - Critical Lives)

Esther Leslie

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Drawing upon a wealth of journal writings and personal correspondence, Esther Leslie presents a uniquely intimate portrait of one of the intellectual giants of the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin. She sets his life in the context of his middle-class upbringing; explores the social, political, and economic upheaval in Germany during and after World War I; and recounts Benjamin's eccentric love of toys, trick-books, travel, and ships. From the Frankfurt School and his influential friendships with Theodore Adorno, Gershom Scholem, and Bertolt Brecht, to his travels across Europe, *Walter Benjamin* traces out the roots of Benjamin's groundbreaking writings and their far-reaching impact in his own time. Leslie argues that Benjamin's life challenges the stereotypical narrative of the tragic and lonely intellectual figure—instead positioning him as a man who relished the fierce combat of competing theories and ideas.

Closing with his death at the Spanish-French border in a desperate flight from the Nazis and Stalin, *Walter Benjamin* is a concise and concentrated account of a capacious intellect trapped by hostile circumstances.

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