



Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926

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Walter Benjamin was one of the most original and important critical voices of the 20th century, but few of his writings have been available in English. Harvard University Press is now undertaking to publish a significant portion of his work in definitive translation, under the general editorship of Michael W. Jennings. This volume, the first of three, will at last give readers of English a sense of the man and the many facets of his thought.

Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926 Details

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From Reader Review Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926 for online ebook

Damian says

This gets 5 stars because of the brilliance of the essay "The Metaphysics of Youth" written in 1914 when Benjamin was 22 years old.

I wish I would have just bought this series outright instead of all the individual books.

Tosh says

The early years of Walter Benjamin, or the roots of Walter. Either way it's great to have all his early work in one volume. I have the complete set of writings, and he's an author that I dip my toes into his world of knowledge as well as whatever thought runs across his head. He's a writer I greatly admire.

Michael says

These early essays provide great insight into Benjamin's almost autobiographical essays. The origins of his thought and his personal reflections. Benjamin is one of the great essayists, and this collection shows his versatility and his effectiveness as a critic.

Paul Moffett says

Benjamin is a huge name in literary and philosophical history in the 20th century, and it's easy to see why. Brilliant.

Adam says

Can you imagine how things would be different if Benjamin had landed that university post instead of Heidegger? It's not just an academic question. Take a somber journey through subjunctive history.

Mona Kareem says

I really love his writings about fiction although he is so repetitive in diagnosing Bourgeois literature and inaesthetically praising soviet realism

Thomas Romer says

ELLIPTICAL AND DENSE

This volume contains selected writings by thinker and cultural critic Walter Benjamin for the period spanning the years 1913-1926.

Many of the entries consist in short fragments, interspersed by more lengthy pieces such as *The Concept of Criticism* and *Goethe's Elective Affinities*.

Before I continue, I must confess having a soft spot for WB.

I first read him, in French translation, at the tail end of my 12 year mandatory stint in the French schooling system which never encouraged and in fact discouraged independent and critical thought; rather the aim of those twelve years seems to have been to annihilate all traces of imagination and creativity and ensure life-long submission to phoney authority.

So it was with much fascination and glee that I read some of WB's earliest essays which opened up a whole world of passionate intellectual enquiry into the nature of reality, all for its own sake.

Nor did his output have anything to do with monetary or employment concerns, and indeed, taken too far, such concerns would have stifled WB's creative spirit and condemned him to obscurity, even post mortem.

These things being said, I cannot now, as a mature reader of thirty years, heartily recommend this volume.

While I still find WB's intellectual energy and penetrating analyses inspiring on principle, in practice WB's writing does not come off well in English translation, for his essays are at times impenetrable, elliptical, always dense, and all too often obscure in their argument.

There are lighter and darker patches of density and ellipsis in this volume but I found my efforts at trying to penetrate the more arduous chunks of theoretical text slimly rewarded, for the contents when grasped are not all that revolutionary or illuminating.

Yes, WB offers new insights on certain terrains, such as fate, children's books, and translation, but I do not find the thinking, when understood, all that enlightened.

WB lacks background knowledge of key areas such as the true content of Natural Law principles, the role of the occult and the workings of conspiratorial power.

To be sure, he was writing in earlier times but then some texts age better than others.

WB is often said to be a good writer, and this may be true in the German original, but in English his texts are chunky, lacking fluidity and clarity.

Despite my best intentions of reading the book cover to cover I gave up three quarters of the way through just because of the slog and the small pay-off for investing time and effort in getting to understand the heck WB is pointing out.

While the world would undoubtedly be a poorer place without Walter Benjamin's literary and critical output, ultimately what inspires me the most about the character is his example as an always curious and diligent non conformist thinker, rather than the actual contents of his musings.

Taking all these factors into consideration, the good and the bad, my score for this book is three stars.

Melanie says

Read "Critique of Violence" (1921) - p. 236-252.

Daniel Duarte says

i m reaing a specific article about the art in the age of reproductibility for a subject at university, which name is commnicationd and aesthetics.
