



Jean Genet (Critical Lives)

By Stephen Barber



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Jean Genet (Critical Lives) By Stephen Barber

An engaging and challenging introduction to Jean Genet, this concise biography of the French writer and his work cuts directly to the intersection of thought and life that was essential to Genet's creativity. Arguing that Genet's life was an extraordinary spectacle in which the themes of his most revolutionary works were played out, Stephen Barber gives both the work and its singular inspiration in Genet's life their full due.

Abandoned, arrested, and repeatedly incarcerated, Genet, who died in 1986, led a life that could best be described as a tour of the underworld of the twentieth century.

Similarly, Genet's work is recognized by its nearly obsessive and often savage treatment of certain recurring themes. Sex, desire, death, oppression, domination—these ideas, central to Genet's artistic project, can be seen as preoccupations that arose directly from the artist's travels, imprisonments, sexual and emotional relationships, and political engagements and protests. This trenchant volume focuses directly on the moments in Genet's life in which those preoccupations are vividly projected in his novels, theater works, and film projects.

Genet's works have been hugely influential for a vast array of writers, filmmakers, choreographers, and directors, especially at moments of social crisis; thus Genet's life is not only at the root of his own work but also that of many important artists of the twentieth century. With its frank and illuminating introduction by Edmund White, *Jean Genet* gives readers access to this brilliant and brutal mind.



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Editorial Review

Review

"A magisterial overview of the key episodes in Genet's existence, a profound understanding of his main artistic experiments and a lively sympathy for his political loyalties. . . . I relished reading this book."
(Edmund White 2004-10-01)

"One in a new series of beautifully produced 'Critical Lives' -- very short critical biographies whose main target audience is likely to be undergraduates, but that will also do nicely for a general audience."
(Gregory Woods *The Times Literary Supplement* 2005-03-01)

"He provides a powerful backdrop for understanding Genet's hatred of French society. . . . Mr. Barber's command of Genet's literature and life make his book a good starting point for understanding a sensibility that might otherwise be dismissed as vicious."--*New York Sun*
(Carl Rollyson *New York Sun* 2005-04-18)

"This focused yet fragmentary treatment seems to me to be an apposite way for dealing with Genet, a writer whose life, even now, has immense lacunae. . . . Barber has an elegant prose style, elliptical and engaging in about equal measure, and this makes for a provocative and informative critical biography."

(Paul Kane *The Compulsive Reader* 2005-03-01)

About the Author

Stephen Barber is professor of media arts at Kingston University, Surrey. He is the author of numerous books, including, most recently, *Extreme Europe* and *Projected Cities: Cinema and Urban Space*, also published by Reaktion Books.

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