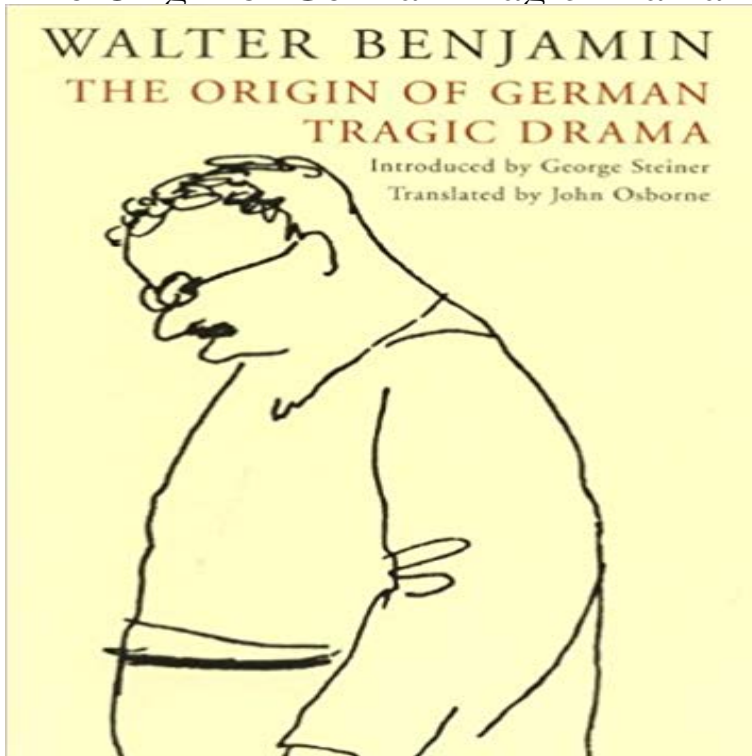


## The Origin of German Tragic Drama



Walter Benjamin is widely acknowledged as amongst the greatest literary critics of this century, and *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* is his most sustained and original work. Indeed, Georg Lukacs one of the most trenchant opponents of Benjamin's aesthetic singled out this work as one of the main sources of literary modernism in the twentieth century. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* begins with a general theoretical introduction on the nature of the baroque art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, concentrating on the peculiar stage-form of the royal martyr dramas called *Trauerspiel*. Benjamin also comments on the engravings of Durer, and the theatre of Shakespeare and Calderon. Baroque tragedy, he argues, was distinguished from classical tragedy by its shift from myth into history. The characteristic atmosphere of the *Trauerspiel* was consequently melancholy. The emblems of baroque allegory point to the extinct values of a classical world that they can never attain or repeat. Their suggestive power, however, remains to haunt subsequent cultures, down to this century.

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