



Leavetaking (Neversink)

Peter Weiss

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"I was on my way to look for a life of my own."

A brilliant, brutally honest autobiographical novel, long out of print, from one of the great artistic polymaths of the 20th century.

This is a Sebaldian account of the narrator's attempt to break free of a repressive upper-middle-class upbringing and make his way as an artist and individual, written in a single incantatory paragraph.

Leavetaking is the story of an upper-middle-class childhood and adolescence in Berlin between the wars. In the course of the book, Weiss plumbs the depths of family life: there is the early death of his beloved sister Margit, the difficult relationship with his parents, the fantasies of adolescence and youth, all set in the midst of an increasing anti-Semitism, which forces the Weiss family to move again and again, a peripatetic existence that only intensifies the narrator's growing restlessness.

The young narrator is largely oblivious to world events and focused instead on becoming an artist, an ambition frustrated generally by his milieu and specifically by his mother, who, herself a former actress, destroys his paintings during one of the family's moves. In the end, he turns to an older mentor, Harry Haller, a fictionalized portrait of Hermann Hesse, who encouraged and supported Weiss, and with Haller's example before him, the narrator takes his first steps towards a truly independent life. Intensely lyrical, written with great imaginative power, *Leavetaking* is a vivid evocation of a world that has disappeared and of the narrator's developing consciousness.

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