



Books of 1981

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Contribution to 'Books of the Year: A Personal Choice', *Observer*, 6 December 1981, 25



Franz Kafka (1883–1924) in 1917

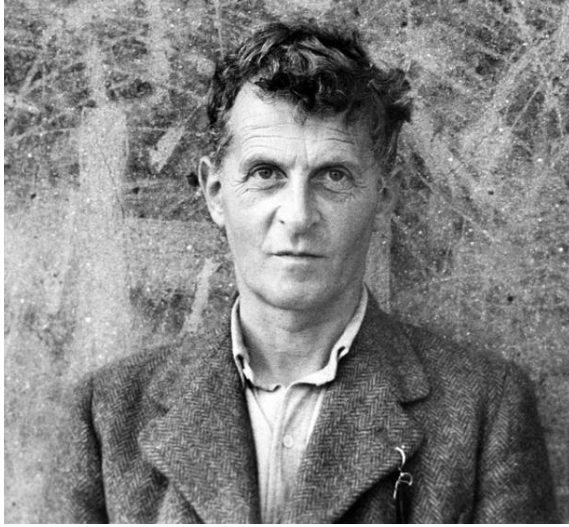
Klaus Wagenbach Archiv, Berlin

ALMOST ANYTHING to do with men of genius seems to me to be of absorbing interest. Hence I greatly enjoyed *K: A Biography of Kafka* by Ronald Hayman, and no less so *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, edited by Rush Rhees, personal reminiscences by some of his friends.¹ Very different as Kafka's nightmare world is from Wittgenstein's philosophical vision, there are similarities: intense concentration, seriousness, a sense of the transcendent, and an obsessional quality

¹ [The full title is *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*. The book was revised and much improved as *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Oxford, 1984).]

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no less powerful and disturbing than the experience of reading Pascal or Dostoevsky.



Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) in 1947

Photo: Ben Richards

I should also like to express my admiration for Julian Budden's third and last volume² of *The Operas of Verdi*, an outstanding achievement of British scholarship; and I read with pleasure *Bismarck* by Edward Crankshaw, a psychologically convincing and wonderfully readable account of a great and evil man.

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² [*From Don Carlos to Falstaff.*]