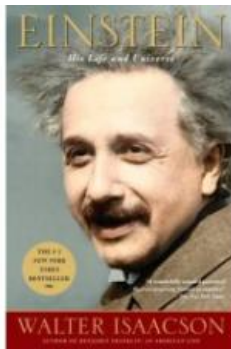


Two Biographies of Albert Einstein

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The year 2007 saw the release of two important biographies of Albert Einstein. *Einstein: His Life and Universe* by Walter Isaacson [Simon & Schuster] is my favorite work on Einstein. Isaacson is CEO of the Aspen Institute and a former executive with CNN and Time. His biography of Einstein is massive and comprehensive. It is also well written and well organized. Isaacson also took advantage of the availability of new Einstein letters and documents in his research.

An excerpt:

His tale encompasses the vast sweep of modern science, from the infinitesimal to the infinite, from the emission of photons to the expansion of the cosmos. A century after his great triumphs, we are still living in Einstein's universe, one defined on the macro side by his theory of relativity and on the micro scale by a quantum mechanics that has proven durable even as it remains disconcerting.

His fingerprints are all over today's technologies. Photoelectric cells and lasers, nuclear power and fiber optics, space travel, and even semi-conductors all trace back to his theories. He signed the letter to Franklin Roosevelt warning that it may be possible to build an atom bomb, and the letters of his famed equation relating energy to mass hover in our minds when we picture the resulting mushroom cloud.

The other major biography is *Einstein: A Biography* by Juergen Neffe and translated from the German by Shelley Frisch [Farrar, Straus and Giroux]. Neffe, associated with the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin, gives primary attention to Einstein's early and most productive years and deals more specifically with Einstein's intellectual development.

An excerpt:

Einstein was one of the most renowned people ever to walk the planet. Certainly no other scientist has come close to his degree of fame and mythic transfiguration. His seemingly paradoxical nature — bourgeois and bohemian, superman and scalawag — lent him an air of mystery. He could reconcile discrepant views of the world, but he was a walking contradiction. Einstein polarized his fellow man like no other. He was a friend to some, and enemy to others, narcissistic and slovenly, easygoing and rebellious, philanthropic and autistic, citizen of the world and hermit, a pacifist whose research was used for military ends.

