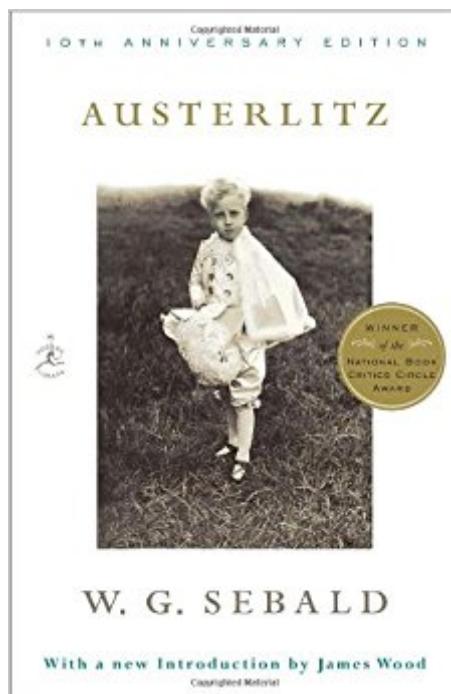


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Austerlitz (Modern Library Paperbacks)



Synopsis

This tenth anniversary edition of W. G. Sebald's celebrated masterpiece includes a new Introduction by acclaimed critic James Wood. *Austerlitz* is the story of a man's search for the answer to his life's central riddle. A small child when he comes to England on a Kindertransport in the summer of 1939, Jacques Austerlitz is told nothing of his real family by the Welsh Methodist minister and his wife who raise him. When he is a much older man, fleeting memories return to him, and obeying an instinct he only dimly understands, Austerlitz follows their trail back to the world he left behind a half century before. There, faced with the void at the heart of twentieth-century Europe, he struggles to rescue his heritage from oblivion.

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Customer Reviews

For those readers fortunate enough to have read W.G. Sebald's inimitable novels "The Emigrants" and "The Rings of Saturn" this latest book by one of the most unique and important literary voices writing today will only add to the admiration building for Sebald and his hauntingly beautiful "Austerlitz." That the work was written in German and translated by the sensitive Anthea Bell somehow adds to the universal impact of Sebald's mind and peculiar technique of telling stories. There are no paragraphs, no chapters, and only an occasional inch of space to bring pause to the writing. True, the technique of placing photographs of "fictional places" encountered by the writer's characters does allow some visual pause, but those pauses are purely additive. Sebald writes about a man (Austerlitz) who despite his lushly satisfying intellectual life of an architectural historian finds

himself in search of his roots. That those roots were blurred by the atrocities of Hitler's Kindertransport program (Jewish children were sent to England by parents hoping for their safety as the wings of evil flapped menacingly in the air) only makes Austerlitz' journey to self discovery the more poignant. His revisiting the sites of his true parents in Prague and Marienbad and Terezinbad, Paris, and Belgium produce some of the most beautifully wrought elegies found in the written word. His walking among the horrors of the obsessive compulsive Hitlerian Final Solution Program is devastating in the way that only researching one's history from time-lapsed memories and visual stimuli can create. Some readers may be put off by the initial rambling technique of getting to the journey that fills the first quarter of this book, not helped by getting adjusted to the pages-long sentences and lack of chapters or pauses. But reflect on the fact that our own minds never stop when obsessed with the desire to know and understand our place in the universe and these initial trivial roadblocks will fade. Eventually Sebald's style ... pulls you into not only a story of great magnitude, passion, and tenderness, it does so with some of the most liquidly gorgeous prose you are likely to encounter. This is the finest of Sebald's books to date. Here is an incredible talent who, thankfully, is steadily producing one fine book after another. Astonishing!

The literary/intellectual world has lost one of its more scintillating stars, when W.G. Sebald, spurred by a heart attack, ran his car into an oncoming traffic and died last week. He was 57 years old. I still haven't recovered fully from the news, since this man's work has deeply influenced my thoughts and the way I read. 'Austerlitz', then, is a beautiful swansong. It is eminently more accessible than his previous books, 'The Emigrants', 'The Rings of Saturn', and 'Vertigo'. It is not to say that Austerlitz is any less ruminative than his earlier work, but there's more of a divested narrative thrust in Austerlitz, and it makes for a breezier (can any Sebald work be 'breezy'?) reading (although Sebald altogether does away with paragraphs and chapters for the most part). The translation by Anthea Bell... I haven't made up my mind about it. Michael Hulse had translated Sebald's earlier books (published by New Directions), and although Bell's translation seems sonorous and good, some of the tough, intransigent lyricism of Hulse's translation seems to be missing here. If you're interested in reading Sebald, definitely start with this haunting novel. Sebald does harrowing things with themes of memory and identity, never giving into portraying the horrors of history with broad, sentimental brushstrokes as many storytellers tend to do. After 'Austerlitz', 'The Emigrants' should be a good follow up read. Then 'The Rings'... and 'Vertigo'. There's a book of Sebald that is supposed to come out next year on Germany's participation in the WWII that was criticized by many Germans as being too... well, as being too starkly honest. There is one more unpublished novel that is on its way to

publication next year in the states (already published in Germany under the title, "Luftkrieg"). I only wonder if there will be any writer in the near future who will speak so eloquently about the act of remembering. Could anyone summon the ghost of Sebald one day, the way Sebald himself had conjured so magically and unforgettably, the spirit of Kafka? One can only wish.

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