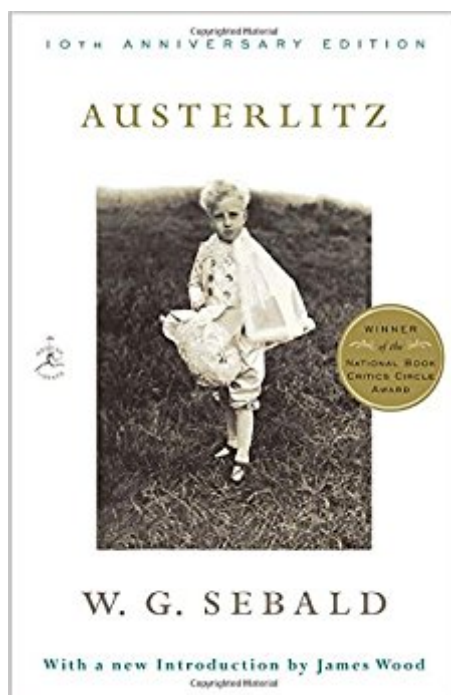


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# Austerlitz (Modern Library Paperbacks)



## 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"[A] beautiful novel . . . quietly breathtaking . . . Sebald contrives not to offer an ordinary, straightforward recital. For what is so delicate is how Sebald makes Austerlitz's story a broken, recessed enigma whose meaning the reader must impossibly rescue." —James Wood, from the Introduction "Sebald stands with Primo Levi as the prime speaker of the Holocaust and, with him, the prime contradiction of Adorno's dictum that after it, there can be no art." —Richard Eder, *The New York Times Book Review* "Sebald is a rare and elusive species . . . but still, he is an easy read, just as Kafka is. . . . He is an addiction, and once buttonholed by his books, you have

neither the wish nor the will to tear yourself away. — Anthony Lane, *The New Yorker*  
— “Sebald’s final novel; his masterpiece, and one of the supreme works of art of our time.” — John Banville, *The Guardian*  
NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF 2001 BY THE LOS ANGELES TIMES  
— NEW YORK MAGAZINE  
— ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY  
— Winner of the Koret Jewish Book Award, the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize, and the Jewish Quarterly Wingate Literary Prize  
— Translator Anthea Bell  
— Recipient of the Schlegel-Tieck Prize and the Helen and Kurt Wolff Prize for Outstanding Translation from German into English

W.G. Sebald was born in Wertach im Allgau, Germany, in 1944. He studied German language and literature in Freiburg, Switzerland, and Manchester. He has taught at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, England, since 1970, becoming professor of European literature in 1987, and from 1989 to 1994 was the first director of the British Center for Literary Translation. His three previous books have won a number of international awards, including the Los Angeles Times Book Award for fiction, the Berlin Literature Prize, and the Literatur Nord Prize.

The book reads like a meandering dream that seems to describe existence itself. Mostly told second (even third hand?) hand recalling the character Austerlitz, who struggles to find his parents lost to the Nazis in WWII. However, this fails to describe this remarkable piece of writing. The book will remain with as much as, *The Emigrants*.

This is not the book for everybody. It is a book of gorgeous prose and slowly unfolding story. While the beauty of the prose carries you along, the story unfolds slowly, but it is such a compelling story that it is hard to stop reading. It is without a doubt an unusual book, but if you don't require a story to race along in a linear fashion, you may just love it. I am extremely glad to have read it.

Austerlitz seems, at first, to be a quiet novel. It moves slowly through its opening sequences—a chance meeting in a railroad terminal, a visit to a fortress and a zoo—and so its narrative power takes you a bit by surprise, as if you had been sitting on a train which had been easing out of the station and find suddenly that it has accelerated and is racing through the countryside. I can't remember reading another book in which the accretion of imagery is as careful and powerful as it is here. The images are all vivid and beautifully drawn, but also metaphorically significant as Austerlitz's story unfolds—evacuated from Prague at age 4-1/2 to save him the Nazis, raised in

Wales with no recollection of his earlier life, and finding himself as an adult trying to reclaim that forgotten past. There is the story, for instance, of the homing pigeon that for three days walked home after its wing was broken. Sebald didn't write *Austerlitz* with the usual white space that one expects in novels (at paragraph breaks and dialogue, for instance)--but he relieves what would otherwise be a stark presentation by including a sequence of photographs. This approach, too, seems integral to the novel and not merely stylistic--for *Austerlitz*, the character, there are no true blank spaces. This does not feel like a Holocaust novel--and even with foreknowledge, the fact that it is can take a reader by surprise in the much the same way that it surprises Sebald's characters. This is a beautiful, haunting novel, and I cannot remember reading anything else that feels like it. Not a straightforward read, but richly rewarding.

phenomenally written and poignant

Sebald was a writer of great significance and influence and his premature death a tragedy, not just for his loved ones but the literary world as well. He won't be everyone's cup of tea because of his unorthodox style. *Austerlitz* is written in a dreamlike or shadowy prose which at times "hints" at events which makes his book a beautiful work of art. I loved this book both for the style and the content. The content of course, as described many times by previous reviewers, is in itself heart wrenching and sad. A man, who as a child was sent to England at the beginning of World War 2 on the Kindertransport by his loving parents who rightly feared for his safety under the Nazis invasion of Europe. It isn't until much later in his life, and after he has phantom glimpses of his life with his parents that he decides to tackle the heart breaking task of searching for them. I did struggle with the first forty pages or so until I adapted to his rather unusual style and from then onwards I was completely hooked. It is a book that will get under your skin and one you won't forget. He talks about architecture and his descriptions of the fascinating buildings he visits and the landscapes he passes through are like a water colour paintings. But much more than that it is a statement on the holocaust and a courageous one at that as it was Sebald's own countrymen who committed the unspeakable horrors that took place under Nazi domination. I was deeply affected by this book which will no doubt be listed as a masterpiece and Sebald as one of the literary giants of the Western world.

stunning. tempted to continue with the rest of his work. have read *After Nature*, *The Emigrants* and *Campos sSanto*, now this in quick succession. best take a break but this is necessary literature.

Austerlitz is a meditation on the price of peace. Austerlitz, the main character, gradually shares the story of his lonely life with the narrator: his childhood as an adopted son of a Welsh pastor, and his growing realisation that his past contains a dark secret. In other hands this would be the stuff of melodrama, but W.G. Sebald creates a narrative of forgetting on a national scale. Austerlitz's lonesome existence is no less due to the destruction of the society he was once a part of than his nature. The haunting question raised is whether our experience of modernity is likewise the result of the suppression of some secret.

This is a profoundly tragic story of a child, sent from eastern Europe during WWII to live with a strange, withdrawn couple in Wales who told him nothing of his past, so that after their deaths, the then nearly adult Jacques Austerlitz had to wait for decades before he could begin to piece together the story of his, and his real parents' lives. Intensely compelling and disturbing.

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