

“NOT AN INNOCENT ENTERPRISE”
THE NARRATOR’S TRANSITION FROM VOYEUR TO VICTIM
IN W.G. SEBALD’S “AUSTERLITZ”

by

Martha Bass Eaheart
A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts
English

Committee:

David Kaufmann

Director

Tamara M. Hawley

John Burt Foster, Jr.

Ruth Metz

Department Chairperson

W. C. Hollis

Dean, College of Humanities
and Social Sciences

Date: November 25, 2008

Fall Semester 2008
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

“Not an Innocent Enterprise”
The Narrator’s Transition from Voyeur to Victim
in W.G. Sebald’s Austerlitz

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University

By

Martha Bass Eaheart
Bachelor of Arts
George Mason University, 2005

Director: David Kaufmann, Associate Professor
English

Fall Semester 2008
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	iii
Chapter 1.....	1
Chapter 2.....	18
Chapter 3.....	30
References.....	42

ABSTRACT

“NOT AN INNOCENT ENTERPRISE”
THE NARRATOR’S TRANSITION FROM VOYEUR TO VICTIM
IN W.G. SEBALD’S AUSTERLITZ

Martha Bass Eaheart, MA

George Mason University, 2008

Thesis Director: David Kaufmann

W.G. Sebald said that Austerlitz was a sequel to The Emigrants. But if Austerlitz is a sequel to The Emigrants, it is one in which Sebald has attempted, by creating a Bildungsroman, making extensive use of allegory, and establishing a close relationship between the narrator and the protagonist, to change the perspective of the narrator so that, it not only is no longer that of a voyeur who has been caught looking and thus become “the object of the gaze of the other,” but, through the narrator’s strong identification with “the other,” it becomes the perspective of a Holocaust victim.

CHAPTER 1

One of the first descriptions in W.G. Sebald's Austerlitz is that of the narrator's memory of his visit, in the 1960s, to the Nocturama located in the zoo in Antwerp, Belgium. After listing the animals he might have seen in the artificial night of the Nocturama he goes on to state that the only animal he recalls clearly is a raccoon. As he remembers:

I watched it for a long time as it sat beside a little stream with a serious expression on its face, washing the same piece of apple over and over again, as if it hoped that all this washing, which went beyond any reasonable thoroughness, would help it to escape the unreal world in which it had arrived, so to speak, through no fault of its own. (4)

From the Nocturama the narrator proceeds immediately to the Antwerp Train Station, which accounts for why he says: "over the years, images of the interior of the Nocturama have become confused in my mind with my memories of the Salle de pas perdus, as it is called in Antwerp Centraal Station" (5). As he begins to describe the waiting room he says that, as he remembers, the people in the station appeared to be similar to the Nocturama's animals in that they were "somehow miniaturized" like the "tiny fennec foxes, spring-hares, hamsters" (6). But one person, in particular, caught his attention; it was a man who, just like the raccoon with the apple, "was not staring apathetically into space" but who "instead was occupied in making notes and sketches obviously related to

the room where we were both sitting” (7). The narrator did not yet know that this man, who he will soon learn is Jacques Austerlitz, is also “trying to escape the unreal world in which” he too “had arrived by no fault of his own.”

The importance of the concept of the “unreal world,” as J.J. Long points out, is more obvious in the original German than in the English translation of Austerlitz (Image 158). “Falsche Welt” (false world) and “falsches Leben” (false life) are used repeatedly in the German version but the repetition is not translated into English, which serves to diminish what Long calls a “leitmotif of the false world or false life” (Image 158). Long further suggests that Austerlitz’s leitmotif evokes “section 18 of Theodor W. Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*, the closing sentence of which reads: Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen,” which Long translates as “it is impossible to live an authentic life in a world that precludes authenticity” (Image 158). The unreal world in which Austerlitz and the narrator attempt to live “authentic lives” is that of Europe after the Holocaust.

Over the course of the novel Austerlitz grapples with another question posed by Adorno, which is “whether after Auschwitz you can go on living” (363). Austerlitz is not, however, the first of Sebald’s works to deal with Adorno’s questions. Most of the characters in Sebald’s The Emigrants also struggle with the question of how to go on living after the Holocaust. Julia Hell, in “Eyes Wide Shut: German Post-Holocaust Authorship” describes one of the defining aspects of The Emigrants, and the one I see as its most interesting feature, as the way in which the narrator is not only a “voyeur” but is also always aware that he is “himself, the object of the gaze of the other” (34-36). Hell defines, in the context of her discussion of Sebald’s works, the “other” as Jewish victims

or survivors of the Holocaust (34). Sebald intended, according to Christopher Bigsby, for Austerlitz to be a sequel to The Emigrants (69). But if Austerlitz is a sequel to The Emigrants, it is one in which Sebald has attempted, by creating a Bildungsroman, making extensive use of allegory, and establishing a close relationship between the narrator and the protagonist, to change the perspective of the narrator so that, it not only is no longer that of a voyeur who has been caught looking and thus become “the object of the gaze of the other,” but, through the narrator’s strong identification with “the other,” it becomes the perspective of a Holocaust victim.

The last pages of The Emigrants illustrate what it means for the narrator to be “the object of the gaze of the other.” The work ends with the narrator looking at a photo, which is fictional and not depicted in the book, of three women working in the Lodz ghetto. The women look directly into the camera as the narrator imagines himself in the place of the ghetto accountant, Walter Genewein, who is said to have taken the picture. Caught in each other’s gaze, they define each other; the reader understands the women in the picture as they are described by the narrator but also understands the narrator in reference to the women. The Emigrants ends with its narrator turning away from the photo; it is too frightening to continue to engage the gaze of the three women in the photo once the narrator realizes that he is standing in the place of its photographer. In “Eyes Wide Shut” Hell compares this ending to “the moment when the voyeur becomes aware of being looked at by someone else” that Jean-Paul Sartre describes in Being and Nothingness. She goes on to state that once the narrator has made this discovery “the text then concludes with a narrator writing his texts under a potentially deadly gaze” (34).

According to Hell “the question this passage poses is: who has the right to tell the story of the dead?” (35). The tension between the narrator as both voyeur and object of the gaze reaches a potentially dangerous intensity in the last pages of The Emigrants but it is always, at least to some degree, a part of the work.

In Austerlitz, Sebald recounts the history of the relationship between the novel’s narrator and its protagonist, Jacques Austerlitz, an architectural historian who has spent his life researching an unwritten project on “the architectural style of the capitalist era” (33). After the two meet in Belgium “in the second half of the 1960s,” they continue to run into each other at various times during the sixties and seventies. During the years of these meetings Austerlitz has no knowledge of his life before he was four and a half years old, arrived in Wales, and became the foster child of a Welsh minister and his wife. After a twenty year period in which Austerlitz and the narrator lose touch with each other, caused in part by the narrator’s one year return to Germany, they once again, through coincidence, meet in London. At that time Austerlitz relates the story, which he himself has only just discovered, of how he came to England from Czechoslovakia on a Kindertransport in 1939 and what he has found out about his family’s history.

He recounts that, despite many clues to his identity, including his name, he had for many years avoided learning anything about his earliest years; he says, in fact, “it never occurred to me to wonder about my true origins” (125). In retrospect, it seems particularly strange to him that, given his profession of architectural historian, he was able to ignore European history after World War I. When some of his early memories finally return, he researches his past by traveling to Czechoslovakia, learns the story of

what probably happened to his mother, and, after returning to London, experiences a mental breakdown. As the novel ends, Austerlitz has recovered, given the keys to his London house to the narrator, and left for France to investigate what might have happened to his father and, possibly, to look for his former lover, Marie de Verneuil.

Sebald is said to have gotten the idea for Austerlitz while watching “Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport,” a British television documentary that aired in 2000, which told the story of the German sanctioned transportation of Jewish children from Nazi occupied areas to foster homes outside of German control (Bigby 69). Andreas Huyssen says that the character Austerlitz was based on two actual people with whom Sebald was acquainted and identifies the first as Susie Bechhofer (972). According to Joseph Cuomo, Bechhofer’s early life closely resembles Austerlitz’s. A participant in the Kindertransport, she became the foster child of a Welsh minister who, after his wife’s death, was institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital (unlike Austerlitz, Bechhofer had a twin sister with whom she shared the experience) (110). The second actual person who inspired the novel was an architectural historian who worked in London and who Sebald ran into repeatedly while traveling in Belgium during the sixties and seventies (Cuomo 111). Since its protagonist represents an amalgamation of more than one real person, Austerlitz is more of a novel than The Emigrants or any of Sebald’s other works. Although it is a novel based on the fictional character Austerlitz’s life story, that story is itself simple and unsurprising enough that Michael Hofmann describes it as “trite” (89).

The interaction between the narrator and Austerlitz makes the story unique. Sebald explained to Lubow that he had no use for omniscient and anonymous narrators but rather felt that “the story comes through someone’s mind” and that someone should be identified (169). As a result of the story “coming through someone’s mind” there is no dialog in Sebald’s works; all the characters sound just like the narrator. But in the Lubow interview Sebald also stressed that the author and the narrator were not the same and that the narrator was not an “authentic person” (169). Massimo Leone states that, in most of Sebald’s works, the narrator is “alone” with an “*absence* of guides or models to follow” (89). As we will see, this is not the case in Austerlitz. Greg Bond in “On the Misery of Nature and the Nature of Misery” finds Austerlitz’s different sort of narrator, compared to those in his other works, to be something of a relief and claims that the “narrator’s role is reduced to that of witness and orderer of material—there is much less vertigo, or personal emotion for the narrator himself, and more space for the more reserved voice of Austerlitz” (42).

But at the beginning of Austerlitz the narrator, just like Sebald’s other narrators, does experience vertigo and seems very “alone” and filled with “personal emotion.” In fact, in the first forty pages of Austerlitz the narrator experiences vertigo on three separate occasions. Hell makes the point, although she does not include Austerlitz in her discussion, that “the many moments of vertigo in Sebald can be read as male hysteria—as a gendered drama articulating again and again the illegitimacy of post-Holocaust authorship under the gaze of the other” (35). Maya Barzilai, in “Facing the Past and the Female Spectre in W.G. Sebald’s The Emigrants,” expresses a similar view when she

says that “Sebald privileges a viewpoint that filters all incomprehensible or horrific events through male anxiety” (215). Hell, when discussing the work of Martin Walser, speaks of the “crisis of post Holocaust authorship” (which she previously defined as the moment when the narrator/voyeur becomes aware that he is being watched) as something that “emerges when the non-Jewish German author confronts” (the other in the form of) “Jewish survivors” (20).

At the end of The Emigrants the “other” with whom Sebald’s narrator engages is represented by the women in the picture, who one assumes are Holocaust victims. Deane Blackler makes the point, although in a different context, that the photographs in Sebald’s works are an attempt to capture, in a way that the text cannot, that which is “other” (146). Although Blackler is also referring, with the use of “other,” to a “metaphysical presence,” this way of looking at the “other” in the context of Sebald’s works (and my essay), although not totally definitive, is useful. Applying Blackler’s definition to the photographs in Austerlitz we find that “the other” includes Austerlitz as a child (but not an adult), an anonymous woman in the Theresienstadt ghetto, and Austerlitz’s mother. Barzilai refers to “(m)other figures” in The Emigrants and it is true, in that work, that “the other” with whom the narrator engages is usually female and often a maternal figure (204). The “other” that the narrators of The Emigrants and Austerlitz confront is Jewish, either a victim or a survivor of the Holocaust, and often female but, as Blackler suggests, Sebald’s “other” also includes anyone who elicits an “uncanny” response from the narrator. Hell adds to the definition of “other” when she explains that the notion that the narrator as the subject of the gaze of this “other” is “a paranoid fantasy” that Sebald and

several other “post-fascist” German authors share, which, however, “produces fascinating texts” (36). The “other” is, in Hell’s definition, a component of this “post-fascist” fantasy.

It is interesting to note that, although Hell’s essay appeared in the same issue of New German Critique as did Amir Eshel’s essay “Against the Power of Time: The Poetics of Suspension in W.G. Sebald’s Austerlitz” and Barzilai’s essay was published in J.J. Long’s and Anne Whitehead’s W.G. Sebald—A Critical Companion, which included several essays on Austerlitz, neither Hell nor Barzilai mention Austerlitz in their essays. Since both Hell and Barzilai wrote about Sebald’s treatment, as a non-Jewish German writer, of the Holocaust, it would seem logical for them to mention Austerlitz, which many, including Zilcosky, claim (though it was written after The Emigrants) is Sebald’s first work to deal directly with the subject (693). My explanation for the omission of Austerlitz from Hell’s and Barzilai’s essays is that both those essays deal with the subject of a narrator “under the gaze of the other” and in Austerlitz, as stated earlier, Sebald has attempted to remove the narrator from that gaze. In this essay I will use both their arguments, but particularly Hell’s, as I attempt to explain how, in Austerlitz, Sebald moves the perspective of the narrator away from that of the voyeur who is also the object of the other’s gaze and into that of a Holocaust victim and explore what Sebald may have hoped to achieve by this change in perspective.

Austerlitz begins, however, with the narrator positioned much like the narrator of The Emigrants, a voyeur who is the object of the gaze of the “other.” In the third sentence of the novel, when the narrator describes his arrival in Belgium, he also describes his first

attack of vertigo with these words: “as the train rolled slowly over the viaduct with its curious pointed turrets on both sides and into the dark station concourse I had begun to feel unwell, and this sense of indisposition persisted for the whole of my visit to Belgium on that occasion” (3). Vertigo may have been exactly what led the narrator to Austerlitz because, on the day that they meet, after becoming unwell, the narrator first sits for a while on a bench at the Antwerp zoo, then enters the Nocturama, and then proceeds “straight into the station” and Austerlitz (5). The emphasis in the first few pages of the novel is on the narrator as an uneasy voyeur; he first views the animals in the Nocturama and then, after entering the train station, looks at the people as if they too were creatures in the zoo. While the narrator seems to find the country of Belgium to be a source of discomfort and anxiety, the precise cause of his feelings is left unclear.

The cause of the narrator’s vertigo upon his arrival in Belgium may be unclear but that is not the case with his second attack of vertigo. The day after Austerlitz, in their first conversation, mentioned the fortress of Breendonk as an example of “outsize buildings” that “cast the shadow of their own destruction before them,” the narrator, now alone, reads in the newspaper that the fortress of Breendonk was, after being seized by the Germans, “made into a reception and penal camp which remained in existence until August 1944” and has now been made into “a national memorial and a museum of the Belgian resistance” that is open to visitors (19). Austerlitz’s earlier mention of the fortress gives the narrator reason to notice the article and inspires him to visit Breendonk. On his arrival, the fortress appears to him as a “monstrous incarnation of ugliness and blind violence” (21). Upon entering the building, the reader learns that the narrator is

probably German, because, while he finds he cannot visualize the prisoners who must have been held there, he says it is “the good fathers and dutiful sons” of Germany who jump to his imagination and that he could “well imagine” the SS guards because “after all, I had lived among them until my twentieth year” (23). As he moves farther into the fortress he feels “the air was growing thinner” but still proceeds to a smaller room with a drain in the middle which simultaneously reminds him of a pit and “the butcher’s shop I always had to pass on my way to school” (25). There he has a strong reaction and says:

No one can explain exactly what happens within us when the doors behind which our childhood terrors lurk are flung open. But I do remember that there in the casemate at Breendonk a nauseating smell of soft soap rose to my nostrils, and that this smell, in some strange place in my head, was linked to the bizarre German word for scrubbing brush, *Wurzelburste*, which was a favorite of my father’s and which I had always disliked. Black striations began to quiver before my eyes and I had to rest my forehead against the wall, which was gritty, covered with bluish spots, and seemed to me to be perspiring with cold beads of sweat.

(25)

In this passage the narrator becomes physically ill, almost faints, and even imagines the wall he is leaning on is perspiring because of the connection between his childhood memories and the location in which he is experiencing those memories. The reaction of the narrator of Austerlitz to Breendonk illustrates perfectly what Hell described as “male hysteria” triggered by “the illegitimacy of post-Holocaust authorship under the gaze of the other” (35).

The “other” that confronts the narrator in this example is the idea of the former prisoners who the narrator cannot even imagine. Immediately after this passage, the narrator is careful to point out that his feelings were not caused by the specific history of Breendonk with its “third degree interrogations which were conducted here around the time I was born” because, at the time of his visit, he had no knowledge of the actual events, such as the torture of the author Jean Amery, that might have occurred in the room in which he was standing (26). The narrator’s panic is caused by something that is located deeper within his psyche than historical facts. Mark McCulloch says “one does not have to look far to find the influence of Freud, whose writings were well known to Sebald” (3). The narrator, in this passage, seems to be having an experience of what Freud describes as the “uncanny” in which the conscious mind encounters something which has been repressed. The narrator’s words: “what happens within us when the doors behind which our childhood terrors lurk are flung open” suggest just such an experience. It is left to the reader to make the connection that something in not only his childhood but also in his relationship to Germany’s past is causing his vertigo and experience of the “uncanny.”

In December 1996, close to thirty years (but only ten pages) later, just as he is about to reconnect with Austerlitz after the twenty year break in their relationship, the narrator experiences his third and last attack of vertigo. He says “I was in some anxiety” because “the sight in my right eye had entirely disappeared overnight” and as a result goes to London “to see a Czech ophthalmologist” (35-36). After his medical procedure is complete he enters a crowded bar to wait until it is time to get his train home but is

feeling unwell from “the contrast medium” with which he was injected (38). When he first sees Austerlitz, the narrator is “Leaning my head against the wall, and breathing deeply and slowly from time to time when I felt nausea rising” (39). At first glance it may seem to be a stretch to describe this as an attack of vertigo; after all, the narrator has a legitimate reason to feel ill since he has just been injected with “contrast medium.” But if Sebald had not intended for this scene to be read as an attack of vertigo he probably would not have had the narrator proceed directly from his appointment with an actual “Czech ophthalmologist” to his encounter with Austerlitz, a figurative “Czech ophthalmologist.” The narrator seems to need more help to clear his vision than one “ophthalmologist” can provide.

By the third attack the narrator is blinded by his vertigo and is now in much the same position, although then the narrator was only compelled to look away, as the narrator was at the end of The Emigrants. Perhaps this is what Sebald was suggesting when he said Austerlitz was a sequel to The Emigrants. The narrator of Austerlitz begins (this third attack of vertigo occurs on just page 38) in the same position that the narrator of The Emigrants ended, blinded by the gaze of the “other.” As Hell suggests, there is a connection in “post Holocaust authorship” between “defeated masculinity and blindness” and the narrator’s third insistence of vertigo illustrates this point (22). As Zilcosky also explains, there is a link between Austerlitz’s name and the concept of being blind and lost because during the battle of Austerlitz, the allied troops were unable to see because of dense fog (687-689). Like the European allies, who did not know where they were and

acted blindly, Austerlitz's main character and narrator are blinded and lost because of European history.

The correct way for writers to approach the place of the Holocaust in European history was something that concerned Sebald and about which he often spoke. He, according to John Zilcosky, "accused other non-Jewish German authors of writing in the wrong way about the Holocaust" (693) and, in an interview with Joseph Cuomo, called much of that writing "shameful" (112). But Sebald was drawn to the subject, possibly because, having grown up in post-war Germany, he did not ever remember meeting a Jew until he moved to England (35). Sebald said he was interested in restoring "a social history that was obliterated" and not "in Judaism or the Jewish people" (qtd in Lubow 167). He sensed, in his words, "some sort of emptiness that needed to be filled by accounts from witnesses one can trust" but that those witnesses "did not exist in that country any longer" (qtd in Silverblatt 85). Sebald believed that the German people had repressed the memory of not only the events of the Holocaust but also the pre-war existence of Jews in Germany (Biggsby 90).

Sebald felt that that these repressed memories had to be addressed and spoke specifically about how literature could, and should, restore this history. According to Sebald, as he told Arthur Lubow, remembering constituted "a moral and political act" (161). In a 2001 speech titled "An Attempt at Restitution," delivered at the Stuttgart House of Literature, he said "only in literature can there be an attempt at restitution over and above the mere recital of facts and over and above scholarship" (qtd in Biggsby 27). Blackler goes so far as to suggest that Sebald may have continued to write in German,

even though he had resided in England for thirty years, as an act of “restitution” (82). Sebald felt that the literary portrayal of these memories should follow definite guidelines; Zilcosky explains that Sebald was opposed to any “melodrama” in literary descriptions of the Holocaust and that he “avoids melodrama by, first, depicting only a ‘holocaust-in-absence,’ and second using only ‘mediated’ narration” (693). Sebald confirmed this when, in conversation with Michael Silverblatt, he stated “the only way in which one can approach these things, in my view, is obliquely, tangentially, by reference rather than by direct confrontation” (80).

Critics have generally found Sebald’s approach to writing about the Holocaust, as exemplified by The Emigrants, to be very successful. In 1996, the year in which the English translation was published, The Emigrants won first place in the Jewish Book Fair (Parry 110). In The Language of Silence Ernestine Schlant points out two different ways in which The Emigrants presents a “unique achievement in German literature” (19) . First, she says Sebald “begins to mourn the destruction of Jews in Germany” by “giving voice to the culture and the lives that were destroyed.” Secondly, Schlant explains that The Emigrants “resurrects a pre-Nazi era in which Germans and Jews were not polarized into victims and perpetrators” (228). Katharina Hall finds similarities between The Emigrants and traditional “Yizkor” books. Hall explains these Holocaust memorial books (whose name comes from the beginning of the Jewish prayer for the dead, “Yizkor Elohim”) as being “a memorial and an act of bearing witness which symbolically reclaim the individuals and communities which have been lost” and are written in the first person, usually by an editor who was in a position of exile and included extensive documentation

in the form of “photographs as well as maps and drawings” (154). Hall concludes that Sebald is “exploring the Jewish and German legacy of the Holocaust in a radical and highly effective new way” that is linked to the traditional Jewish way of memorializing the dead (161).

Sebald’s statement that “only in literature can there be an attempt at restitution,” however, strikes me as problematic for several different reasons. First, since Sebald was born in 1944 he did not bear any personal responsibility for anything that happened during the Holocaust. It is hard to understand why he, nonetheless, felt a responsibility to provide restitution. The second problem I have with the statement is with Sebald’s use of the word restitution in the context of Holocaust memories. Sebald feels that Germans have repressed the history of the Holocaust and that literature should be used to help restore that history; that is an attainable goal but it does not meet the definition of restitution. The word restitution suggests the restoration of something that has been removed or stolen (not something that has been repressed); in scientific usage the word means a state of return to an original condition. Real estate, stocks and bonds, jewelry, or even atoms are suitable objects for restitution. But Sebald stated that he was not particularly interested “in Judaism or the Jewish people,” or by implication actual restitution, but in restoring memories, specifically the memory of historical events. As Ruth Franklin, whose grandmother was enslaved in the Lodz ghetto, points out it is not possible to restore memories that were lost because of the Holocaust. Franklin reports that she was initially drawn to the closing passage in The Emigrants because it helped to

fill the blank in her memory (caused by the loss of her grandmother) but ultimately came to the conclusion that “the blankness, however, is closer to the truth” (142).

Thirdly, although Schlant commends Sebald for recreating a German past “in which Germans and Jews were not polarized into victims and perpetrators,” Sebald’s statement about restitution continues that polarization; even Germans and Jews who were not alive at the time of the Holocaust are seen as victims or perpetrators. Whatever motivated Sebald’s need to provide “restitution,” the effect of that need is to construct, as Hell’s essay explains, a fantasy which works to turn Jews into the “other.” Barzilai seems to have recognized this when she faults Sebald’s portrayal of Jewish characters in The Emigrants because it “recalls the issue of the effeminace and uncanny construction of the Jew prior to the Second World War” (204).

Understanding the other is a topic that Maria Lugones deals with in her essay titled “Traveling, and Loving Perception.” In it Lugones gives her own explanation of Marilyn Frye’s term, “arrogant perception.” As Frye uses the term it applies to the way women are often seen by men. But Lugones uses the term to address the way in which “white/Anglo” women tend to view women who are “outsiders.” For Lugones “arrogant perception” is “a failure to identify with the object of one’s perception” (391). Lugones refers to different cultures as “worlds” and the process of going back and forth between them as “world travel.” Her suggested remedy for this “arrogant perception” is to “travel” to the “world” of the outsider and become a part of that “world.” Her term for this “travel,” which represents the opposite of “arrogant perception,” is “loving perception.” Maria Lugones is an advocate, although in a totally different context, of becoming the

“other.” Lugones recommends this as technique that women of different ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds might use to gain greater solidarity and understanding of each other. She does not suggest it as a way that men might overcome “arrogant perception.” The concept of “arrogant perception” is, however, closely tied to, maybe even the source of, what Hell calls “male hysteria” caused by being “the object of the gaze of the other” (35). Considering Lugones’ and Hell’s arguments together, it appears that looking at the atrocities of the Holocaust from the perspective of “arrogant perception,” which is arguably the typical position of authorship, is likely to trigger feelings of “illegitimacy” of that “authorship.” I wonder if it is possible that Sebald, in an attempt to overcome the “arrogant perception” that his previous use of the term “restitution” demanded, was trying to position the narrator of Austerlitz as a “world traveler,” in Lugones’ sense of the term, and this is why he sought to change the narrator’s perspective into that of a Holocaust victim.

CHAPTER 2

Although by the end of the novel the narrator's perspective has become that of a Holocaust victim, the three insinuations of vertigo in the early pages of Austerlitz demonstrate that the narrator begins the novel physically ill from anxiety caused by the illegitimacy of authorship and very much aware of the gaze of the "other." At the end of the novel the narrator's anxiety and vertigo are gone and the main project of the novel, which is to ensure that the narrator is no longer subject to the other's gaze, has been accomplished. Sebald makes use of at least three different techniques to achieve this change in the narrator's point of view. The first technique that I will discuss is the use of the bildungsroman, the second is the allegory contained within that bildungsroman, and the third is the close relationship between the narrator and Austerlitz, who are sometimes portrayed as interchangeable.

The novel can be viewed as a bildungsroman in which, through his relationship with Austerlitz, a survivor who is the child of Holocaust victims, the narrator learns, about the German past. When they meet, however, Austerlitz has not yet become aware of his personal connection to the Holocaust and is still avoiding twentieth century history. After both Austerlitz and the narrator leave Belgium and have returned to England, where they both live and are university instructors, their relationship continues and the narrator says: "almost every time I went to London in the years that followed I visited Austerlitz"

(32). These visits occur in the office in which Austerlitz meets with his students; there they discuss Austerlitz's architectural history studies and his "obsession with railway stations" (34). The narrator compares Austerlitz to the teachers he knew in Germany by saying:

When I began my own studies in Germany I had learnt almost nothing from the scholars then lecturing in the humanities there, most of them academics who had built their careers in the 1930s and 1940s and still nurtured delusions of power, and I found Austerlitz the first teacher I could listen to since my time in primary school. (32-33)

Once Austerlitz becomes the narrator's instructor, the process by which the narrator can escape the gaze of the other has been set in motion. But the narrator returns to Germany in 1975, which he at this point refers to as his "native country," and though he only stays for a year and he writes to Austerlitz from Germany, the connection between the two is broken.

When they meet in the bar in 1996, after the twenty year gap in their relationship, the narrator explains that Austerlitz had, only that day:

been thinking of our encounters in Belgium, so long ago now, and telling himself he must find someone to whom he could relate his own story, a story which he had learned only in the last few years and for which he needed the kind of listener I had once been in Antwerp, Liege, and Zeebrugge. (42-43)

The symbiotic nature of the relationship between Austerlitz and the narrator is now established; Austerlitz needs a pupil just as much as the narrator needs a teacher. This

aspect of their relationship was not a part of the narrator's role in The Emigrants; none of the characters in that work "needed" the narrator to be a "listener."

Amir Eshel also sees Austerlitz as a bildungsroman and suggests that the pivotal point for understanding this occurs late in the novel when Austerlitz and the narrator meet in Paris, Austerlitz gives him the key to his London house (79), and tells him, "I could stay there whenever I liked, he said, and study the black and white photographs which, one day, would be all that was left of his life" (293). Eshel states that this scene "suggests a different reading of the plot altogether" because, at this point, the reader realizes that the photographs that have appeared in the book were not available to the narrator until he had been handed the key (79). This leads Eshel to state that "re-reading the plot from the narrator's perspective, it now seems obvious that the narrative is a post-modern crypto-*Bildungsroman* stretching over some thirty years" (80). "Re-reading the plot from the narrator's perspective" also puts the emphasis on the narrator and foregrounds his story; Austerlitz's role becomes primarily that of the narrator's teacher and the purpose of Austerlitz's memory recovery becomes to instruct the narrator.

If one of Sebald's goals was restitution, why did he write a bildungsroman about the Holocaust in which the protagonist is a young non-Jewish German living in England? Sebald may have chosen the Bildungsroman format for Austerlitz because of his desire to describe a distanced "holocaust-in-absence" by the use of "mediated" narration. Since the narrator is in the position of a pupil recounting what he has learned from his teacher, that position imposes the desired distance and "mediated" narration on the novel. But the Bildungsroman accomplishes something else; it legitimizes everything the narrator says

because he is merely repeating what Austerlitz, who as a child of victims of the Holocaust has a right to speak, has said. But one must remember that, unlike the characters in The Emigrants, Austerlitz is a fictional character. Can the narrator's position as a post-Holocaust author be legitimized in this way? It appears that whatever restitution is taking place in Austerlitz occurs at least as much for the narrator's benefit as for Austerlitz's. What is being restored, by the teacher student relationship, is the legitimacy of the narrator's position as one who can speak without the constant awareness that he is "himself, the object of the gaze of the other," which was always present in The Emigrants.

But it is not just the bildungsroman aspect of the novel that restores the legitimacy of the narrator's position. As part of what he teaches the narrator, Austerlitz presents an allegory. In the early years of the relationship between Austerlitz and the narrator, since Austerlitz has repressed his memories of his first years in Czechoslovakia, they never discuss the Holocaust. It is during these conversations, however, that Austerlitz presents an allegorical explanation of modern European history. Austerlitz's name, itself, is laden with symbolism. It immediately suggests the battle that marked the beginning of the end of Napoleon's victories and the beginning of modern European history. Eshel explains the implication of Austerlitz's name by saying that "the reader is expected to find inscribed in Austerlitz's name the modern, Napoleonic 'historical paradigm,' the idea of a forcefully united Europe under one economic, political and symbolic hegemony" (88). This modern concept of Europe began with Enlightenment thought but did not become consolidated until the Industrial Revolution. In the very first meeting between Austerlitz

and the narrator, Austerlitz explains that it was only once the clocks in Europe's train stations "were all standardized around the middle of the nineteenth century did time truly reign supreme" (12). Eshel states that Austerlitz sees the standardization of time as part of "this paradigm of organizing aggressive rationality as the root of all evil" (88).

Even though Austerlitz's explanation of the allegory of European history begins with no overt mention of the Holocaust, the subject is never far away. The first meeting between the narrator and Austerlitz occurs in a train station and their first conversation is about the architectural history of that station. Eshel explains that "train stations become for Austerlitz the signifier of his personal fixation on loss" (84). Austerlitz, as Eshel points out, teaches the narrator that "railroad transportation holds the key to understanding the modern age" (84). Long asserts, in a discussion of The Rings of Saturn, that for Sebald "any sense of subjective autonomy or authenticity is jeopardized by the technological innovation of modernity symbolized by the train" (Image 146). But, as Sebald noted, in discussing The Emigrants with Eleanor Wachtel, "the railway played a very, very prominent part, as one knows, in the whole process of deportation" (53). Sebald was counting on the reader understanding the reference to the role of trains in the Holocaust.

The Antwerp train station was commissioned by King Leopold who is chiefly remembered as the Belgian ruler responsible for the colonization of the Congo and the slave labor that was associated with the production of rubber. In a synopsis of a BBC documentary on the Congo, Nick Fraser calls Belgium's role in the Congo "a horrifying prelude in European history to the Holocaust." Andreas Huyssen suggests that the

presence of Belgium and King Leopold in Austerlitz “rewrites Hannah Arendt’s argument about the affinity between European colonialism in Africa and the Nazi regime” (971). Since the reader knows about the Holocaust and Austerlitz does not, McCulloch makes the point that, “it is this denial that invites the author to approach the ghastly subject in the first place” (135). Although Austerlitz is in denial, the narrator directly introduces the subject of the Holocaust into the early pages of the novel when, inspired by what Austerlitz has told him about the pre-World War II history of the fortress, he makes the solitary visit to Breendonk.

Although much of the allegorical explanation of the Holocaust is presented before there has been any actual discussion of the subject between the narrator and Austerlitz, the presentation of the allegory culminates, near the end of the book, in an outraged tirade against the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. Austerlitz meets an old acquaintance from his student days in Paris, Henri Lemoine, who instructs him about the history of the library. First Lemoine states that it is “the official manifestation of the increasingly importunate urge to break with everything which still has some living connection to the past” (286). He explains that in the exact location of the present library “there stood until the end of the war an extensive warehousing complex to which the Germans brought all the loot they had taken from the homes of the Jews of Paris” (288). Their discussion ends with Lemoine stating “the whole affair is buried in the most literal sense beneath the foundations of our pharonic President’s Bibliotheque” (289). Although Long sees this discussion in terms of modernity and says Lemoine “suggests that the state is built on a willed historical amnesia and sustains itself through the ongoing exercise of disciplinary

power” (Image 83), the implication that all of present day Europe rests on the “foundation” of the Holocaust is clear.

In fact, all the allegorical elements of Austerlitz’s name and his story combine to reveal that, as Eshel has said: “Theresienstadt is the most radical facet of the economic, political, and symbolic order of post-Enlightenment modernity” (86) and the allegory, therefore, serves to de-emphasize Germany’s responsibility for the Holocaust. Eshel calls this a “questionable universalization through Europeanization of the Holocaust” and feels that in Austerlitz “modernity is all too clearly configured as necessarily leading to Theresienstadt” (88). Long disagrees by saying “however one seeks to understand the Holocaust, though, an examination of its relationship to modernity is inescapable” (Image 2). The Holocaust, according to Long, can be viewed as either “a pathological reaction to the experience of modernity” or “a regression from the rational processes of civilization to an archaic or barbaric state” but can only be understood in terms of modernity (Image 2). Huysen supports Eshel’s point when he says of Austerlitz’s name, “Jarring as it may seem, the name also bears a linguistic proximity to Auschwitz” (973). Linguistically and allegorically, Austerlitz and Auschwitz are closely connected.

Sebald is not, however, unique in suggesting a “universalization” of the Holocaust. Some feminist writings on the Holocaust deliver a very similar message. This explanation, written by Aviva Cantor, looks at the role of patriarchal power:

What made the Holocaust possible (and some may argue inevitable) is the fact of patriarchy, and the fact that patriarchal values dominate our society...Patriarchy is rooted in the elevation of power to the highest value and in the struggle for it

among groups of men and by individual men. Men seek power over each other, over women, over children, over animals, over the natural world, and justify this on grounds of utility. It is these values which have made the Holocaust possible. (qtd in Chicago 40)

The link between this feminist explanation and Austerlitz's allegory is that both view the Holocaust, for similar but not precisely the same reasons, as the "inevitable" product of European history. Melissa Raphael, a Jewish feminist theologian, sees patriarchy and the Holocaust to be closely connected and even says that "redemption of both women and God from patriarchy was occurring as together they fell into the holocaustal pit" (156). At first glance this statement does not seem to have much in common with Austerlitz but there is a similarity between seeing either patriarchy, as Raphael does, or "organized aggressive rationality," as Austerlitz does, as "the root of all evil" (Eshel 88). At the very least, both theories present meta-narratives and Sebald's use of a meta-narrative, as Eshel says, seems to be "all too implicated in the Enlightenment project that it criticizes" (89).

Although Sebald never refers directly to patriarchy, Austerlitz's allegory still addresses the subject. Barzilai, in her discussion of The Emigrants, makes the comment that "the history of European Jewry in the twentieth century is often marked as feminine in Sebald's writing" (212) and that this is at least as true of Austerlitz as it was of The Emigrants. The most obvious way in which this is expressed in the novel is presented by Austerlitz's mother, Agata Austerlitzova. When Austerlitz goes to Czechoslovakia he learns that his parents "always remained unmarried," which would probably have been unusual in the 1930s (154). But the effect of their not being married is that Austerlitz's

name, upon which Sebald's allegory of European history is based, comes from his mother and not his father. In addition, all the clues that point or should have pointed Austerlitz to his history come from female sources. After recovering from his experience of memory recovery in the Liverpool Street Station, Austerlitz visits "an antiquarian bookstore" owned by "Penelope Peacefull" (141). As he enters her shop, Peacefull is working on a crossword puzzle and even asks Austerlitz for help with the clues, when they hear, on the radio playing in the background, "two women talking to each other about the summer of 1939, when they were children and had been sent to England on a special transport" (141). The women discuss the routes their trains took and Austerlitz realizes "that these fragments of memory were part of my life as well" (141).

Later in the novel Austerlitz tells the narrator how, at an earlier point in his life, when he was a student in Paris, he became very close to a French woman, Marie de Verneuil. She arranged a vacation for the two of them to the Marienbad spa near "the Auschowitz Springs" which in the late nineteenth century "had gained a great reputation for curing the obesity that was so common among the middle class" (201). Once they arrived in Prague, Austerlitz was initially happy but then, as he told Marie, "something unknown wrenched at my heart here in Marienbad, something very obvious like an ordinary name or a term which one cannot remember for the sake of anyone or anything in the world" (213). Decades later, when he finally goes to Czechoslovakia, he learns that he and his parents had visited Marienbad when he was a toddler and that his unease must have been caused by the memories of that visit that were trying to return. Coincidence is important to Sebald's work but it seems more than random coincidence

that it was Marie de Verneuil who took Austerlitz to a place where he could have conceivably recovered his memories. Verneuil, although without any knowledge of what she had done, led him to a place in which the connection to his past was strong even though Austerlitz was not yet ready to have the past re-surface.

When Austerlitz finally arrives in Czechoslovakia to investigate, he goes to the state archives in Prague and has difficulty making himself understood until he meets Tereza Ambrosova, an English speaking clerk. She is able to provide him with a list of families named Austerlitz who lived in Prague in the 1930s. Armed with this list he makes his way to Vera Rysanova who “had been my mother Agata’s neighbor and my nursemaid in the thirties” (152). Vera is able to tell Austerlitz about his life, his father’s life until he left for Paris, and his mother’s life before she was deported. With the exception of the headmaster, Penrith-Smith, who tells him that his real name is Jacques Austerlitz, none of the information Austerlitz needs to reclaim his past comes to him from a man. His Jewish past is feminized or at least women provide the only conduit to knowledge of that past.

But Sebald does not just feminize the history of European Jewry; he also feminizes all pre-World War II European history. As Eric Santner points out, Sebald, like Walter Benjamin, usually sees “history” and “catastrophe” as synonymous (75). But Sebald also describes an idyllic history. This sense of an idyllic, pre-modern history, is consistent with the allegory that is presented in the novel because it provides a counterpoint, a sort of past that modernity left behind, to contrast with the present. Bond points out that Andromeda Lodge the home of Austerlitz’s school friend Gerald

Fitzpatrick is described as a “utopian landscape” that “is projected back before the calamity of the Holocaust” (42). For Austerlitz the embodiment of this “utopia” is presented by Gerald’s mother, Adela Fitzpatrick, who acted as a substitute mother to him even after he finished school. Of his time at her home he says “I could wish now...to have vanished without trace in the peace that always reigned there” (78). The idyllic life of Andromeda Lodge with its balance with nature is feminized just as the 20th century is masculinized. Long questions that Andromeda Lodge is idyllic and says, “its status as a rural idyll is destabilized by the fact that its inhabitants are gripped by a mania for collecting dead things” (Image 39). It would be more accurate, however, to say its male “inhabitants” are collectors of “dead things” since Adela is not a collector. Blackler also feels that Adela is a significant figure in the novel and that she provides “a key moment for understanding the fictional strategies in Austerlitz” (106). Of a time when Adela and Austerlitz are watching shadows in the ballroom Austerlitz says: “Adela leaned towards me and asked: “Do you see the fronds of the palm trees, do you see the caravan coming through the dunes over there?” (159). Blackler feels that Adela was not just teaching Austerlitz how to view the shadows (and the world) but explaining to the reader how to approach Sebald’s works. But that superior understanding, which Adela possesses, and the idyllic feminine past, which Adela represents, along with European Jewry, have fallen victim to the inevitable history of modernity. This perspective is actually very close to the feminist views expressed by Cantor and Raphael; the past is depicted as idyllic and feminine and the 20th century is seen as catastrophic and masculine. In Austerlitz it is

not just the idyllic feminine past that is seen as victim of catastrophic masculine history
but Austerlitz's personal past (and possibly the narrator's) is also a victim of that history.

CHAPTER 3

If Austerlitz can be read as a Bildungsroman in which its young German narrator learns about the German history that has been repressed, it seems suspect to find out that what he learns is that all modern European history, even if a cause such as modernity or patriarchy is identified, led inevitably to the Holocaust. It is not that any part of the allegory is factually or philosophically unsupportable; as Eshel points out, it is well grounded in the writings of “Marx, Adorno, and Foucault” (87). It is the effect of the allegory that is questionable. The anxiety which the narrator felt at Breendonk, as a German who had more in common with the perpetrators than the victims, is assuaged by this allegorical reading in which, as Eshel explains, the Holocaust becomes a universalized, and not a German problem. It is only fair to point out that the allegory is not the only thing that the narrator learns about the Holocaust; once Austerlitz has recovered his past the narrator learns the facts and figures of Germany’s attempt to exterminate the Jews. But, as Sebald himself would probably have agreed, the allegory has more impact than the facts.

The allegorical aspect of the novel diffuses the anxiety of the narrator’s position as a German who is writing about the Holocaust by minimizing the German nature of the Holocaust and universalizing it into a European event. Furthermore, the allegory helps to further remove the narrator’s anxiety and continues the distancing of the narrator from

the gaze of the “other” by beginning a process in which the narrator becomes the “other.” I next want to look at how that process is completed. The close relationship and the similarities between the narrator and Austerlitz make the identification between Austerlitz and the narrator so close that they become almost indistinguishable from each other and the narrator becomes able to see himself as a victim.

That Austerlitz’s and the narrator’s experiences often parallel each others is illustrated by the way in which Austerlitz’s account of remembering himself as a child in the Liverpool Street Station mirrors the narrator’s account of meeting Austerlitz in the train station in Antwerp. The similarities first become apparent when Austerlitz, after arranging to meet the narrator in London, begins telling the story of how he recovered his memories. Austerlitz starts by describing his mental state at that time; he describes experiencing a writer’s block so severe that, as he says, “the panic I felt on facing the start of any sentence” (123) had escalated to the point that he buried everything he had ever written in the compost heap in his yard. During this time, to escape his “panic,” Austerlitz spent his nights walking around London but was “always irresistibly drawn to the Liverpool Street Station” (3). Similarly the narrator, at the beginning of the book, says he was “partly for reasons which were never entirely clear to me” drawn to repeatedly visit Belgium and eventually the Antwerp Centraal Station (3). The Liverpool Station, prior to its being remodeled in 1980, is described as “one of the darkest and most sinister places in London, a kind of entrance into the underworld” (128). Austerlitz describes “sitting on a bench” at the station “and feeling that constant wrenching inside me, a kind of heartache which as I was beginning to sense, was caused by the vortex of

past time” (129). Upon the narrator’s arrival in Antwerp he describes beginning to feel “unwell” as soon as the train enters the “dark station concourse” (3). The narrator also rests on a bench, outside the station at the Antwerp zoo, while “waiting for the pain,” the source of which is not explained, “to go away” (3). On the day on which Austerlitz recovers his memory he follows a porter and comes upon “the entrance to the Ladies Waiting Room” of the Liverpool Street Station (134). After entering this room he thinks he sees “tiny figures who looked to me...like prisoners in search of some way of escape from their dungeon” (115). When the narrator enters the station in Antwerp he comments that “the railway passengers seemed to me somehow miniaturized” (6). Not only do both of them see people as smaller than they are but they each qualify their opinions with the same words, “to me.” Sebald’s narrators and characters do tend to sound alike since, as Sebald said, “the story comes through someone’s mind” and comes out in the language of that mind, but these similarities suggest more than just that likeness.

Austerlitz’s memories return and he sees his foster parents as they appeared on the day they picked him up at the Liverpool Street Station and also “the boy they had come to meet” (137). He explains that he “recognized him by that rucksack of his” (139). Likewise, when the narrator enters the Antwerp Station he spots Austerlitz and notices the “rucksack” in which he keeps his camera (7). The return of Austerlitz’s memories in the Liverpool Street Station makes the recovery of his past possible; the similarities between the setting and series of events in which his memories return and the setting and series of events in which the narrator meets Austerlitz suggest that it is that meeting that makes the recovery of the narrator’s past possible. In the novel’s very last pages, after

Austerlitz has left for France, the narrator is back at Breendonk and carries his own rucksack. Since Austerlitz's rucksack was one of his distinguishing features, in fact, *the* feature that allowed him to recognize himself as a child in the Liverpool Street Station, this description, in the last pages of the novel, of the narrator's rucksack seems to complete the identification of the narrator with Austerlitz.

There is disagreement among critics as to what to make of what I see as the merging of the narrator and Austerlitz. Jan Ceuppens, when discussing The Emigrants points out that "repetition" is the "most striking structural feature of Sebald's narratives" (190). From this point of view, the similar construction and content of the two railroad station scenes might be just a structural feature of Sebald's writing. Brad Prager, however, finds this closeness troublesome and says Sebald is merely using the trope of the "good German" and explains what he means by saying "the good German atones ... through empathizing with Jewish victims, to the point that the narrator or protagonist risks becoming one with, and even mistaking himself for those very victims." Prager finds this to be markedly the case in Austerlitz and says "In their suffering, the two figures are closer to one another even than the narrator of The Emigrants was to his subjects; here, the narrator is not simply the empathetic listener who identifies with the victim but one that can be described as a doppelganger as well." Although as demonstrated previously, there is certainly enough evidence to support Prager's argument, Eshel tends to disagree and says "It is not, however, that Austerlitz is subsumed in the narrator or that the latter should be equated with the writer" (80). But finding a way to look at Austerlitz in which Austerlitz is not subsumed in the narrator,

particularly when Austerlitz gives his story and the key to his London house (and life) to the narrator, and finding a way to not equate the narrator with the writer, when the writer twice inserts his name into the text, seems very hard to do. Even Eric Santner, who, as I will discuss later, is quite sympathetic to the closeness between these two characters, has to admit that “the narrator manifests a peculiar will—one in which a certain megalomania mixes with envy—to write himself into another person’s history” (178).

The relationship between the narrator and Austerlitz becomes even more complicated when Austerlitz describes his visit to Czechoslovakia and what he learned about his father, Maximilian Aychenwald. The only views voiced in the novel on the German role in the Holocaust come from Austerlitz’s father, who, surely not coincidentally, shares a name with Sebald, which occurs twice in this short passage.

Vera Rysanova, Austerlitz’s former nanny, says that:

Maximilian did not in any way believe that the German people had been driven into their misfortune; rather, in his view, they had entirely re-created themselves in this perverse form, engendered by every individual’s wishful thinking and bound up with false family sentiment, and had then brought forth, as symbolic exponents of their innermost desires, so to speak, the Nazi grandees, whom Maximilian regarded without exception as muddle-headed and indolent. (167)

It is not hard, and probably not wrong, to make the assumption that these are Sebald’s thoughts. And it is not inappropriate that Sebald might write himself into the novel as the father of its protagonist since, as the author, he is Austerlitz’s father. But apart from giving Sebald a place to air his views on the German people’s place in Nazism, it also

serves to further confuse the lines between narrator, protagonist and author. Closing the gap between the narrator, the protagonist (and sometimes the author) and merging their stories is one more way in which Sebald seeks to remove the narrator from the gaze of the other and to legitimize the narrator's position.

The process of removing the narrator from the gaze of the other and legitimizing his position is complete by the end of the novel when, in its last pages, the narrator decides to go back to Antwerp "to see the Nocturama again and go out to Breendonk once more" (294). Upon arriving at Breendonk, he does not go directly into the building but sits "beside the moat surrounding the fortress" and says, "I took the book Austerlitz had given me on our first meeting in Paris out of my rucksack" (296). The book is the story of Rabbi Yisrael Yehoshua Melamed by his grandson, Dan Jacobson, who Austerlitz has told the narrator was "a colleague of his" (296). Bringing up this book, since Jacobson's family immigrated to South Africa and lived near the diamond mines, allows Sebald to return to the allegory and remind the reader of the subject of colonization that was first brought up in the Antwerp train station. The narrator quotes Jacobsen as saying of the mining pits:

It was truly terrifying to see such emptiness open up a foot away from firm ground, to realize that there was no transition, only this dividing line, with ordinary life on one side and its unimaginable opposite on the other. The chasm into which no ray of light could penetrate was Jacobson's image of the vanished past of his family and his people which, as he knows, can never be brought up from those depths again. (297)

This return to the subject matter that Austerlitz and the narrator discussed in their first meeting makes explicit the connection between European colonization and the Holocaust.

The narrator continues to describe what he is reading and says that while searching for information about his grandfather Jacobson traveled to fortresses in Kaunas, Lithuania, which were taken over by the Germans during World War II and in which 30,000 people were killed. The novel ends:

One of them, writes Jacobson, scratched the words *Nous sommes neuf cents Francais* on the cold limestone wall of the bunker. Others left only a date and place of origin with their names: Lob, Marcel, de St. Nazaire; Wechsler, Abram, de Limoges, Max Stern. Paris. 18.5.44. Sitting by the moat of the fortress of Breendonk, I read to the end of the fifteenth chapter of *Heshels's Kingdom*, and then set out on my way back to Mechelen, reaching the town as evening began to fall. (298)

This return trip to Breendonk is markedly different from the narrator's first visit in which he was overcome with vertigo; the narrator is now able to sit calmly outside the fortress. Whereas the first time he saw Breendonk he was crippled by the anxiety of being in the gaze of the "other," now he belongs and sees himself as part of the "other's" story.

In order to make that sense of belonging clear, Sebald once again inserts his name, Max, into the text along with his own birth date, "18.5.44." (May 18, as Blackler mentions, is not only Sebald's birthday but also the Roman Catholic holy day that marks the Ascension of Christ [53]). Zilcosky says the fact the narrator finds Sebald's birth date, along with his name, in the book he is reading, and that it is included in the second

to last sentence of Austerlitz signifies “a second homecoming, implying that the narrator and the author have also discovered in Jacobson’s book their own places of origin” (696). That “the narrator and the author” are able to find their “place of origin” in a list of Holocaust victims also signifies that the narrator now sees himself, as Prager suggested, as a victim of the Holocaust.

By writing a bildungsroman in which the narrator is taught about the Holocaust by one of its victims, an allegory that Europeanizes the history of the Holocaust, and an account of male bonding between the narrator and Austerlitz, Sebald has sought to remove the narrator from the gaze of the other by turning the narrator into a victim. This transformation has completely removed the omnipresent tension of the question of “Who has the right to tell the story of the dead?” that was a part of The Emigrants (Hell 35). The question that now presents itself is why would Sebald want to do this and is there any possibility that something might have been gained by turning the narrator into a victim?

In his discussion of Austerlitz, in On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald, Santner seems to feel that this is the case. Santner is one of the few critics who are able to seamlessly include Austerlitz in an over view of Sebald’s work. By comparison, John Zilcosky, in his essay on Austerlitz, explains that nothing he said in his previous writings on Sebald applies to Austerlitz, probably because its subject matter is very different than those works and imposes different constraints. Santner sees no such problem and feels that Austerlitz is consistent with the rest of Sebald’s works. In his analysis of Austerlitz he sees the relationship between the narrator and Austerlitz as an expression of

“neighbor-love” that can be understood as part of German-Jewish literary tradition (206-207). In Santner’s view the relationship between Austerlitz and the narrator has made possible a type of “miracle” that is dependent “on the performance of acts of witnessing” (75). Santner goes on to say, “What is clear, however, is that the actualization of the missed opportunity—the decision to look for Marie—becomes possible only by way of the special sort of relationship Austerlitz has developed with the narrator” (138). What Santner calls “neighbor love” and Lugones calls “loving perception” (or the transformative act of “world traveling”) seem to be closely connected terms. My essay has focused on what the relationship between Austerlitz and the narrator does to legitimize the narrator’s position; Santner, however, sees a way in which that relationship facilitates significant, even miraculous, changes in Austerlitz that occur because of the narrator’s act of witnessing his story. But for that to be the case one has to accept that it is possible to be, in Lugones’s term, a “world traveler” and through “neighbor love” or “loving perception” become the “other.” Despite the fact that Lugones and Santner make interesting, and surprisingly similar, arguments for this to be the case, I am not convinced that it is ever possible to become the other.

Long suggests that, particularly in The Emigrants, “Sebald’s concern with Jewish fates and families,” which Schlant and Hall found so compelling, “can be seen as a substitute for far more difficult engagement with the past that he and his narrators share “ (Image 61). In undertaking this essay I had hoped to find a way in which Austerlitz represented an attempt to make that “more difficult engagement with this past” but I have failed to find such an “engagement.” What I have found, however, is that, although

Sebald said that Austerlitz was a sequel to The Emigrants, the two works do not have much else in common. The Emigrants, as Schlant said, “begins to mourn the destruction of Jews in Germany” by “giving voice to the culture and the lives that were destroyed” (19). The focus of Austerlitz is the relationship between the narrator and its protagonist; what Schlant, and others, found so compelling about The Emigrants is absent from Austerlitz. It has been replaced with an allegory which presents what Eshel called “a questionable universalization through Europeanization of the Holocaust” (88). By changing the perspective of the narrator from that of a voyeur to that of a victim, instead of breaking new ground in Austerlitz, Sebald has, much like many of the authors that he found “shameful,” merely made a case for the “good German” (Prager).

But, despite all the problems I have identified with the narrator’s transition from voyeur to Holocaust victim, shameful is not a word that I want to apply to Austerlitz. The main theme of the novel, Adorno’s point that “it is impossible to live an authentic life in a world that precludes authenticity,” is not diminished by Sebald’s questionable choice to position the narrator as a “good German.” At the end of Austerlitz neither the narrator nor Austerlitz are any closer to leading “authentic lives” than they were when the novel began. In the last sentence of Austerlitz, the narrator, sitting outside the fortress of Breendonk, finishes the fifteenth chapter of Jacobson’s book about his grandfather but has not yet finished reading the book. Austerlitz has left for the Pyrenees to see if he can find any trace of what happened to his father but there is no conclusion to Austerlitz’s story. Much like the raccoon in the Noctarama, a return visit to which the narrator has said was one of the specific reasons for his return to Belgium, both Austerlitz and the

narrator are still “washing,” arguably “beyond any reasonable thoroughness,” the same piece of apple over and over again” and still attempting “to escape the unreal world” (4).

REFERENCES

REFERENCES

- Adorno, Theodor W. Negative Dialectics. E. B. Ashton, Trans. New York: Continuum, 1994.
- Barzilai, Maya. "Facing the Past and the Female Spectre in W.G. Sebald's The Emigrants." Long and Whitehead 203-216.
- Bigsby, Christopher. Remembering and Imagining the Holocaust. Cambridge: UP, 2006.
- Blackler, Deane. Reading W.G. Sebald: Adventure and Disobedience. Rochester: Camden, 2007.
- Bond, Greg. "On the Misery of Nature and the Nature of Misery: W. G. Sebald's Landscapes." Long and Whitehead 31-44.
- Ceuppens, Jan. "Seeing Things: Spectres and Angels in W.G. Sebald's Prose Fiction." Long and Whitehead 190-202.
- Chicago, Judy. Holocaust Project from Darkness into Light. New York: Penguin Books, 1993.
- Cuomo, Joseph. "A Conversation with W.G. Sebald." Schwartz 93-118.
- Eshel, Amir. "Against the Power of Time: The Poetics of Suspension in W.G. Sebald's Austerlitz." New German Critique. Winter 2003. 71-96. JSTOR. Fenwick Library. 1 Jul 2007. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3211159>>
- Franklin, Ruth. "Rings of Smoke." Schwartz 119-143.
- Fraser, Nick. Ed. "Congo: White King, Red Rubber, Black Death." Storyville. bbc.co.uk. 25 Apr 2008. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/documentaries/storyville/congo.shtml>>
- Hall, Katharina. "Jewish Memory in Exile: the Relation of W. G. Sebald's Die Ausgewanderten to the Tradition of the Yizkor Books." Jews in German Literature Since 1945: German-Jewish Literature? Pol O'Dochartaigh, Ed. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000.

- Hell, Julia. "Eyes Wide Shut: German Post-Holocaust Authorship." New German Critique. Contemporary German Literature. Winter 2003. 9-36. JSTOR. Fenwick Library. 10 Feb 2008. <<http://mutex.gmu.edu:2112/stable/view/3211156?seq=1>>
- Hofmann, Michael. "A Chilly Extravagance." Schwartz 87-92.
- Huyssen, Andreas. "Gray Zones of Remembrance." A New History of German Literature. David E. Wellbery, Ed. Cambridge: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 2004.
- Leone, Massimo. "Textural Wanderings: A Vertiginous Reading of W.G. Sebald." Long and Whitehead 89-101.
- Long J.J. W.G. Sebald—Image, Archive, Modernity. New York: Columbia UP, 2007.
- . and Anne Whitehead, Eds. W. G. Sebald: A Critical Companion. Seattle: U of Wash P, 2004.
- Lugones, Maria. "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception." Hypatia. Indiana UP, 1990.
- Lubow, Arthur. "Crossing Boundaries." Schwartz 159-173.
- McCulloch, Mark R. Understanding W.G. Sebald. Understanding Modern European and Latin American Literature, Ed. James Hardin. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2003
- Parry, Ann. "Idioms for the Unrepresentable: Postwar Fiction and the Shoah." Andrew Leak and George Paizis, Eds. The Holocaust and the Text: Speaking the Unspeakable. New York: St. Martin's, 2000.
- Brad Prager. "The Good German as Narrator: On W.G. Sebald and the Risks of Holocaust Writing." New German Critique. Fall 2005. 75-104. ProQuest. Fenwick Library. 27 Feb 2008. <<http://mutex.gmu.edu:2233/>>
- Raphael, Melissa. The Female Face of God in Auschwitz: A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Santner, Eric. On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2006.
- Schlant, Ernestine. The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Schwartz, Lynne Sharon, Ed. The Emergence of Memory: Conversations with W.G. Sebald. New York: Seven Stories P, 2007.
- Sebald, W.G. Austerlitz. Trans. Anthea Bell. New York: Modern Library, 2001.

Silverblatt, Michael. "A Poem of an Invisible Subject." Schwartz 77-86.

Wachtel, Eleanor. "Ghost Hunter." Schwartz 37-62.

Zilcosky, John. "Disorientation, Nostalgia, and Holocaust Melodrama in Sebald's Austerlitz." MLN 2006. 679-698. Project Muse. Fenwick Lib. 10 Feb 2007.
< <http://mutex.gmu.edu:2158/journals/mln/v121/121.3zilcosky.pdf>>

CURRICULUM VITAE

Martha Bass Eaheart, like W.G. Sebald, was born in Bavaria. Her American family was living in Germany at the time because her father, as was Sebald's, was a career Army officer.