



## Vertigo

*W.G. Sebald, Michael Hulse (Translator)*

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**Vertigo** W.G. Sebald , Michael Hulse (Translator)

*Vertigo*, W. G. Sebald's first novel, never before translated into English, is perhaps his most amazing and certainly his most alarming. Sebald—the acknowledged master of memory's uncanniness—takes the painful pleasures of unknowability to new intensities in *Vertigo*.

Here in their first flowering are the signature elements of Sebald's hugely acclaimed novels *The Emigrants* and *The Rings of Saturn*. An unnamed narrator, beset by nervous ailments, is again our guide on a hair-raising journey through the past and across Europe, amid restless literary ghosts—Kafka, Stendhal, Casanova. In four dizzying sections, the narrator plunges the reader into vertigo, into that "swimming of the head," as Webster's defines it: in other words, into that state so unsettling, so fascinating, and so "stunning and strange," as *The New York Times Book Review* declared about *The Emigrants*, that it is "like a dream you want to last forever."

## Vertigo Details

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Author : W.G. Sebald , Michael Hulse (Translator)

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## From Reader Review Vertigo for online ebook

### Gorkem says

Sebald, II. Dünya Sava?? sonras? Alman halk?n?n belleklerine, bask? ve korku içinde ya?ayan dünyalara bizi gene otobiyografik, deneme ve farkl? öykü türlerini kendine has bir biçim içerik içinde müthi? bir okuma zevki sunuyor.

Sebald birbirinden ba??ms?z yap?lardan olu?an öyküleri temalar ile birbirine ba?lamas? ve gene Sebald"?n inan?lmaz do?al anlat?m? ile Beyle isimli Napolyon döneminde bir askerin (evet dü?ündü?ümüz ki?i) okuyucuya sinyaller çakarak bu ki?inin a?klar?n? ve ba?ar?s?zl?klar?n? okuyoruz.

?kinci bölüm ve di?erleri cidden tarif edilmesi zor ve ancak okuma do?rultusunda tad? lezzeti beyninizde kalacak inan?lmaz göndermeler ile devam ediyor. Sebald bizi tarihsel anlamda yolculuklara ç?kararak yazarlar üzerinden harika göndermeler yap?yor.

Harika bir deneyimdi.

Herkese iyi okumalar

10/9

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### Jimmy says

"He had no answers, but believed the questions were quite sufficient" (p. 62)

Now I have read all of Sebald's four major "novels". I feel, as I often do after reading Sebald, unable to say anything meaningful about his work, even though I was deeply moved while reading him. It seems funny to me, in retrospect, that I didn't especially like Rings of Saturn, the first book of his I read. I'm sure if I return to it now I will love it. His writing goes to the edge of so many things that it is easy to imagine one not liking it if they just aren't in the mood for this type of stuff, though lately I have been all about this type of stuff.

Since I am again unable to say anything meaningful, I wanted to transcribe what I wrote about Sebald in my notebook while sitting in the park a few weeks ago:

The problem with most writing is that it tries to do so much and what it tries to do is so predictable and in the same mode. I want a literature that is not trying to say anything, not the intention constantly hounding at every word. How to write for the barely visible? How to make it not seem significant, at least not in the normal ways? Approaching BOREDOM that is the goal. Even achieving boredom, which is a task--boredom that is not the result of boring writing--boredom which is carefully manufactured boredom in the reader which is a kind of constant attentiveness--a state of unease where the reader is potentially responsible for everything.

Deliberately slowing down the pace, not deliberately beautiful, as if an accident. Signifiers not bundled together like a thesis--a sort of rambling that defies easy 'purpose', allowing the person speaking to be the only common element, that voice and his concerns which is larger than the

piece of writing, that goes on afterward and was going on before, that the writing becomes a sort of artifact of his thinking & materializing perspective without DEFINING him, without concluding anything without easiness of "saying".

It is not that it lacked significance, it's that the words did not create that significance. The words were like a rag, already soaked in whatever mysterious significance it needed--so that the words themselves didn't have to try to convey anything. The attention is focused back to the basic attention of the sentence, its parts taken simply which becomes a feat astounding by itself. To read every sentence as if it were the only sentence in the English language. To make a reader read it that way. How?

I'd like to append that I do not completely stand behind all these thoughts, they are just jottings I made without time to revise or think through. Nonetheless, Sebald was on my mind when I was thinking about these subjects. Also interesting is this article I read about Sebald, in which I quote:

It is clear that his work was as unfinished as it was original. And odd. It was work of high seriousness without pretension. That is, it engaged with many of the great themes of the literature and art of the past: war, peace, life, death, art itself, memory, absence, omission. But almost as prominent was—for a writer with such high regard for the history of individuals—the almost total absence of such concerns as love, sex, family, children; or of such ordinary (and powerful) emotions as jealousy, hatred, love (again) or greed.

It is interesting that I never thought about what was omitted in his writings, which are very familiar themes in other writer's works. I would also add that "love" in that quote above should probably be amended to "romantic love", since he does convey a lot of friendship and deep connections between (usually neglected) people, as well as familial love. And also absent is humor, though there are glimpses where you can tell he was highly attuned to humor, but that his main concern, at least in his writings, lay elsewhere.

I would like to say something about his technique of embedding images within his narrative, but I fear I have not thought it through enough to say anything interesting yet. Perhaps that will be something I can think about on a re-read, which I plan to do very soon, starting with *Rings of Saturn*.

One last thing that I wanted to mention, and this is going out on a limb, is that it would be interesting to study the parallels between Sebald and Bolano. From the limited Bolano that I've read, I feel like they are approaching the same subjects and big questions from completely different angles and writing styles. Which means I should probably read more Bolano, since I also did not love the first (and only) Bolano I've read (2666). I will end with a quote from the book itself, since I have already rambled on long enough:

"The more images I gathered from the past, I said, the more unlikely it seemed to me that the past had actually happened in this or that way, for nothing about it could be called normal: most of it was absurd, and if not absurd, then appalling." (p. 212)

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## Szplug says

It's interesting for me—as I reacquaint myself with the frequencies of the Sebald-*via*-Hulse literary signal—to contrast the prose styles of the late German and the modern French academic Mathias Énard, the

author of the five-hundred-plus page shotgun blast *Zone* : whereas Énard's amphetaminic, propulsive narration piles one gruesome event upon another with such energized and relentless urgency that no single scene is given the opportunity to overwhelm or paralyze the reader with horror, but rather blends and merges into a chiaroscuro of violence that swells in Döppler fashion as the conclusion approaches, Sebald slows the pace to a steady crawl, a languid and leisurely stroll through memory's arcade, taking time over and again to pause before a particular reminiscence—and its temporal residues—in order to fully absorb the vibrations emanating from its anamnestic position.

It seems to me that each of Sebald's books represent the author working through his own collection of memories and reminiscences and, in individuating particular scenes, assaying to determine the degree of *truth* constituted within—and bemusedly lending free rein to the myriad brushes wielded by his imagination in filling in whatever gaps exist, easily crossing the ever hazy borders between fiction and (relational) fact—and fluidly intermingling unusual incidents from the lives and writings of historic personages whose physical and/or textual beings once occupied and performed amidst the same physical spaces where Herr Sebald places himself in the course of unfolding his eerily calm, episodic memory games—in order to flavor a recollection to better suit the memorial meal he is creating. Is the Sebald who narrates the books the same as the individual of the identical name who penned them? Does the placid shell splintered with cracks form the outer layer of both? How much does fiction abut, overlay, and obliterate the actuality of the past as remembered by the author? Could even *he* have stated the amounts with certainty before his untimely passing? It's a fascinating game we are privy to here, especially in that our own arranging of the past will influence that which the writer has put on paper for us to ingest and absorb; and the spicing provided by the shimmering drama enacted throughout his literary and historic borrowings finds the nodal points of similarity in perspectives unvaryingly alienated and chafed by the ebb and flow of the uncanny and unusual scenarios that life configures and bestows upon the human soul during the course of its journey in earthly incarnation—creating a framework of pond ripples that effortlessly sync with the perspective of any reader who has stood raw and bemused before the impenetrable mystery of his own life. That the eerie dissonances and asynchronous disturbances the author encounters when a reminiscence is invoked by a particular configuration of material and temporal settings and intersections—and visually represented or inspired by the strange and haunting collection of colorless photographic way stations liberally sprinkled about the book, pictorial lodestars guiding, succoring, and tethering the reader at select points along the textual voyage—can be understood and evaluated in coevality by a large proportion of his readers—whatever their age, sex, or nationality—is a testament to the German's ability to perceive the universal inherent within the uncanny interactions of the past and the present upon unique individuals, and to access it through the subdued and temperate working of his words.

Such is the manner in which Sebald's writing subtly but palpably work upon the reader's emotions. I feel uneasy under the spell of his toneless inflection, infected with a piercing melancholy for all that has passed into shadow and will never again bloom strong and fulsome against the noonday sun; the brief passages about the squalid, boarded up, serrated roof tenement building standing like a rotted tooth in the Viennese jaw, or the ghostly flour factory dourly frowning upon the cluster of cluttered Italian renaissance in the Venetian lagoon, give me a peculiar shiver when I read them, exposing a nerve to some powerful current of existential angst, unearthing a deeply buried spiritual cavity where the life has been excavated in a manner similar to that of the natural world shattered and shifted and shaped to allow the imposition of our temporary temples to our tool-worshipping, technocultural, self-incarnated pantheon. Even when the story veers into a visit to Sebald's childhood home, the village of W. cradled at the foot of the Bavarian Alps, the characters and events recollected by the discomfited prodigal son are those of eccentricities, madnesses, depressions, and madcap antics that lead furiously towards an abyss eagerly anticipated as a release from the numbing inanity of the present. It is telling that the few intimations of human sexuality are those which have been either deeply repressed or proven of an ephemerality and futility, and that—in either case—have left their

subject distressed and wounded; when Sebald recalls a heated tryst he witnessed whilst still a boy, the woman bent backwards and receiving the urgent thrusts seems more dead than alive, with eyes of a glassy mania that recall those of the crazed horses that have frightened the author for as long as he can remember. The novel's final sentence describes a London visited by a *silent rain of ashes*—it serves as an exquisitely apt summary of the contents of *Vertigo*: nature's cyclical bounty of the contents of tombs, the temporary structure of a temporal life that is perpetually being forgotten or altered even as it occurs.

Fritz Leiber once wrote about how he found a decrepit alleyway in the urban midnight, with its silent spray of wires, pipes, shuttered windows and peeling façades, far more terrifying than castles or forests or the roiling seas, and it has stuck with me ever since. Sebald not only agrees with Leiber, he works these fears upon the wheel of memory to spin his uniquely disquieting marriage of the inanimate with the animate, the lifeless with the lived, the crumbling with the dead; a macabre and elegiac epic theatre that in its prime seemed conceived and written by a brilliant and daring virtuoso, but with the passing of the years has progressively revealed itself as the disturbing and decayed vision of a madman. Few other writers can so casually-yet-masterfully access the angst inherent within the transient nature of humanity—its life and its works—as set against the conception of forward-moving time as this enigmatic German genius.

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### **Steven Godin says**

Hmm.....this is a tough one, and still don't know just quite what to make of it. I Could sit on it for 24 hours and reach a different conclusion, but while it's fresh in my mind I settle for now. And speakings of minds, Sebald going by this certainly had an imaginative one, made up of fragmented memories from his youth, and historical meditation swirled with fantastical events from an overview of the life of Stendhal in 19th century Italy . The positives from Vertigo far outweigh the negatives, but I so wish it had either been an ingenious novel of vast proportions, or a travelogue memoir solely based on fact, it mixes both, with mixed results. It has given me vertigo, a sensation of whirling and loss of focus, I wish I had a feeling of equilibrium, because reviewing this is not going to be easy.

A ghostly figure, which I will call Sebald's doppelganger, takes off from England to travel via the streets of Vienna, Venice, Milan, Verona and Innsbruck, finally ending the journey in the German village of W. (Wertach? his family home). Driven by a hypnotic prose (which was seriously good) Sebald the narrator takes readers on an almost spiritual pilgrimage, bending his own thoughts from places visited in the past, and the felling it evokes inside of him. Some pages contain old photos and drawings that accompany the text, this just adds to the feeling of buried thoughts and periods in the past, some are blurry, but then so was Sebald's mind. Kafka on a bus, his link with a pizzeria in Verona?, the image of Ludwig of Bavaria floating by in a vaporetto in Venice, the mythical figure of Gracchus the huntsman, and an ancient war, entrancingly, are spellbound into Sebald's vision. His wondering travels conjure up some wondrous landscapes through Italy, and are beautifully descriptive, casting bewilderment and daze. In a moment of confusion whilst in the Milan Cathedral, he would all of a sudden no longer have any knowledge of his surroundings, unable to determine whether he was in the land of the living or already in another place, having a force of uncertainty that pervades everything around him. This sums Vertigo up in a nutshell.

Vertigo is not the type of book to put your feet up and relax to, on the contrary, it stimulates the mind, gets you thinking, puzzles and dazzles likewise, to a degree this reminded me in some ways of calvino's "Invisible Cities", for the way it wraps you in a magical blanket. But Sebald writes with a more melancholic and haunting tone. There is sadness within, especially towards the end. There is a problem though of piling up too much detail and jumping from thought to thought that felt

increasingly random and oblique. In terms of the readers, there are no hints about the points he was trying to raise. I don't want to call more than 50% of it's content as self-indulgent, but not to lie, it was. I can understand the whole dislocation from reality thing, but it didn't fully grasp me.

And this coming from someone who generally does not use criticism in reviews, always looking rather for the good things, and there are plenty here. But one must be honest with ones self, otherwise doubt over ones ability to judge fairly is bought into question.

A good solid three stars is the best I can do.

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### **Jeff Jackson says**

1) Inspired to pick this up after seeing Grant Gee's doc "Patience: After Sebald" which is currently streaming on Netflix. It's worthwhile viewing, especially for Iain Sinclair's comments about why Sebald chose not to put his work into English himself (he was more than capable) and the subtle transformation that happens to his prose through the lens of translation.

2) His first novel isn't as tightly constructed as The Emigrants or as brilliantly sprawling as The Rings of Saturn, but the web of connections is still dizzyingly complex and expertly woven - the closer I picked at the various strands, the more I was amazed at the patterns that emerged.

3) The Kafka chapter is pitch perfect, often laugh out loud funny, and the ending is gently breathtaking. Maybe the best thing he ever wrote.

4) Stendahl, sure, but I wasn't expecting to run across outsider poet Ernst Herbeck.

5) A German lit professor once told me to skip the opening chapter b/c it had nothing to do with the rest of the book. Nonsense. Read it all.

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### **Tony says**

There are three main arteries to drive the 12.5 miles from my suburban home to downtown Pittsburgh. Foremost is McKnight Road, a six-lane swath through McDonalds and Target and JiffyLube and, well, you know the route. It's under construction this summer, a bridge reduced to two lanes. McKnightmare Road, now. If you insist on going that way, you sit, you do not move. I can not 'not move'.

But as I said, there are two other alternate routes to take; narrower and slower because of the additional traffic, but acceptable at an additional 5 or 10 minutes of actual moving. I took one, Thompson Run Road, which meanders beside that trickle, a pleasant if slower choice. Alas, the world is run by 'C' students, Al McGuire once famously and correctly said. And there is 'stimulus' money in the pipeline. So, they tore up that road too.

My 20-minute journey became a grueling hour instead on the third option, Babcock Boulevard. Stuck again, implacably. A road sign beckoned: Cemetery Lane. The road rose through a dense wood and opened, aptly, in a clearing with a cemetery on the left. And another and another. One mile of graves, canted downhill, the

markers facing the winding, rising road. Very old markers, tilted askew from the shifting ground or an unhappy tenant. Monoliths. Family plots. A Star of David on Stoltz' headstone, perhaps incongruously by Gruber's. Hemlocks and arborvitae give shade, maybe peace. I wondered how long ago this road was named. How many souls were laid here before it would be defined as such a place? And how many souls now? I don't know since I can't see over the hill, now from the road where I crawl to work.

I think also of another cemetery and another time. The flatter ground where my parents lie in Pennsylvania's soft coal country. I saw my grandparents buried there when I was a small child. A double marker in Polish joined them among so many others like them. But away from all the others, in the furthest corner, there stood a tiny marker. The other stones were together, a family or community, a church, even in death. But not that little stone, removed palpably from the rest. I asked my father why. He said she was a young woman who was not quite right. She had a baby when she shouldn't have. She killed herself shortly after. I looked there again, and back to my father. He said, because she killed herself she can not be buried with the others. That spot is not consecrated. I suppose he didn't agree with that. He was not that kind of man. But he never said so.

Every visit, I would look away and to that back corner and feel her staring, feel her judgment. It was then, for me, that the robes became costumes, the intonations turned hollow. That marker is still there today, alone. No one joined her and no petition moved her. I doubt she has visitors. I mean, why would I?

*(This is not a review anymore than Vertigo is a novel. I've tried to create in my own way the meandering spirit in which Sebald writes. I don't know if I've succeeded or if he would approve. Maybe if I had a grainy photograph of a solitary grave marker nestled amid the prose.)*

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οοο:.ο..ο~ο..\_.· ?????? Ροζουλ? Εωσφ?ρος :\_.·ο~ο:.·ο .·οοο ★..·^..★ ?????? ???????  
?????? Ταμετο?ρο Αμ says

Ψυχεδελικ?ς περ?πατος παρ?α με τη μν?μη και τη λ?θη και ξ?φνου μπροστ? μας εμφαν?ζεται μια μεγ?λη αγ?πη που δεν θα καταπιε? ποτ? η λησμονι?.

Πως να μην ρ?ξεις ?λα τα αστ?ρια του ουρανο? σε αυτ? το α?σθημα ιλ?γγου και συνειδητ?ς λογοτεχνικ?ς μελαγχολ?ας;

Το παρ?ξενο γεγον?ς του ?ρωτα μας εξηγε? ο Σταντ?λ και μας μεταφ?ρει σε ιστορικ?ς μ?χες, απ?ραντα πεδ?α πτωμ?των, πολλ?ς ερωμ?νες, απογοητε?σεις, αρρ?στιες και το τελευτα?ο ταξ?δι αν?μεσα σε φαντασ?α και πραγματικ?τητα.

Ενα ταξ?δι που απολαμβ?νουμε για τις αλησμ?νητες ?ρες σιωπ?ς και τον χιμαιρικ? ?ρωτα ως ψε?τικη συναλλαγ? ευτυχ?ας.

Αρχικ? ξεκιν?με απο τη Βι?ννη ε?μαστε ακο?ραστοι περιπλανητ?ς και κ?νουμε μεγ?λες και κουραστικ?ς πεζοπορ?ες.

Κ?που συναντ?με τον ποιητ? Δ?ντη, ε?ναι κι αυτ?ς εξ?ριστος απο τη λ?θη του, μα δεν προλαβα?νουμε να του μιλ?σουμε. Περπατ?ει βιαστικ? και χ?νεται.

?σως φτα?ει η μν?μη που μας παραπλανε? κορο?δευτικ?.

Στις νυχτεριν?ς β?λτες μας υπ?ρχει σκοπ?ς. Πρ?πει οπωσδ?ποτε να αντιμετωπιστε? το α?σθημα

δυσφορ?ας και ιλ?γγου. Δεν ε?ναι ?ρα να γε?ρουμε στο «ρε?μα του χρ?νου». ?χι ακ?μη τουλ?χιστον.

Συνεχ?ζουμε στη Βενετ?α. Εδ? πρ?πει οπωσδ?ποτε να ρυθμιστε? το σ?στημα νομολογ?ας για το ερωτικ? π?θος.

Πρ?πει να αθω?σουμε τον Καζαν?βα πριν αρχ?σει να πα?ρνει στα σοβαρ? τις σκ?ψεις του περ? τρ?λας και ορ?ων της ανθρ?πινης λογικ?ς.

Φτ?νουμε στα Λουτρ? της Ρ?βα. Χρειαζ?μαστε απομ?νωση-ξεκο?ραση-θεραπε?α- και ?ρωτα πλατωνικ?.

Υπ?ρχει ?νας βασανισμ?νος επισκ?πτης αν?μεσα στους ?λλους. Φοβ?ται την πολυκοσμ?α,ε?ναι απ?στευτα μοναχικ?ς και μ?νιμα σκεπτ?μενος. Μας κ?νει να τον αγαπ?σουμε, να τον πιστ?ψουμε να τον νι?σουμε ως την ψυχ? ?ταν μας λ?ει μουδιασμ?να ιστορ?ες για την αρρ?στεια του και μια αποσπασματικ? θεωρ?α περ? του ?ρωτα δ?χως σωματικ? επαφ?.

Πριν ξεκιν?σει μας ξεκαθαρ?ζει πως θα κ?νουμε λ?γο παρ?α χωρ?ς ανταλλαγ?ς προσωπικ?ν στοιχε?ων και ?ταν ?ρθει η ?ρα του αποχωρισμο? θα φ?γουμε απλ?ς αφ?νοντας μ?νο ευσεβε?ς π?θους.

Και λεει: στον ?ρωτα δ?χως σωματικ? επαφ? δεν υπ?ρχει διαφορ? αν?μεσα στο πλησ?ασμα και την απομ?κρυνση.

?ταν θα ανο?γαμε τα μ?τια, θα ξ?ραμε ?τι η φ?ση ε?ναι η ευτυχ?α μας και ?χι το σ?μα μας, που αποκαιρ? πια δεν αν?κει στη φ?ση. Γι'αυτ? κρατ?νε ?λοι τον λ?θος αγαπημ?νο, και υπ?ρχουν σχεδον μ?νο τ?τοιοι, στον ?ρωτα ?χουν τα μ?τια κλειστ? ? τα ?χουν δι?πλατα ανοιχτ? απο την απληστ?α, το ?διο πρ?γμα δηλαδ?.

Ποτ? οι ?νθρωποι δεν ?ταν τ?σο αβο?θητοι και τ?σο ασυν?ρτητοι πνευματικ? ?σο σε αυτ? την κατ?σταση.

Και τ?τε δεν μπορο?ν πια να κυριαρχ?σουν στις αντιλ?ψεις τους.

Υπ?κειται κανε?ς σε μια διαρκ? π?εση προς την εναλλαγ? και την επαν?ληψη, η οπο?α, κ?νει τα π?ντα απο τα οπο?α προσπαθε? κανε?ς να κρατηθε?, ακ?μη και την εικ?να του αγαπημ?νου προσ?που, να διαλ?ονται. Τ?τοιες καταστ?σεις λ?γο απ?χουν απο την τρ?λα.

Αυτ? μας ε?πε και δεν χρει?στηκε να συστηθο?με. Δεν ?ταν ?λλος απο τον Φρ?ντς Κ?φκα!!

Μ?νο γ?αυτ? τα λ?για περν?ει στα αγαπημ?να και αξ?χαστα.

Μ?νο γ?αυτ? τα λ?για δεν γ?νεται να αποχωριστο?με πολιτισμ?να.

Μ?νο γ?αυτ? τα λ?για ....

Καλ? αν?γνωση!

Πολλο?ς πλατωνικο?ς ασπασμο?ς!

## K.D. Absolutely says

Dizzying yet beautiful. Reading Sebald, my second, is like drinking red wine. It tastes bitter yet there is an aftertaste of something sweet that is left in your mouth. It makes your head spin after a while and yet you enjoy the feeling. It is something that you don't normally drink (since I prefer beer being cheaper generally)

but it gives you some class and it is reason enough for you to finish the till the last drop from the glass.

What I am trying to say is that this book takes you to an unfamiliar places and events: Napoleon's war-ravaged France with dead bodies lying on the streets, Frank Kafka's hometown or just those side streets in European cities and the people who lived in them whose names don't ring a bell at all. I mean, I have been to Paris (in 2004) and those two weeks I still vividly remember but with the many world-known events that happened in that city, there are just too much images (from books, films, television) that compete in my mind and clutter those that I had during the quick two-week visit. So, the images of **Beyle** (first of the four narratives in his book that was actually that of the writer **Stendhal**) dying of syphilis is a bit uneventful for me to associate with first-hand images of Paris. However, what hooks you to continue reading is Sebald's easy to read prose and the interesting pictures and illustrations that are supposed to be the actual and yet felt only imagined images of the events narrated in the book.

The book's title is very apt as the narratives, told in first person, seem factual and yet while you are reading, you would wonder whether those events are actual because how could the narrators (four of them) recall all those details if they happened a long time ago. You can immediately conclude that they are unreliable narrators and yet you can't stop reading because the beautiful lyrical prose of Sebald prods you to go on. I mean, his storytelling does not have concrete solid plot but there is underlying theme - vertigo, that is - that connects the four stories. I know. I know. Vertigo as a theme is like having a fluke as a trematode to discuss in your Biology class. I mean, who cares about flukes, right? But flukes are interesting enough because as parasites they can feed from many other species that they can even outlive. I mean, Sebald does not offer something new really but his style is distinct (free flowing narration that do not have plot yet his prose is lyrical and too hard to pass up on) and so you miss a lot by not reading his works.

This is my second Sebald. My first was *Austerlitz* (4 stars) that I read five years ago. Five years ago and still I remember what it is all about. His books are not easily available here in the Philippines so I order them via Book Depository or Amazon.com but I swear that they are really worth your every hard-earned centavo.

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### [P] says

I find the wonderful German writer W.G. Sebald so difficult to review that my treatment of his second novel, *The Rings of Saturn*, was no more than a long story about a trip I once made with my then partner to her home in Cornwall, during which, mostly on account of her parents, I lost my mind *and* my girlfriend. I'm not, of course, going to go over all that again, and I couldn't even if I wanted to, for I have forgotten much of what took place; yet the disquieting thing is that what I can recall or bring back I now doubt the veracity of. For example, my girlfriend's parents were very rich, but I am sure that it is not the case that their admittedly large home was backed by an even larger field, in which wild horses ran; yet that – the field, the horses, the house – is my strongest memory of the week I spent in Cornwall.

Some years ago I was at college and my philosophy teacher told me a story about how he moved to the Czech Republic, on a whim so to speak, in order to be with a Czech girl he had met whilst she was on vacation in England. When he arrived at her house she showed him in and explained that he ought to say hello to her father. He agreed and so she directed him to climb the stairs, where her father could be found in the first room on the right. My teacher may have found this odd, but in any case he climbed the stairs and entered the room and there he saw the old man, sitting in a chair, listening to Wagner, with tears streaming down his face. Now, this did not happen to me. I know that well enough, so why is it that this memory now seems as though it belongs to me? Why is it that I am able to put myself in that situation, in place of my

teacher, and see, not what he saw, but my own version of it, with as much assurance as anything that has actually happened to me in my life?

As I sit here and think about those two trips, one to Cornwall and one to the Czech Republic, both of which are a strange mixture of fantasy and fact, the proportions of each unknowable to me, I feel extremely disorientated. This disorientation is, I believe, what Sebald called *vertigo*, a state that is characterised by the difficulty, or a belief in the difficulty, of putting one's feet on the ground, of being sure of yourself and of the world around you. It is this mental, and physical, state that Sebald writes about in this book, the first of his four great novels. In it he tells a series of anecdotes and stories, involving both fictional characters and real people, including himself.

Sebald's first vertigo-sufferer is Marie-Henri Beyle, who we are told was a soldier in Napoleon's army; he was also a writer, and is better known as *Stendhal*. Throughout his life Beyle's memories and perceptions, according to Sebald, consistently played tricks on him. For example, he was convinced that the town of Ivrea, through which he once passed, would be indelibly fixed in his mind, only to find, some years later, that what he actually remembered was nothing but a copy of an engraving called *Prospetto d'Ivrea*.

Beyle writes that even when the images supplied by memory are true to life one can place little confidence in them.

For Beyle, the distinction between truth and fiction, reality and imagination, was tenuous at best. Probably the most wonderful, the most moving anecdote Sebald shares with us in this regard involves Beyle's relationship with a possibly imaginary woman, La Ghita. Beyle, writes Sebald, claimed to have been travelling with La Ghita, to have had involved conversations with her, and to have eventually broken from her, and yet there is no definitive proof that she ever existed; in fact, the likelihood is that she was a composite of numerous women the Frenchman had known.

As with all of Sebald's work, in *Vertigo* he is concerned with melancholy outsiders, or eccentrics. Most people do not have a troubled relationship with reality, like Beyle does, but the few that do tend to not be particularly happy [or mentally stable]. This appears to be borne out when, at the beginning of the second section of the novel, Sebald, or the narrator who so closely resembles Sebald, discusses his own mental breakdown, which occurs when travelling through Vienna, Milan, Verona, Venice and Innsbruck. The narrator's vertigo manifests itself as a kind of dread or neurotic fear, and by a sense of the uncanny. For example, at one point he tells the story of Casanova's imprisonment and notices that the day the Italian had set for his escape is the day that he [Sebald] had visited that same prison, Doge's Palace. When he leaves each town or city he does so as though trying to outstrip his anxiety, as though he is on the run from himself [and possibly the two shadowy figures he believes may be following him]. In the second half of this long second section, Sebald returns, seven years later, to make the same trip and visit some of the same places. This trip is a tour of his memories of those places as much as it is an actual tour of them.

Like Beyle, Sebald is hyper-sensitive; the things that he reads and the art that he engages with often break into reality, the everyday world is often transformed by his imagination [or madness]. At one point in the book he thinks that he is following Dante, at another he mentions that he was once convinced that a black limousine driver was Melchior, one of the three magi [or wise men]. Throughout, there hangs over the book the question, What is reality? Are Sebald's strange experiences reality? Instinctively one would want to say

no, because Dante was dead at the time the narrator claims to have seen him, and yet, for me, the issue is far from clear-cut; what someone experiences, regardless of how impossible it may seem, is their reality, is as real as anything we would accept without raising an eyebrow. The truth of the world, I once wrote, is like a cloud of blue smoke on a windy day.

Over the years I had puzzled out a good deal in my own mind, but in spite of that, far from becoming clearer, things now appeared to me more incomprehensible than ever. The more images I gathered from the past, i said, the more unlikely it seemed to me that the past actually happened in this or that way.

According to many of the reviews and articles I have read, *Vertigo* is the weakest of Sebald's four novels, but that is not an opinion I share; for me *The Emigrants* is the least engaging of the bunch. However, what does distinguish this novel from the others, and perhaps accounts for some of the indifference towards it, is that it wears its influences more brazenly. Sebald's other work all tastes subtly of Marcel Proust and Jorge Luis Borges, but here the flavour is very, very strong. The prose style, involving long complex sentences, with multiple clauses, is recognisably Proustian; and some of the ideas contained within *Vertigo* are not only similar to some of those found in *In Search of Lost Time*, but actually appear in it. Furthermore, the structure of this book, in comparison with *Austerlitz* and *The Rings of Saturn* in particular, is far from sophisticated. For example, while the opening Beyle section is thematically connected to the rest of the work, it still essentially stands alone. Later in his career Sebald would work his anecdotes and stories into his overall narrative and that gave them a satisfying flow that *Vertigo* does not have.

Yet there are also positive aspects of the book that one will not find in Sebald's more sophisticated work. First of all, it is at times pretty funny. There is a refreshing lightness of touch, or lightheartedness, in certain passages. Two incidents stand out to me in this regard, there is Sebald possibly getting hit on in a bar in Italy and a scene on a bus when he spies two kids who he thinks are dead-ringers for Franz Kafka. Here, our intrepid narrator approaches the boys and their parents, but receives a frosty reception; he asks for a photograph of the children but is turned down. They probably thought I was a pederast, Sebald notes. Ha! Martin Amis once said that all great writers are also comic writers, and I believe there is some truth in that. A comic writer does not have to mean someone like P.G. Wodehouse, but, for me, and Amis too, includes the likes of Tolstoy and Kafka. The idea is that if you understand the world, and the human condition, you cannot help but be, on occasions, funny, because life is funny; so it pleases me that Sebald has shown that he, too, could be humorous. The story of the Kafka kids also highlights another pleasing aspect of *Vertigo*, which is that it is more obviously fictional than the novels that came after it. One may in fact see that as a negative, but it was nice, in my opinion, to encounter a more relaxed Sebald, one trying stuff out, even some goofy stuff.

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### Seemita says

I take refuge in prose as one might in a boat.

Laughter erupted from the adjacent table. A middle-aged lady chided a young man for his deteriorating writing skills. The young man shifted in his chair with a sheepish grin, nudging a tiny vial of admiration in

his copper-brown eyes. *[Were they bearer of a clandestine moment?]* His neighbour was now invoking poetry gods with the adulterated whim of a ventriloquist. He quoted Baudelaire. *[I think. Or was that Verlaine? Damn! My poetry quotient is not worth a tarnished dime. Anyway, back to the poet.]* He is now towering over a nubile being and scanning her notes. This young thing is explaining a sonnet with gusto, snapping the air with jingling of her bangles. *[Does there exist a common set of fans of both Baudelaire and Shakespeare? Of course! Stupid me! Focus!]* There is a fifth person around the same table who is presently sweeping the quartet with the incisive broom of her bushy eyelashes. *[Is she the decision-maker or the note-taker?]* Now and then, the five rearrange their gazes that return to settle at familiar corners at regular intervals. Parchments are frayed, books are shuffled, inks are spent, dates are booked and budgets are spooled. At long length, the chairs cough to clear their temporary owners upon seeing them lock the final reminders on their phones. As they exited, I cast a long shot over their diminishing frames which appeared like five uneven jagged tips of an archipelago, with the bunching of few, declaring allegiance within the island clan.

Sitting at a book cafe in a foreign land, I am unlikely to be privy to this fivesome's next rendezvous. But is it likely that a whiff of Baudelaire scent in another time, in another unfamiliar land, on some future date, beseech me to relive this moment? A jingling of bangles over lyrical waves, may be? Didn't I declare an unwavering twenty minutes of my life in their favor, mothering a nascent hope somewhere, of them forming a part of what I write today, and tomorrow? Or was the hope hinged on the dual legs of amnesia and disillusion where a tickle of rowdy adventure may topple the balance for good?

As a wanderer of questionable credentials, I waited for Sebald to join me in unravelling the threads of my hotchpotch travelogue. He has an authorial hand that has penned a stunning vertiginous thesis, legitimizing a dense brethren of Beyle (view spoiler), Dr.K (view spoiler) and himself. Insinuated by a nebulous world, painted in lush resins of metaphors and teeming ruminations, I dived into his mystic valley forgetting about my inadvertent vertigo attacks. But he tendered assurances of safety and like a gentleman, kept his promise. My descent was marked by walks in Vienna and stays in Venice; arty trips to Verona were a revelation where Pisanello waved a enigmatic hello from the celebrated ruins. A shadow of Dante shimmered past at a high point where Casanova was jostling for a foothold. When Beyle left a key to his timid memories with Sebald, the latter, with an eye of a savant, opened only those doors to the visitor which the visitor had the capacity to overcome. After all, vulnerability is not a vanity to be dragged on insensitive roads. Like every able guide, Sebald too, kept a secret or two under his hat that he dazzled me with when I least expected it. He had come to know of my love for Mr.K and peppering an object of love with dust of doubt and loss is a ravenous thing to undertake. But he executed the spraying with such poignancy that I was forced to ponder if these very flaws accentuated the grandiose of Dr.K. He also guided me into the dilettante alleys of his childhood with the transparency of a new born's eyes. He scrapped the bark of his insecurities to reveal a luminous skin that bore its sheen in my adulating mind. Why should bleeding be lamented if oozing blood washes toxic wastes of soul? Well, I didn't mind bleeding a little myself.

And with those blood-stained palms, I finally touched his spine that stood sparkling at one of the shelves of this cafe I was waiting in. Sitting amid the penned memories of literary luminaries, he smiled through the puzzled face of a little child (view spoiler). And I instantly knew I had to befriend the child if I have to learn more of his craft and lend dignity to my travelogue. I swiftly reached out to hold his hand before anyone molly-coddled him to elsewhere. With another memory of Sebald tightly held under my arm, I walked out, thinking if there was any way to escape the vertigo.

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Note: If my vague albeit sincere review of Sebald's writing has somewhat muddled up your appetite, trust these guys to tell you why you need to read Sebald.

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## Tristan says

*"The more images I gathered from the past, I said, the more unlikely it seemed to me that the past had actually happened in this or that way, for nothing about it could be called normal: most of it was absurd, and if not absurd, then appalling."*

How does one explain, let alone come to grips with Sebald's 'Vertigo?' What is it that he *does* exactly? What is he reaching for?

Judging from fellow reviewers, this seems to be a question of some import, leaving vast amounts of his readers – devotees and those viewing him with mild disfavor alike – pretty much stumped for a definite answer. In fact, the man's style has spawned its own adjective, Sebaldian. Always a telltale sign that you've "made" it as a writer. Or that academics have just given up trying to come up with their own description of you, if one is more pessimistic about these things.

One wouldn't be so arrogant as to presume being able to provide anything remotely close to a definition (especially a thoroughly unqualified dweeb like myself, having done only the most preliminary, dewy-eyed reconnoitre of his oeuvre).

That, and it has always seemed to me that it's the very epitome of vulgarity when one attempts it with certain kinds of literary fiction; the genre(?) which Sebald, as is apparent in his debut, has a distinctive approach to, though I would hold off hailing this particular book as a masterpiece just yet.

After this first - fittingly vertiginous - encounter, Sebald to me very much is like an amorphous fog bank which, wholly unexplained, appears on a sunny, clear-skied day, slowly occupying reality only to transmogrify it, to subject it to its own particular whims and inclinations. To be sure, this "invaded" reality still feels familiar, yet has assumed an eerie, disorienting aspect. Suddenly, one clumsily reaches into thin air, wanders around aimlessly, stumbles at inopportune moments. There is no solidity to be found, one's illusion of having a firm grasp on things is done away with.

Time as well falls under its spell, its linear progression tampered with, or indeed smashed to pieces. These can be decided to be puzzled back together by a brave soul, or alternately just be left alone, to let exist on their own, to be replayed in the mind again and again. Very much how one remembers a dream, in ostensibly disconnected fragments.

As an attempt at wedding ego document (the main protagonist it would be uncontroversial to state is a clear stand in for Sebald himself) to meditations on literary/historical figures ( Kafka, Stendhal, Casanova ), 'Vertigo' certainly is ambitious, employing a structure composed of what are (auto) biographical, thematically linked vignettes, each devoted to a single character.

They all have one commonality: they engage the world in a deeply oneiristic manner. That, it seems, is what drives both Sebald and his characters, be they real or fictional. They are dreamers, visionaries even, roaming

their respective worlds, whilst inviting in, stepping into and out imaginary ones at the same time. They seek to escape, get away from their own being, their very identity. They want to be rootless, even destroy themselves, after which they can construct themselves anew out of the wreckage; in other words, metamorphosis (it is no coincidence, I think, that Kafka gets his own vignette here) is their God.

Is it hard to fathom why Sebald might be attracted to this concept? After considering the fact he was born (May, 1944) while the Nazi war machine and concomitant reign of terror was still in full swing, one can safely assume its odious legacy was inculcated in him as a child. Indeed, its horrors, and the resulting shame and disgust must have haunted him for all his life, as it did - and still does - many Germans. No wonder one might want to adopt a different identity, another nationality, another reality, another anything; to seek solace in the past, to flee into the comforting, always so seductive embrace of the unreal.

Just mark the following quote, as it is as revealing of the author's mental state as anything to be found in these pages:

*"How I wished during those sleepless hours that I belonged to a different nation, or better still, to none at all."*

But let's ditch the psychoanalysis, and return to the actual work, which is where frustration rears its ugly head. Especially because of its many virtues, it must be said that few books have made me feel so conflicted as 'Vertigo' did.

Theoretically I should be busy evangelizing it whenever and wherever I can. Yet ( and this probably can be attributed to it being a collection of loose vignettes primarily concerned with dabbling in impressionism ), the whole couldn't be held together enough for me to be fully satisfied. Sebald just never held me in that almost transcendental zone, enraptured. Always there was this cool distance present, a clear remove from what was happening (or not happening, since it's purposefully without plot) on the page.

Like a dream, 'Vertigo' feels more like a mood piece; while in possession of a veneer of quiet, soulful melancholy, reaching occasional heights of profound insight and lyricism, ultimately it slips away, is fleeting.

Its fragrance, not without irony, remains of the fragmentary sort.

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**\*\*\* All images are - naturally, this film buff couldn't resist - taken from that singularly haunting Hitchcock which bears the same name \*\*\***

**Drew says**

I think there's a strong argument to be made that this is a five star book; Sebald will routinely, with a

seemingly quotidian sentence, compel you to feel almost breathtaking pain and loneliness--it's a crazy trick. And the last several pages are jaw-dropping in a way I won't spoil. The front of my copy of *Vertigo* calls Sebald "memory's Einstein," and this pretty much has to be true since it's well established that Sebald can write a great book (or more than one) about what is essentially a walking tour, just by interpolating little historical or autobiographical side notes.

So why the vertigo? Well, vertigo is really just a change in perspective--it's what happens when you've been looking at the ground beneath your feet, but then are forced to notice the immeasurable chasm two feet to the left. And it's an apt metaphor for what the book does; it wrenches you from your narrow perspective of history or geography or the human psyche, and forces you to confront a broader one: the madness of large-scale battle, or the effect of a secret rape on a small town, or the loneliness of maybe never being able to know love. A couple demonstrative quotes:

"There is something peculiarly dispiriting about the emptiness that wells up when, in a strange city, one dials the same telephone numbers in vain. If no one answers, it is a disappointment of huge significance, quite as if these few random ciphers were a matter of life and death. So what else could I do, when I had put the coins that jingled out of the box back into my pocket, but wander aimlessly around until well into the night."

Or, from near the end, on a train trip: "There was no room for doubt, however, about the reality of my poor fellow travelers, who had all set off early that morning neatly turned out and spruced up, but were now slumped in their seats like a defeated army and, before they turned to their newspapers, were staring out at the desolate forecourts of the metropolis with fixed unseeing eyes."

And my big problem with *Vertigo* and maybe even Sebald in general is this incorrigible, pervasive, European-style world-weary fatalism. A wise viewpoint from an older person, especially a European (Sebald's historical reveries provide good evidence for fatalism as a philosophy, or at least I thought so), and in fact he makes it pretty hard to argue with him without sounding like a petulant American child. But you know what?

I reject fatalism. I don't believe that what we have is the best we're going to get. I don't just want wisdom; I want truth. I don't just want sex; I want love. I don't just want law; I want justice. And I refuse to believe that these things can't be found. I claim the right to bite off more than I can chew, and to gleefully spit it all back into the sneering faces of the naysayers. I claim the right to disturb the comfortable, and in return I will do my best to comfort the disturbed. And though I am cynical, I cannot--will not--let cynicism govern my actions.

And when I'm older and smarter and inevitably have accomplished so much less than I expected, I'll come back and read this again, and I'll doubtless find Sebald to be better company.

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**Geoff says**

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*I listen, as it were, to a soundless opera.*

Elsewhere I have called Sebald Europe's last great rememberer, the final inheritor of the legacy of all those literary and artistic exiles of the disasters of the 20th century, sort of carrying all of that over for us into the new millennium, wandering late in the terrible century the landscape of what was built on top of those ruins and embers, surveying in a more detached mode the reconstruction smothering out the ghosts and relics, tuned to the ever-returning, ever-retreating voices of all of those marching backwards into history's shadows. Within the fissures of all of his prose, the white space between letters, the timeless calamity resounds. Under his gaze the stream's course not so much reverses as superimposes, a river overlapping a river overlapping a river in an endless palimpsest of fading impressions yet proving ineradicable. He bears witness to what is no longer witnessable, the centuries accumulate in his books, and become semitransparent as fog overlaying a dark morning forest whose trees in the wind resemble the slow undulation of oceans. On these oceans barques are setting sail for unknown places. They return, bereft of crew, ghost ships with holds full of enigmatic riches.

It feels appropriate that the last of his fictions for me to read was his first novel, for *Vertigo* is something like Sebald's *ricorso*. In it Sebald appears already fully formed - the wanderer in search of the strange interdependencies of Life and Fate. The Teutonic conscience that cannot bear the legacy of its homeland and so exiles itself. The living man ferried over Styx to the land of the dead like so many before him, but unable to find port - the hunter Gracchus. The man to whom Art and Letters are a world above the unfathomable world below, one which we carry inside of us and retreat to for meaning, for solace, for safety and for rejuvenation. His procession home is fraught with phantoms, mists, paranoia, doubling, mirror-worlds, unsettling coincidences, emergences of the same, tonal repetitions as in a piece of music, manifestations of nightmares, disconsolate memories, distant warnings, obscure signposts, and the titular unrelenting nauseating imbalance and sense of dislocation. Yet it is as achingly beautiful and melancholy and brilliant as any of his works, and found me at the perfect moment, when its celestial longing and sense of the inherent beauty in the struggle at recovering the irrecoverable (one of the main purposes of Art), of setting down in the more permanent fixture of words and images the finite, the fading, the ungraspable, its determination not to lose the hope of uncovering meaning within the cosmic occurrence of apparently meaningless collapse, however obscure and at times terrifying ("*For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror, which we still are just able to endure*"), was much needed succor for this brother huntsman of the Black Forest, this fellow Flying Dutchman.

*Di Morte l'angelo a noi s'appressa. Già veggo il ciel discindersi.*

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### Kris says

Throughout *Vertigo*, W.G. Sebald, through deceptively clear prose and photographs, creates a disorienting waking dream for his readers. The novel is divided into four sections, and while there is not a straightforward plot or clear storyline, Sebald weaves thematic connections as well as specific details revisited from different perspectives to hold the novel together. Some sections read as biographies of historical figures, while others are written from the perspective of neurotic characters, traveling in Venice, Vienna, and the Tyrolean Mountains in dreamlike states.

Nothing is stable in Sebald's world. Although maps, atlases, and sketches of terrain appear throughout the book, discrepancies between these guides and the actual sites, changed by time, development, or the gap

between the ideal and reality, make these worlds difficult for the characters to navigate. Sebald uses water as another device to convey the dream-like vertigo suffered by his characters. Waves roll, vaporetti rock on the canals of Venice, the lapping of water acts as a lullaby. Buildings and works of art molder and decay. Characters attempt to find something concrete to hold onto - friends, people on the streets, a walking routine, scraps of paper to decipher - but in the end their dream-states always prevail.

Since finishing *Vertigo*, I can't shake off the disorienting sense that I was dreaming along with the characters. This novel is recommended for people who don't require traditional plots, but who are interested in traveling with Sebald, witnessing his blurring of genres, and sharing in the disconcerting experience of life with his characters.

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### **Grazia says**

**"Una fiammata brevissima, uno scoppio, sprizzi di scintille e poi ogni cosa si spegne."**

Gli ingredienti sono i medesimi di *Austerlitz*: viaggio, memorie, letteratura, arte, architettura, Storia. L'impasto si compone di prosa elegantissima (mai artificiosa) e fotografie in bianco e nero. Fotografie come testimonianza di vite che furono. Pensieri, associazioni, parallelismi, ricordi, ricostruzioni. Pensieri evocati che non appartengono più alle persone che li hanno concepiti perché legati ad un tempo e ad un luogo.

La vertigine è quella che coglie nel momento in cui avviene la presa di coscienza di quanto sia effimero l'uomo, le sue pulsioni, i suoi ricordi, i suoi mutabili pensieri, i suoi tentativi di sopravvivere al tempo.

Vite di persone, si intersecano semplicemente perché hanno solcato lo stesso suolo, hanno osservato lo stesso dipinto, in anni differenti, attraversati dagli stessi pensieri e dalle stesse pulsioni. Forse. Oppure passanti in maniera fortuita per gli stessi luoghi, senza un disegno, ma solo per pura casualità.

Il viaggio che compie Sebald, non è (solo) un viaggio nei luoghi, è un viaggio nel tempo e nelle coscienze. Un tentativo di ricostruzione identità e individualità dissolte. Ma come mantenere ciò che è stato se i luoghi e le cose non sono in grado di testimoniare?

*"Quante più immagini del passato riesco a raccogliere, continuai, tanto più mi sembra inverosimile che proprio in quel modo si sia svolto il passato: nulla in esso può definirsi normale, anzi, la maggior parte di quanto vi è accaduto è ridicolo, e là dove non è ridicolo suscita orrore."*

A Sebald non interessa raccontare una storia. Sebald regala suggestioni.

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### **MJ Nicholls says**

It's hard to write about what Sebald does, since his style belongs to a tradition of German writers such as Thomas Bernhard: it's sparse, lyrical, poetic and formally original.

*Vertigo* is the first of four "novels" where he pioneered his mix of memoir, historical lecture and evocative description. Like *The Emigrants*, the book is divided into four separate trips, whose connections (conceptual or intellectual) I am too feeble to understand. Each section explores the tension between memory and art, whether through evocative childhood paintings or landscapes etched into the narrator's subconscious.

We might define ‘Sebaldian’ as work with a philosophical and personal bent that tackles big bad German themes like *Weltschmerz* or Kafkaesque alienation. This book also highlights the intrinsic ocular evil of equines.

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### **Vit Babenco says**

*Vertigo* is about properties of human mind and memory and the story goes as a sudden paroxysm of dizziness...

“...over the years I had puzzled out a good deal in my own mind, but in spite of that, far from becoming clearer, things now appeared to me more incomprehensible than ever. The more images I gathered from the past, I said, the more unlikely it seemed to me that the past had actually happened in this or that way, for nothing about it could be called normal: most of it was absurd, and if not absurd, then appalling.”

It is a tale about that strange occupation we call living...

“Mme Gherardi maintained that love, like most other blessings of civilisation, was a chimaera which we desire the more, the further removed we are from Nature. Insofar as we seek Nature solely in another body, we become cut off from Her; for love, she declared, is a passion that pays its debts in a coin of its own minting...”

Between sanity and madness there is but a step...

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### **Orsodimondo says**

#### **MIND THE GAP**

L’io narrante di Sebald è quasi sempre in un periodo delicato e doloroso della vita – conosce la desolazione degli ospedali, ha frequentato anche quelli psichiatrici – è immerso nella malinconia, ma direi anche in qualcosa di molto prossimo alla depressione. E’ alle prese con una forza con la quale ingaggia una lotta muta, ma strenua.

Immagino che quella forza sia il ricordo: ricordare o dimenticare fa ugualmente male, è un peso dal quale non ci si libera.

Ma è qualcosa che non si può trascurare.

Anche conservare memoria perfetta di una lacerante amnesia è preferibile al completo oblio.

Ma le immagini che la memoria riconduce, per quanto fedeli al proprio vissuto, possono essere prese come dati di fatto, sono davvero affidabili?

*Quante più immagini del passato riesco a raccogliere, tanto più mi sembra inverosimile che si sia svolto proprio in quel modo: nulla in esso può definirsi normale, la maggior parte di quanto vi è accaduto è ridicolo, e là dove non è ridicolo suscita orrore.*

L’orrore è l’eredità dell’heimat, nasce da quei dodici anni che durarono mille, durante i quali Sebald e il suo io narrante videro la luce: e, anche, dall’essersene andato via, avere abbandonato la terra natia, un gesto sentito come aver voluto dimenticare e rimuovere quel passato (ma si è comunque portato dietro l’infezione nazista, proprio come Stendhal nel primo racconto, sotto l’alias di Beyle, si porta dietro la sifilide nel suo

peregrinare per l'Italia settentrionale).

Perché, in fondo al ricordo, c'è sempre dolore, c'è sempre una colpa. Il ricordo è 'vertigine'.

L'io narrante di Sebald parla in modo accurato, dotto, forbito, ironico, ipnotico.

Parla col silenzio. Parla attraverso gli spazi geografici e temporali che percorre.

Parla di paesaggi di rarefatta solitudine.

Traccia linee di collegamento tra la mano di una donna che potrebbe essersi poggiata sulla sua spalla nella hall di un albergo di Limone sul Garda con il ricordo di anni prima a Manchester dove un'ottica cinese gli riparò gli occhiali giungendo a una vicinanza fisica quasi simile.

Sembra sempre circondato di simboli, ha visioni, vede persone morte da tempo, fa incontri strani, è perseguitato da atmosfere gotiche, cupe, sospese, desolate.

Si ferma a scrivere dove capita, anche nel corridoio del treno o davanti alla stazione di Desenzano, prende appunti con la matita su taccuini dimenticando tutto tutti e se stesso: scrive e afferma di non sapere cosa scrive, *...ma di avere sempre più la sensazione che si trattasse di un romanzo giallo.*

L'io narrante di Sebald parla attraverso racconti che sono romanzi che sono memoir che sono saggi che sono autobiografia, diario di viaggio, ricordi personali, diari altrui, lettere, articoli di giornale, confidenze (romanzo giallo?)...

Parla di storia e geografia e arte e botanica e architettura e musica e ...

Parla di viaggi, nel tempo e nello spazio. Sono viaggi dell'anima, che il corpo asseconda:

*Entrato in chiesa, mi sedetti un attimo per slacciarmi le stringhe delle scarpe e all'improvviso, come ricordo ancora con immutata chiarezza, non seppi più dove fossi. Nonostante il faticosissimo tentativo di ricostruire lo svolgimento delle ultime giornate – quelle che mi avevano condotto lì - non avrei neppure saputo dire se mi trovavo ancora nel mondo dei vivi o in un Altrove.*

Parla, e sembra tacere.

Parla piano, parla col silenzio e in silenzio.

Respira e mi trasmette libertà: non solo perché è oltre la costrizione di qualsiasi genere letterario.

E' proprio questa forma di quiete che ha il profumo di libertà.

La mia sensazione è che segua una linea più sinuosa che retta, più periferica che tesa al centro: potrebbe ridisporre queste quattro sezioni (racconti?) in un'infinita varietà di combinazioni.

Non è in fondo questo che il narratore di Sebald afferma quando nella biblioteca civica di Verona sfogliando le raccolte dei giornali locali risalenti all'agosto e settembre 1913 scrive:

*...storie senza né capo né coda che, pensavo tra me, sarebbe stato opportuno approfondire?*

E ancora:

*...con le mie annotazioni mi trovavo ormai arrivato al punto in cui si trattava di andare avanti non si sa fino a quando oppure di lasciar perdere.*

Perché in tutte le opere di Sebald ci sono le fotografie, cosa significano?

Sono abbandonate tra le pagine come in un diario, per ricordare qualcosa, un momento particolare?

Ma anche se si trattasse di un diario, è un diario pubblicato, la foto è stampata in un posto e un ordine precisi: vuole avvalorare il testo, confermarlo, dargli più verità?

O siamo nel campo della letteratura postmoderna, e Sebald sta cercando di ricordarci che si tratta di un'opera di finzione, una sua invenzione (come l'attore che improvvisamente volta le spalle al palcoscenico e parla rivolto allo spettatore, squarcando il velo): in fondo, la foto non dimostra nulla, può essere quella o un'altra cosa, non abbiamo prove per collegarla al testo, se non una specie di verosimiglianza.

*Lavoriamo al buio - facciamo quello che possiamo, diamo quello che abbiamo. Il nostro dubbio è la nostra passione e la nostra passione è il nostro compito.*

Così Henry James sintetizza il lavoro dell'artista: sono parole che si applicano anche al lettore, perché quando s'incontra una vera e propria opera d'arte, come gli scritti di Sebald, è come leggere al buio, non si può mai sapere dove si verrà condotti.

Ecco perché, quando posso, io cerco rifugio nella sua prosa, come in un cinema: quando inizio a leggerlo, è come se si spegnesse la luce e io prendessi il largo.

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## Özgür Da? says

W. G. Sebald kendimi buldu?um ender yazarlardan biri. Yap?tlar?nda genel olarak geçmi?in izlerini arayan, içsel dü?ünceleriyle gerçe?i yo?uran bunu foto?raflar, mektuplar, belgeler vs. gibi materyallerle destekleyen kimseye benzemez tarz? olan bir yazar. Kanaatimce Proust, Joyce vb. yazarlar?n seviyesinde bir isim.

Vertigo'da Sebald yine geçmi?in pe?ine dü?üyor. Avusturya, ?italya ve Almanya'da geçmi?in izlerini sürüyor; ilk öykü büyük Frans?z yazar Henri Beyle Stendhal'in imgelerindeki bozulmalara ve a?k giri?imlerindeki ba?ar?s?z?klar?na odaklanarak ya?ad??? psikolojik y?k?mlar? ele al?yor. ?kinci ve dördüncü öykülerde Sebald bizzat kendi yolculuk yaparak gerçekli?in içerisinde geçmi?in özlemlerini ve korkular?n?, maddenin hüznünü, bunalt?lar?n? zengin bir dille anlat?yor. Üçüncü öykü ise Kafka'n?n melankoli ve bunalt?lar? üzerine yo?unla??yor.

*"Yabanc?s? oldu?um ?ehirlerde bir ?eyler yemek içmek için gidece?im yerleri nas?l seçti?imi bilmiyorum. Bir taraftan çok seçiciyimdir, bir karar vermeden önce saatlerce sokak ve caddeleri ar??nlar?m; di?er taraftan ço?unlukla sonunda gerçek anlamda bir seçim yapmadan herhangi bir yere girer ve hüzün verici bir ortamda, iç s?k?nt?s?yla hiçbir ?ekilde ho?uma gitmeyen bir yeme?i yerim."*

(s. 76)

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## Baran ????? says

Baz? yazarlar var, ak?llar?na ne gelirse yaz?p özensiz, çirkin metinler haline getirdikleri eserlerini bilinç ak??? tekni?yle yaz?lm??, post-modern eserler diye bize kakalarlar, biz de biraz safsak hemen yutar?z bu yalan?. Bu metini okurken bu dü?ünce s?kl?kla akl?mdan geçti. Ama Sebald?n Vertigo'su kanaatimce ne bilinç d??? tekni?yle (Woolf misali) yaz?lm??, ne de aha i?te post-modern bir kitap etiketini hak etmek için kaleme al?nm??, ne de çalakalem, üstünkörlü, özensiz yaz?lm?? bir metin. O yüzden de?erlendirilmesi ve de anla??imas? zor bir metin oldu?unu dü?ünüyorum, yani bir y?ld?z da verilebilir be? y?ld?z da. Bu ikilemi ?ahsen ben de ya?ad?m. Kitap ilk ç?kt???nda Can Yay?nlar?n?n kitab?n üzerine "öykü" etiketi yap??t?rmas? üzerinden dönen tart??malar? hayal meyal hat?rl?yorum, ama bunlar bence de öykü de?il, an?ms? öyküler,

belgeselvari an?ms? hikayeler belki de, tarihsel anekdotlar (ilk "öykü" mesela) denilebilir. ?lk "öykü" d???nda di?erlerinde yolculuk temas?, oteller, gitme, kaybetme, an?msama, unutma, tren istasyonlar?, Avrupa ta?ras? merkezde yer al?rken, bu noktada bazen Appelfeld'in Demir Raylar'?ndaki karakterin istasyon istasyon Avrupa ta?ras?nda dönüp dolanmas?n? çokça an?msad?m. Okuduktan sonra akl?mda bütünsel olarak pek bir ?ey kalmad?, anlardan, resimlerden, parçalardan geriye kalan edebi birkaç lezzet harici hiçbir ?ey. Dedim ya bu kitab? anlamlandırmak zor, ama sonra dü?ündüm bu kitap neden böyle, ve tekrar ismine bakt?m, Vertigo: ba? dönmesi, yükseklik korkusu (kitab?n sonundaki rüya). Evet, dedim. Bu tarz bir yaz?m?n en nihayi amac? okurda bir ba? dönme duygusu uyand?rmas?, ba? dönmesi esnas?nda gerçeklikten kopu?, hayal meyal an?msamalar, kendinden kopma, unutma, bilmeme, bilememe... Yazar bunu amaçlam?? ve de becermi? de. Manyak yazar dedim :) a?z?m aç?k kald? sonrasında. Çünkü hem bu kadar "derbeder" hem de bir o kadar "özenli" bir metin görüntüsü vermek ancak ya?ad??m ba? dönmesiyle aç?klanabilirdi... Vay can?na dedim...

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