

Troubling Signs: Sebald, Ambivalence, and the Function of the Critic

Uwe Schütte

The authorial figure of Winfried Georg Sebald is considerably less homogeneous than it appears to most commentators. Not only was he torn between the languages of his native Germany and his adopted home England, he navigated the threshold between the academy and the world of literature. Moreover, his career as a writer was marked by a peculiar ambivalence between peripheral status and central importance. His ascent in the anglophone sphere—taking place more or less during the five-year period between the respective translations of *The Emigrants* in 1996 to *Austerlitz* in 2001—is marked by an overwhelmingly positive critical reception. The latter found its way onto countless syllabi and attracted intense scholarly attention not long after its initial publication. Although the first book on Sebald in any language was published in 1995—a slim collection of newspaper reviews, interviews, and short essays (Loquai 1995)—very little critical scrutiny followed in subsequent years. Germanic academics took more than a decade after Sebald emerged as a notable literary figure

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

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before deeming him worthy of serious attention. And even then, this interest was limited to mostly doctoral students and junior faculty.

That his canonization took considerably longer in the German-speaking world and failed to match the enthusiasm of his anglophone readers can be attributed to the considerable body of often highly controversial scholarship Sebald published during his three-decades-long academic career. Speaking broadly, one can divide his critical output into three categories: first, two early scholarly monographs, long out of print in Germany; second, four volumes of collected essays easily available in paperback; and third, dozens of essays scattered across a range of scholarly and literary journals, as well as shorter pieces and reviews in obscure exhibition catalogs and conference proceedings. Taken together, these critical texts form the ground from which the literary texts of the final decade of Sebald's life sprouted. It is therefore unfortunate that his critical writings are still largely unavailable in translation, since they play an indispensable role in parsing the complexities of his oeuvre—including both the apparent contradictions as well as the myriad connections between his critical and imaginative modes of writing.¹ In other words, his unconventional authorial identity cannot be fully comprehended without an appreciation of the critical writings and, in turn, his transformation from scholar to writer.²

The most prominent feature of his work in the critical sphere is the stubbornly contrarian stance Sebald assumed toward his peers in German studies specifically and the Germanic literary establishment more generally. Beginning with his earliest publications, the expatriate scholar—Sebald's professional life was spent entirely in England—antagonized many who would occupy important positions in the popular media and on awards committees. He doubled down on this strategy by harshly attacking widely revered figures like Alfred Döblin or Alfred Andersch, attracting the scorn of many academics as well as such prominent writers as Günter Grass and Uwe Timm. His polemic against Andersch soured his relationship with Hans Magnus Enzensberger, one of Germany's most renowned public intellectuals and Sebald's longtime mentor. Although the recipient of several German literary awards during his lifetime, including the prestigious prizes named after Heinrich Böll and Heinrich Heine, Sebald was shut out from the most important one: it is telling that even though he was

1. Sebald's former colleague Jo Catling is currently translating the two collections of essays on Austrian literature, following up on the 2013 publication of her translation of Sebald's *Logis in einem Landhaus (A Place in the Country)*.

2. For a comprehensive study of this crucial aspect of his oeuvre, see Schütte 2014.

being touted as a future Nobel laureate, he still had not received Germany's most prestigious literary honor, the Georg Büchner Prize, an award granted annually by the German Academy for Language and Literature.³

Refused Recognition

Sebald's 1990 appearance at the Ingeborg Bachmann literary festival in Klagenfurt, Austria, highlights the complex interconnections between his career as a scholar and his nascent standing as an author. Televised live in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, it was (and still is) the most high-profile literary competition in the German-speaking world. Sebald read a short version of the Paul Bereyter narrative from *The Emigrants*, his breakout work in the anglophone world. In Klagenfurt, however, he received none of the six prizes handed out by the jury, losing out to now mostly forgotten names.⁴ Not everybody agreed with the snub. German-Austrian writer Daniel Kehlmann lambasted the jury in a polemic published in 2005: "Mann, Kafka, and [Joseph] Roth never took part in the Klagenfurt competition, but Sebald did. This was a challenge for the literary establishment that it completely and utterly failed."

Coincidentally, Sebald was already acquainted with two members of the Klagenfurt jury. In February 1971, they were fellow discussants on a Swiss radio broadcast panel focused on Carl Sternheim. The organizer, Peter von Matt, a leading Swiss scholar of German literature,⁵ invited Sebald to discuss his very provocative book on the Wilhelmine playwright published two years earlier. In the book, based on his MA dissertation, Sebald did not limit his attack to Sternheim, who was enjoying a new wave of popular and critical interest at the time. He reserved his harshest denunciations for his peers in the scholarly community and their self-serving veneration of a mediocre writer. Sebald was joined on the panel by the influential critic and Sternheim expert Hellmuth Karasek, an editor at *Die*

3. It is worth mentioning in this context two failed applications to the *Deutscher Literaturfonds*, an institution offering financial support to writers. The applications in his papers at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv (DLA) are remarkable, as they demonstrate that as early as 1986–87, the plans for stories later published in *The Emigrants* already existed. For more, see Bartsch 2016.

4. They were Franz Hodjak, Ludwig Roman Fleischer, Cornelia Manikowsky, Pieke Biermann, and Birgit Vanderbeke. The main prize went to Vanderbeke.

5. Von Matt proved to be a lifelong supporter of Sebald. He later invited a much older Sebald in winter 1997 to deliver the trio of lectures about the aerial bombardment of German cities that would prove so controversial at the University of Zurich.

Zeit's culture desk. Unhappy with the harshly negative thrust of Sebald's study, Karasek, in a highly unorthodox move, commissioned a review from a Sternheim scholar based in the USSR. In evident accordance with the editor's expectations, the reviewer completely dismissed both book and author: "Everything written by Sebald on Sternheim is sheer nonsense." The review declares the playwright "the sacrificial victim of the critic W. G. Sebald, an aspiring high school teacher" (Poljudow 2005).

It is not really surprising, then, that, two decades later, Karasek, unlike von Matt, did not support Sebald during the jury deliberations for the Bachmann contest. The full details of the jury's deliberation are not fully available, but as the official documentation of the 1990 competition shows, Karasek voted only once for Sebald in the various runoff ballots that determined the three winners (Felsbach and Metelko 1990: 163–87).⁶ What is surprising, however, is that in January 1993, Karasek enthusiastically praised *The Emigrants* during an appearance on *Das literarische Quartett*, a high-profile television program: "Ich habe ganz, ganz selten bei der Lektüre . . . wirklich so innegehalten wie bei diesem Buch und gedacht, ich bin sehr dankbar, dass ich das lesen musste. Ich habe ein Stück bedeutende Literatur entdeckt" (Just et al. 2006: 611; Only very, very rarely have I had to stop and think about how grateful I am for being asked to read a book. I have come across an important work of literature). This early experience with the Germanic literary establishment convinced Sebald to keep his distance—a chasm that only expanded over the decades, mostly as a result of his stubborn reluctance to play nice with his peers in German studies.

Sebald vs. Academia

This opposition to *Germanistik* began with his aforementioned book on the Wilhelmine playwright Carl Sternheim, Sebald's official entrance into the discipline. The first sentence represents no less than an open declaration of war: "Es ist der Zweck der vorliegenden Arbeit, das von der germanistischen Forschung in Zirkulation gebrachte Sternheim-Bild zu revidieren . . . wobei es sich bei dieser Revision vorwiegend um eine Destruktion

6. The writer he supported, the East German Reinhard Jirgl, has by now been recognized as one of the most important voices of contemporary German fiction and was awarded the Büchner Prize in 2010. Like Sebald, he failed to receive any prize in Klagenfurt in 1990.

handelt” (Sebald 1969: 7; The aim of the present study is to revise the image of Sternheim propounded by German studies . . . and this revision will predominantly take the form of destruction). Titled *Carl Sternheim: Kritiker und Opfer der Wilhelminischen Ära* (*Carl Sternheim: Critic and Victim of the Wilhelmine Era*), the heavily revised version of his Manchester MA dissertation was a broadside against Sternheim, whose plays were enjoying a revival of interest across the Federal Republic of Germany at the time. Sebald gave frequent polemic vent to his dislike, taking what can only be described as a consistently negative and unfair stance toward both the author and his writings. He repeatedly uses quotations taken out of context, deliberately misinterprets and misrepresents passages, and intentionally excludes material that would undermine his claims. Sebald’s highly contentious (and, it goes without saying, unjustified) aim was to show that the German Jewish playwright was an unwitting precursor to fascism.

The considerable anger undergirding Sebald’s academic debut was directed at two targets. Obviously, he nursed a grudge against Sternheim because he embodied the kind of opportunistic writer Sebald loathed. In order to secure a place for himself in the militaristic and anti-Semitic German society under the Kaiser, Sternheim converted from Judaism to Protestantism and adopted the conservative values and chauvinistic attitudes that prevailed in the run-up to the Great War. For the militantly anticlerical Sebald, embracing Christianity at all approached a cardinal moral sin. Literature, Sebald firmly believed, was inexplicably linked to truth—something missing from Sternheim, who, according to Sebald’s purist worldview, only assumed a critical stance toward the bourgeoisie in the hopes of impressing those in the higher echelons. While Sebald’s polemic does little to improve the understanding of Sternheim, his passionate interest in a case study of Jewish assimilation gone tragically wrong clearly foreshadows his grappling with the painful topic of Jewish *Eindeutschung* in his prose narratives of the 1990s.⁷

Secondly, and more importantly, the real focus of Sebald’s attack in his Sternheim study was *Germanistik* itself, which in his view was politically compromised. Like many of his generation, Sebald felt that his experience in the German university system was tainted by the presence of many professors who had made their career under the Nazis. “All my teachers

7. Sebald’s reflections on the role of Jewish authors in Wilhelmine Germany, despite their many flaws, were groundbreaking for German studies in the 1960s. For more, see Hessing and Lenzen 2015.

had gotten jobs during the Brownshirt years,” Sebald once claimed in an interview, “and were therefore compromised, either because they had actually supported the regime or had been fellow travelers or otherwise been silent” (Atlas 1999: 290). Such blanket accusations, rooted in a lifelong suspicion of any representatives of the establishment, were very much in line with the radicalized zeitgeist of the late 1960s. The renowned scholar Wilhelm Emrich, editor of Sternheim’s collected works, was a prime target of Sebald’s wrath. At the time, Emrich was one of the most respected figures in German literary studies, holding a distinguished chair at the Free University of Berlin. Sebald surmised that given the poor aesthetic quality of Sternheim’s oeuvre, Emrich’s warm embrace of a German Jewish writer was a shrewd ploy to obfuscate his past. To the young Sebald, this blatant careerism was prototypical of the entire discipline:

Andauernd . . . wird die Bedeutung Sternheims bekräftigt, ohne daß man sich je kritisch mit ihm auseinandersetzt. Das scheint mir symptomatisch für die deutsche Literaturkritik, die stets bereit ist, einen vom Hitlerregime diskreditierten Autor zu rehabilitieren, wahrscheinlich, weil sie von dem untergründigen Gefühl verfolgt wird, daß ihre eigene Rehabilitation noch nicht zur Genüge vollzogen sei (Sebald 1969: 129; Sternheim’s importance is continually pronounced without any critical analysis of his writings. This to me is symptomatic of literary criticism in Germany, always keen to rehabilitate writers discredited by Hitler’s regime, probably because of the underlying feeling that its own rehabilitation has not yet been fully achieved).

Although he did not know it at the time of the book’s publication, Sebald was vindicated when details of Emrich’s very German career trajectory came to light in the 1990s. Emrich had initially been a member of a Communist student organization only to end up working for Joseph Goebbels at the Ministry of Propaganda. Arrested and detained for several months after the war, Emrich promptly switched allegiances, blossoming into a fervent democrat who deftly avoided discussing his past. Indeed, in order to bury evidence of his erstwhile political loyalties, the anti-Semitic articles he had published were torn out of journals in university libraries (Jäger 2000: 251).

Not surprisingly, Sebald’s first monograph outraged Sternheim scholars. Academic reviewers mostly focused on his blatant disregard for basic professional standards and the overtly arrogant tone of his writing. Outside academia, however, some applauded Sebald’s fresh and belligerent

erent approach to an established author. In a review that appeared in the *Germanic Review*, Donald D. Daviau articulates both positions: “Because of his direct attack on literary critics, his arrogant, aggressive tone, his many doubtful generalizations, and his doctrinaire, jargonistic style, Sebald’s own approach will probably evoke as much negative reaction among *Germanisten* as their aesthetic ‘*werkimmanent*’ approach has seemed to arouse contemptuous feelings within him. Nevertheless, his book does present a consistent (if not consistently argued) point of view that will have to be taken into account by future critics of Sternheim” (1972: 236). As his book was causing a stir in Germany, Sebald managed to secure a lectureship at the University of East Anglia (UEA) in Norwich, and soon after he embarked on a second project, a doctoral thesis on Alfred Döblin, another German Jewish writer whose career had been stifled by the rise of National Socialism. It was submitted in August 1973, and he was successfully awarded his degree the following July despite some reservations on the part of the examiners. Because publishers were largely skeptical about the book, it was only in 1980 that a revised version appeared as *Der Mythos der Zerstörung im Werk Döblins* (*The Myth of Destruction in the Works of Döblin*).

The book proved just as controversial as its predecessor. Essentially an act of character assassination, Sebald’s argument mercilessly ravages Döblin’s literary works and essays. To him, Döblin’s conversion to Catholicism was even more condemnable than Sternheim’s conversion to Protestantism. It was tantamount to treason for Sebald not only because of his own personal distaste for the religion of his conservative rural upbringing but also because it coincided with the beginning of the most violent period of Jewish persecution in November 1941. As he had done to Sternheim, Sebald accused Döblin—who fled a month after Hitler’s ascendance in 1933—of paving the way intellectually for the Nazi dictatorship.

In his novels, Sebald maintains, Döblin glorifies violence through his repeated graphic portrayal of cruelty, thereby fostering a “myth of destruction” that the Nazis subsequently made a reality. Sebald lays emphasis on the bestial slaughtering of Jews in Döblin’s *Wallenstein* (1920), a novel set during the Thirty Years’ War. Indeed, Döblin’s work is replete with brutality, mass murder, and large-scale destruction—a trend that raises a troubling question: Why was Döblin so obsessively fixated with such imagery? Sebald’s claim that Döblin’s literary violence laid the groundwork for the literal violence of the Nazis is doubtful at best. More important, however, is the lesson Sebald learned from Döblin that he would apply to his own writing later. That is, Sebald never explicitly describes or evokes the horrors

of the Shoah, instead tackling them in tangential, oblique ways. He thus avoided what he saw as the moral impasse that mired Döblin, who, as it were, conjured up a kind of fictional slaughter of Jews that the Nazis later translated into reality.

Scathing Reviews

Sebald waged his campaign against *Germanistik* on yet another front: the fifteen academic reviews he published in the English-language *Journal of European Studies*, founded at UEA in 1971. They appeared between late 1971 and 1975, constituting half of the roughly thirty reviews he penned until he stopped reviewing entirely in July 1990.⁸ Despite the range of intellectual and critical questions these fifteen reviews engage, they unanimously pass negative judgment on established scholars of German. Here, however, Sebald bears some resemblance to the ambivalent position that the outsider Sternheim found himself in the anti-Semitic climate of Wilhelmine Germany. Like Sebald in foreign England, Sternheim was torn between the desire to belong to imperial German high society while simultaneously harboring a profound aversion to it.

Even though they represent a tiny portion of his literary output, the palpable aggression undergirding Sebald's early reviews highlights an oft neglected dimension to his personality. This hostility, in turn, can be seen as a symptom of his ambivalence for the academic profession into whose ranks he was officially enlisting. (The arrogance could also be justly attributed in part to a junior academic's feelings of insecurity.) Whatever its origins, Sebald's deep-seated mistrust and disapproval of *Germanistik* surfaces in a variety of ways. One example is offered by his assessment of Helmut Dinse's *Die Entwicklung des jiddischen Schrifttums im deutschen Sprachgebiet* (*The Development of Yiddish Literature in the Germanic Sphere*):

From its early beginnings, *Germanistik* as a discipline was fatefully wed to the growth of the German ideology and it is therefore quite consistent that Yiddish literature, from the early middle-ages to the nineteenth century should fail to figure in the clerks' account of [German literary history]. And it strikes one as the supreme quirk in all

8. Sebald abandoned academic reviewing in 1975. Nearly a decade later, Sebald, who by now had attained professional seniority, accepted several review requests from the *Modern Language Review* (MLR).

this that the efforts of the one established academic in present-day Germany who is actively engaged in researching Yiddish texts are somewhat marred by his own past record of anti-Semitic activities. (Sebald 1974)

What Sebald is referring to here is the case of German linguist and Yiddish scholar Franz J. Beranek. According to Dinse, the New York-based Institute for Yiddish Research (YIVO) considered Beranek to be “a formerly active anti-Semite” and “philologically incompetent.” And for this reason, “Yiddish research in the Federal Republic was unable to establish any international contacts” (1974: xvi–xvii).⁹

Sebald did not limit his attack to scholars working in the land of his birth; he called out Austrian *Germanistik* for its role in the rise of National Socialism. Like other academic disciplines, the institutional study of Germanic letters had readily participated in the great silence enveloping the crimes of the Nazis and took far too long to address this moral failure. Discussing Joseph McVeigh’s *Kontinuität und Vergangenheitsbewältigung in der österreichischen Literatur nach 1945 (Continuity and Coming to Terms with the Past in Austrian Literature after 1945)*, he unabashedly lances an ad hominem attack on leading scholars for obfuscating their former political tendencies: “Literary historians [from Austria] such as [Josef] Nadler, [Heinz] Kindermann, [Norbert] Langer, and Adalbert Schmidt remained influential into the early 1960s and did their best to obfuscate the moral and aesthetic issues which should have been brought onto the agenda in those years. Indeed, I remember vividly a lecture delivered by Adalbert Schmidt in this country in the early 1970s which made my hair stand on end” (Sebald 1990). Sebald paired his antagonism of the academic establishment with praise for outsiders and those going against the grain of *Germanistik*. This is neatly illustrated in his review of two studies of exile literature. In his view, the deplorable way *Germanistik* has grappled with this body of texts is symptomatic of a kind of *Betriebsblindheit* (organizational tunnel vision), for “critics, and academics in particular, have largely chosen to ignore an area in which literature and politics are so inextricably intertwined” (Sebald 1973a).

This comment evinces the degree to which German studies in the decades after the war did not question the dominance of the *innere Emigranten* (inner emigrants) over colleagues who had fled into exile. After

9. On the question of Beranek’s academic incompetence, see Guggenheim-Grünberg 1966.

the war, those forced out by racial or political persecution often found it difficult to reintegrate, especially since the staunchly conservative political climate of the Adenauer years was extremely unfavorable to socialist and Jewish writers.¹⁰ Disconcertingly, the first two books on German literature in exile, both reviewed by Sebald, appeared only in 1973—a shocking fact that only confirmed his feelings of disappointment and resentment toward the discipline.

Sebald frames the review as a kind of contest between two opponents. Manfred Durzak's edited volume *Die deutsche Exilliteratur 1933–1945* is comprised of thirty-nine essays penned by established academics and critics, while Hans-Albert Walter's multivolume monograph *Deutsche Exilliteratur 1933–1950* is the work of an independent scholar. Characteristically, Sebald approvingly categorizes the author of the latter as “an outsider,” adding that “H. A. Walter modestly describes himself as an autodidact” (1973b: 290). Unreservedly praising the two-volume survey, he states that “there can be little doubt that this study will remain the one indispensable work on the subject.” Sebald saw this as no less than “a comprehensive and exemplary work—literary history at its best” (290). It goes without saying that this critical interest in the thematic of exile foreshadows the narrative threads he would weave together in *The Emigrants*.

Indeed, the reviews contain other clues that point to Sebald's literary endeavors. His reviews of illustrated books, for example, underscore his interest in the specific, spectral nature of (analog) photographs and their narrative dimensions. Reviewing Franz Hubmann's *Dream of Empire: The World of Germany in Original Photographs, 1840–1914*, he comments on an 1860 portrait of a Russian ambassador and his family: “The casual *raffinement* of this scene reminds one of the insufficiency of literary and, to be sure, historical descriptions. . . . Old photographs have much to commend them” (Sebald 1973b: 289).

Sebald also reviewed *Kafka und Prag*, a coffee-table book featuring a biographical essay on Kafka by Johann Bauer and contemporary photographs of the city by Isidor Pollak. This belongs to the small body of reviews written for the Austrian literary magazine *Literatur & Kritik*, to which he would also contribute a number of critical essays. (Sebald preferred magazines with a more general readership to scholarly journals.) Early in his review, he castigates Kafka scholarship by claiming that the collected

10. Peter Weiss, a communist of Jewish descent, attested to this; he never returned to Germany, staying in his Swedish exile.

photographs and documents provide the reader with a deeper understanding of Kafka's writings than "the all too self-serving secondary literature" (Sebald 1972: 421).

According to Sebald, the photographs illuminate Kafka's texts because "in them modernity appears as an emanation of the archaic, like the art nouveau head of the Medusa etched into the milky frosted glass windows of a Prague staircase."¹¹ Kafka's texts, according to Sebald, revolve around "the symbiotic relationship of progress and regression" (421). For him, photographs speak louder than words: "[Einige] meisterhafte Bilder [vermögen dies] mit der Kraft eines *déjà vu* aufzuweisen . . . [und] erinnern daran, dass noch die ungereimtesten Szenen und Szenarien in Kafkas Romanen der Wirklichkeit direkt korrespondieren, einer Wirklichkeit freilich, deren Gegenwart von den bösen Geistern der eigenen Vorzeit heimgesucht wurde" (422; Some masterful photographs by Isidor Pollaks prove this with the power of a *déjà vu* and they remind us that even the illogical scenes and scenarios in Kafka's novels directly correspond with reality, a reality, though, haunted by the evil spirits of its own prehistory). The free-ranging, essayistic style in which Sebald discusses Kafka's text in this review not only paves the way for his 1986 speculative essay, titled "Tiere, Menschen, Maschinen: Zu Kafkas Evolutionsgeschichten," it also prefigures the genre-blending "Dr. K. Takes the Waters at Riva" in *Vertigo*.¹² Indeed, in his review of the Bauer and Pollak book, Prague's Modernist titan makes his first appearance in the oeuvre of Sebald as the very literary paradigm that, due to the opacity of Kafka's writings, allowed Sebald to indulge his love of speculative and digressive writing. As Sebald explained to his interviewer, Ralph Schock, writing the story about Kafka in Riva marked the "Übergang von der Beschreibung der Literatur zur Literatur selbst" (Sebald 2011b: 97; the transition from writing about literature to literature itself). All of this is to say that these reviews offer an instructive perspective on his development as an author. That the reviews have been largely ignored in anglophone Sebald scholarship is regrettable—particularly for scholars reading him in translation. After all, they constitute the majority of critical texts Sebald published in English during his lifetime.

11. The aesthetic of the photo and its fixation on the head of the Medusa owes much to the kind of photography that Sebald would later incorporate into his literary books.

12. The origins of this seminal essay hark back to January 1983, when Sebald was commissioned by the *Times Higher Education Supplement* to celebrate the centenary of Kafka's birth. However, the chief editor felt that Sebald's essay, entitled "Animals, Men, Machines: Reading Kafka in 1983," was too unorthodox to be printed in the magazine.

Return of the Polemicist: Andersch Redux and Jurek Becker's Holocaust Kitsch

Sebald's penchant for polemical attacks on writers, colleagues, and critics largely lay dormant during the 1980s but returned with a vengeance in the 1990s. The public impact he made with his attack on Alfred Andersch in 1993 was immense because at the time, the opportunistic writer was a widely admired fixture of German postwar literature. In "Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Alfred Andersch; Das Verschwinden in der Vorsehung" ("Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: On Alfred Andersch"), Sebald levels a number of accusations but focuses primarily on Andersch's personal conduct during the Nazi era. He divorced his Jewish wife in 1943, a precondition to publishing at the time, only to exploit the marriage a few years later during his incarceration in an American POW camp.¹³

Sebald aimed at nothing less than a complete dismissal of Andersch's literary works. These books, Andersch repeatedly assured, were fully grounded in historical fact. This claim, misleading as we now know, helped elevate Andersch to a position of moral and literary authority in German postwar literature. Sebald's withering attack—which in part took the form of yet another vicious character assassination—arose from his belief that Andersch represented the biggest failure of postwar German literature: "To the overwhelming majority of the writers who remained in Germany under the Third Reich, the redefinition of their idea of themselves after 1945 was a more urgent business than depiction of the real conditions surrounding them" (Sebald 2003b: ix). In addition to the fact that their passivity to (and in some cases direct cooperation with) the regime prevented them from providing accurate depictions of life under the swastika, their novels and stories, according to Sebald, were designed to whitewash their moral shortcomings.

Sansibar oder der letzte Grund (Flight to Afar), Andersch's most popular and successful novel, is an illuminating case in point. A group of upright Germans rescues a work of art¹⁴ and a Jewish girl, smuggling both to safety—the very opposite of what Andersch did when he deserted his

13. Ever since Sebald first dared to topple Andersch from the pedestal erected by his advocates and apologists, a considerable number of new insights about the author's mystifications, distortions, and outright lies have come to light. These are discussed in detail in Döring and Joch 2011.

14. It is a sculpture by Ernst Barlach who, we have now learned, was not as opposed to the Nazi regime as his advocates claimed for a long time, citing his inclusion in the famous *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) exhibition in 1937.

wife and daughter at the apex of the Holocaust. Sebald summarizes his position in the foreword to *Luftkrieg und Literatur (On the Natural History of Destruction)*, the collection that brought together his controversial 1998 public lectures in Zurich on the literary recollection of (more correctly, the lack thereof) the Allied aerial bombing of German cities and a revised version of the Andersch essay: “In my view, such a preoccupation with retrospective improvement of the self-image [that postwar writers] wished to hand down was one of the main reasons for the inability of a whole generation of German authors to describe what they had seen, and to convey it to our minds” (Sebald 2003b: x).

The essay on Andersch was preceded by an even more ferocious attack on a less well-known German Jewish author. Composed in 1992, the essay, which like most of Sebald’s critical work has not been translated, was commissioned for a volume celebrating novelist and screenwriter Jurek Becker. His greatest literary success was the semi-autobiographical novel *Jakob der Lügner (Jakob the Liar)*, which first appeared in 1969 and was later the subject of three film adaptations, including a 1999 Hollywood feature film starring Robin Williams.

Sebald’s polemic focuses on this debut novel, which was largely based on Becker’s five-year-long incarceration in the Polish ghetto Łódź. Sebald accuses the book of a self-imposed “Erinnerungssembargo” (embargo on recollection) (Sebald 2010: 234). Even though the story is based on the real experiences of the inmates of a Jewish ghetto, Sebald is unable to locate any affective traces of the author: “Becker [ist] nirgend anzutreffen. . . . Sorgsam hält er sich aus allem heraus, wohlweislich verwahrt bleiben seine Gedanken und Gefühle” (230; Becker is nowhere to be found. He carefully keeps his distance from everything, very prudently burying all his private thoughts and emotions).

Even worse for Sebald was the novel’s humorous tone—evidently an antidote to the horrors he had experienced but chose not to revisit when working on the book: “Beckers erstes Buch über Jakob weist kaum eine Spur auf von Verstörung. Daß es dem deutschen Durchschnittsleser das Getto kommensurabel macht, ist das Maß seines Mißlingens” (231; Becker’s debut bears hardly a trace of any kind of trauma. Making the ghetto commensurable to the average German reader is the ultimate proof of the novel’s [ethical] shortcoming”). Yet, despite the photographic aids, Becker was unable to rekindle any memories of the subjects and places depicted. Indeed, he was unable to grab hold of any childhood memories at all. Sebald quotes an essay by Becker:

[Ich] habe Geschichten über Gettos geschrieben, als wäre ich ein Fachmann. Vielleicht habe ich gedacht, wenn ich nur lange genug schreibe, werden die Erinnerungen schon kommen. Vielleicht habe ich irgendwann auch angefangen, manche meiner Erfindungen für Erinnerungen zu halten. Ohne Erinnerungen an die Kindheit zu sein, das ist, als wärst du verurteilt, ständig eine Kiste mit dir herumzuschleppen, deren Inhalt du nicht kennst (Sebald 2010: 234; I have written stories about ghettos as if I were an expert. Maybe I thought to myself, if I write for long enough the memories will come. Maybe I even began at some point to believe my inventions were memories. Having no memories of childhood is like being condemned to carry a box around without ever knowing the contents).

The theme of recovering repressed childhood memories is, of course, at the center of *Austerlitz* (2001a). The fictional character suffers the exact problem Becker describes: unlocking the secret trove of childhood memories that have hindered his adulthood. Unlike Becker, however, Sebald, in his last novel, tackles the very poetological problem he diagnosed in *Jakob der Lügner* and other Becker texts—namely, the absence of the author as a means of authentication. In *Austerlitz*, Sebald divides the narrative arrangement between a protagonist who relays the gradual recovery of his memories (and along with it his identity) and a narrator who functions as a reflective surface, ascertaining for the reader the credibility of the title character's recollection. Furthermore, the palpable absence of any mental disturbance in the narrator of *Jakob der Lügner*, something that Sebald strongly criticized, left its traces in *Austerlitz*. This can be detected in the protagonist's discussions of his psychological problems with the narrator, who tracks and records the changing affective states of his distant friend. During Austerlitz's discussion of his visit to Marienbad with Marie de Verneuil, the psychological violence rooted in his inability to access his former self plays a crucial role, eventually leading to a mental breakdown and temporary hospitalization.

There can be little doubt that Sebald's brief engagement with Becker had implications for the novel he would publish roughly half a decade later. And once more, the matter confirms a decisive pattern in the symbiotic relationship between Sebald's critical and imaginative modes of writing: the angry polemic directed at German Jewish writers is matched by the profound empathy with which he engaged memoirs of German Jews specifically and victims of persecution and displacement in general. In his literary

texts, Sebald aims to avoid what he believes to be the missteps in other people's writings—usually what makes for bad scholarship makes for good literary fare. Only when both sides of Sebald's coin are considered in concert can one begin to grasp the power and significance of his career. But again, the fact that this remarkable essay is not likely to be translated into English any time soon is yet another example of the obstacles facing those reading Sebald in translation.

English Only, Please

It goes without saying that the inaccessibility of German-language scholarship on Sebald is a major yet seemingly unmentioned fulcrum of some anglophone research on the writer. There is indeed a vast body of criticism in German, including many outstanding monographs and collections, knowledge of which greatly assists a sophisticated understanding of Sebald. While a number of excellent English-language publications by bilingual academics have made some crucial insights of the German scholarship accessible, this is only a partial remedy. One could argue that any Sebald research penned by a non-German speaker should carry a proviso warning readers of the absence of a considerable body of thought. It is equally true, however, that German academics—despite the fact that (nearly) all of them will be able to read English—will not readily engage with scholars approaching Sebald's texts from outside German studies.¹⁵ Nor, it needs to be stressed too, do they show a particular willingness to write in English, something that would obviously greatly extend the reach of their contributions. The next section will look at various issues regarding the chasm between the two languages using three different examples: a film, an edited volume, and two monographs on Sebald by widely respected American Germanists.

15. A different matter is the research on Sebald in French, Italian, and Spanish. While there is an overlap between the French reception of Sebald and Anglo-Germanic Sebald research—like the bilingual special edition of *Recherches germaniques 2* (2005) edited by leading Paris-based Sebald scholar Ruth Vogel-Klein or the Sebald conference at C erisy in September 2014 conducted in French—Sebald research in the other Romance languages fails to find any discernible audience in German- and English-language scholarship whatsoever.

Missing German(s): *Patience (After Sebald)*

While there are some admirers who are eager to adopt Sebald as a Jew—evidenced by the stones left at his grave (Bahners 2008)—the British writer Will Self has deplored a similar tendency to wrap Sebald up in the Union Jack. This nationalistic sleight of hand shrewdly incorporates his books into the leviathan known as British literature. During his 2010 Sebald Memorial Lecture, Self waxes ironically about the self-serving marginalization of the author's Germanic origins by his fellow countrymen: "In England, Sebald's one-time presence among us—even if we would never be so crass as to think this, let alone articulate it—is registered as further confirmation that we won, and won because of our righteousness, our liberality, our inclusiveness and our tolerance. Where else could the Good German have sprouted so readily, if not from our brown and nutritious soil?" (2014: 106).

Grant Gee's film *Patience (After Sebald)* (2012) provides an apposite example of Sebald's appropriation by the UK cultural elite. The film ambitiously tries to adapt *The Rings of Saturn*, the book most prominently set in England and thereby ideally suited to claim the author as English.¹⁶ *Patience* works best during the few passages when excerpts are evocatively read by the actor Jonathan Pryce, superimposed with grainy footage shot on location in East Anglia. Most of the film, however, is devoted to a considerable array of writers, artists, critics, filmmakers, and others commenting on Sebald and his works. Many of these twenty-odd experts struggle with the correct German pronunciation of Sebald's name, and only three of them had ever met the writer. There are apparently no German-speaking academics¹⁷ or, indeed, German scholars who presumably could have spoken competently about his background and the critical texts awaiting translation. Nor are there any of the translators who have played such an important, if somewhat underappreciated, role in Sebald's emergence as a global literary figure. Ironically, Sebald is the only German in the film.¹⁸

Not surprisingly, the crucial issue of where *Die Ringe des Saturn* resides in German literary history plays no role at all. Rather, the book is framed solely around the tradition of anglophone perambulatory writing.

16. The book was also chosen by British director Katie Mitchell for adaptation as a "theatrical audio play."

17. The only exception is Barbara Hui, whose doctoral work involved digitally mapping the geography of *The Rings of Saturn*.

18. The only exception, and the only time German words are to be heard, is from a short excerpt from a TV documentary on Michael Hamburger.

As the writer and academic Robert Macfarlane states in Grant Gee's film *Patience (After Sebald)* (2012), in the English cultural tradition, the act of walking in the country is normally associated with recovery while linked to discovery in the United States—proof that Sebald firmly belongs to the Island.¹⁹ Putting aside the interesting question of how the text engages British history and culture, the question of the German origins of this “English pilgrimage” is never addressed.

The dearth of critical insights is connected to other problematic aspects of *Patience*. Although the film stresses Sebald's oscillation between fact and fiction, it fails to question the central premise of *The Rings of Saturn*—namely, that the circular walking tour the narrator claims to make through a sizable chunk of East Anglia never actually took place. Sebald undertook a number of individual walks, having originally planned to write ten separate short essays for a major German newspaper. Finally, one of the film's concluding images—in which smoke from a fire lit by the side of the road where Sebald's death supposedly occurred morphs into an image of his face—is in very poor taste. Though the film was no doubt intended as an homage, it does an unfortunate disservice to his legacy, resulting from a self-serving attitude that overlooks basic aspects of Sebald's identity.

German Excluded—*After Sebald*

While *Patience (After Sebald)* is aimed at a wider audience, the next example targets the smaller community of Sebald's critical readers. Several valuable academic essay collections on Sebald have appeared in English over the last decade. In the introduction to *A Literature of Restitution: Critical Essays on W. G. Sebald* (2013), the editors stake an important claim that captures the nature of their volume: “Championed by influential commentators in the English-speaking world such as Susan Sontag and James Wood, Sebald in English was perceived as a striking new voice, yet . . . his saturation in the Germanic tradition arguably makes him a less singular figure in his native language. . . . Indeed, it is only in returning to the original German texts . . . that the full subtlety of his elusive, allusive prose becomes apparent (Baxter et al. 2013: 3). The importance of “returning to the original German texts” is demonstrated by an essay collection from 2014. In an

19. Macfarlane himself has written a number of books based on extended walks that bear more than a passing resemblance to the meandering, digressive style of *The Rings of Saturn*.

apparent allusion to the subtitle of Gee's failed film, the volume is entitled *After Sebald: Essays and Illuminations* and is edited by Sebald's former colleague Jon Cook (2014). Among the contributors are a bevy of distinguished scholars like Dame Gillian Beer (Cambridge), Clive Scott (UEA), and Robert Macfarlane (Cambridge), in addition to well-known artists and writers like Will Self, Richard Long, Tess Jaray, and Ali Smith.²⁰

One can only speculate why this volume is marred, among other things, by careless, sloppy editing. Particularly when dealing with a scrupulous, conscientious writer like Sebald, the volume of mistakes fails to do justice to the editor's former colleague. For example, spelling mistakes in the original versions of some contributions are reprinted unchanged.²¹ Simple factual claims are incorrect,²² and ignorance of German leads to confusion and misleading readings.²³ While the chapters do occasionally feature German umlauts, they have all been erased from the German titles of Sebald's books in the bibliography—akin to mixing up *it's* and *its* in English.

Simon Prosser, Sebald's publisher at Hamish Hamilton, once praised a piece by Macfarlane as "perhaps the best short introduction" to his writings (Prosser 2009: 13).²⁴ However, the opening section of his contribution,

20. Disappointingly, many chapters are merely reprints or slightly revised versions of previously published material.

21. See Cook 2014: "Schiller in Marianbad, Schiller in Marienbad" (148); "Thomas Bernhard" (143); "Die Dritte Period" (147).

22. Dame Gillian incorrectly describes Stuttgart as "the nearest city to his village" (Cook 2014: 43).

23. The fact that, in the mind of the narrator, the "slaughterhouse at Ordsall" conjures up the brand name Haeberlein & Metzger from "Nüremberg" (Cook 2014: 39)—an incorrect fusion of German and English spelling—is not at all surprising or unprompted, as Dame Gillian assumes, as *Metzger* means "butcher" in German.

24. This issue of the in-house literary magazine featured an extended section with essays and texts on Sebald. Prosser also writes, "One of the most fugitive of Max's works, which I have never managed to track down, is a radio play which he supposedly wrote for the BBC on the life of Kant" (2009: 10). At the time of Prosser's writing, the existence of the script, which was originally intended to be adapted for a TV film by the Sender Freies Berlin, was indeed not very well known. There are three versions of the script, on which Sebald worked for about five years, from 1979 to 1984, extant in Sebald's literary remains kept at the DLA. Following my efforts to persuade German radio stations to finally produce it, a radio play was broadcast by the Cologne-based broadcaster WDR in July 2015. Prosser incorrectly assumes that Sebald wrote the script in English for the BBC. This apparent lack of awareness that Sebald wrote predominantly in German and always had German media outlets in mind for his projects exemplifies once again the desire of the British literary establishment to conscript him as one of its own. For a detailed analysis of the Kant script, see Schütte 2016.

adorned by the needlessly minimalistic heading—“Sebald”—is riddled with errors and inaccuracies. Macfarlane introduces his biographical sketch by misspelling Sebald’s first name in its female English form, “Winifred” (Macfarlane 2014: 20), which does not exist in German. His place of birth is stated as “Wertech” (20) instead of Wertach, and he was never “a Professor of German Literature at the University of East Anglia” (20), as his colleague Cook should most certainly know.²⁵ Macfarlane further confuses the two universities Sebald attended before his arrival in the UK. According to him, “Sebald studied German literature at Freiburg University, taking his degree in 1965” (20), though in fact his first degree was awarded in 1966 by the Université de Fribourg, in French-speaking Switzerland.²⁶ It is unfortunate that Macfarlane’s essay opens the collection. The poor quality of the introductory biographical remarks, however, is not replicated in the remainder of the essay. Indeed, Macfarlane’s essay gives an excellent introduction to Sebald’s work, situating it in the contemporary context and making incisive remarks on some curious aspects of its anglophone reception.

Nevertheless, looking across the entire volume, the importance of careful consideration of the subtleties of German, the language in which Sebald conducted much of his professional and personal life, to any inquiry into his oeuvre is undeniable. It is good academic practice, in any case, when dealing with texts in a foreign language, to enlist the help of a native speaker. In the specific context of UEA, seeking out the help of native-speaking colleagues is considerably more difficult since the Department of German was dissolved during Sebald’s lifetime. Along with other colleagues, he was transferred to the School of English and American Studies. Given Sebald’s long-standing aversion to and acts of open protest against the neoliberal reformation of British higher education, the complete restructuring of the department, his professional home for more than a quarter century, signaled a poignant and final defeat.²⁷

25. Sebald held a chair in European literature. This mistake is replicated numerous times in Sebald scholarship. The latest example can be found in a recent edited collection; in an afterword to the volume, German publisher Michael Krüger informs readers that the chair Sebald assumed in 1988 was in “modern German literature” (Finch and Wolff 2014: 276).

26. Sebald left the Universität Freiburg im Breisgau without a degree in summer 1966 after two years of study.

27. On Sebald’s role in English university life, see Schütte 2011.

Sebald and the Sebald Archive

Will Self's contribution to *After Sebald* is noteworthy for another reason, as it engages Sebald's unpublished PhD thesis in English on Döblin. This study, submitted in August 1973, represents the longest Sebald text available in English.²⁸ Until early 2012, it could be consulted in only a few British holding libraries but is now easily available online from the British Library EThOS service. Surprisingly, most English-speaking academics have by and large ignored the thesis, which is largely identical to the published German version.²⁹

A poignant and puzzling example of the problems arising from the ignorance or marginalization of Sebald's critical writings is furnished by David Kleinberg-Levin's *Redeeming Words: Language and the Promise of Happiness in the Stories of Döblin and Sebald*. Inexplicably, Sebald's PhD thesis on Döblin is sidelined in this study. Kleinberg-Levin quotes only a short passage from *Der Mythos der Zerstörung im Werk Döblins*, comprising some six lines, which he renders in his own English translation (Kleinberg-Levin 2013: 64).³⁰ In a separate instance, he only refers the reader to Sebald's book, part of a long list of more than forty academic sources that Kleinberg-Levin acknowledges in an extensive footnote (79). Here, however, Kleinberg-Levin adds a second mistake to his consistent misspelling of *Mythus* by incorrectly stating the title as *Der Mythos der Störung im Werk Döblins* (317).

Another important point to consider for academics working in the burgeoning field of Sebald philology is the sheer volume of work exploring the themes of memory, trauma, intertextuality, intermediality, et cetera. So vast is this discussion that it is by now effectively mandatory to consult Sebald's papers at the German Literary Archives in Marbach. In addition

28. Sebald originally wrote his thesis in German and then enlisted the help of native speakers to translate each draft chapter into English. Even before his degree was awarded, he offered it to an English-language publisher by sending the manuscript to Oxford University Press, which rejected it (Schütte 2014: 115–55).

29. On the differences between the two, and a comprehensive discussion of Sebald's engagement with Döblin, see Sheppard 2009.

30. Throughout his book, he misses the crucial point that Sebald used the spelling of *Mythus* rather than *Mythos* in his title to differentiate the term (which is meant to signify the return of archaic violence) from the typical signification of *Mythos* as myth. This also differentiates it from the way *Mythos* is understood in critical theory. There are other consistent misspellings that riddle the text—e.g., Stendhal is cited in a kind of mock-Scandinavian spelling as “Stendahl.”

to prepublication manuscripts, the archive holds notes, correspondences, and other research materials that could shed new light on his work and his development as a writer. The Marbach holdings also include Sebald's library, and the countless annotations in his books offer another fascinating terrain for scholars to explore. Ben Hutchinson (2007), for example, has demonstrated with this material the hitherto unrecognized influence Italian writer Giorgio Bassani exerted over Sebald. Another noteworthy example of archive usage is the introduction and commentary that Iain Galbraith produced for his edition of Sebald's poems (2011). Unfortunately, this kind of archival research has not gained much traction among scholars.

Despite the logistical complications of visiting and working in the archive, the wealth of material is simply too important to ignore. A recent monograph by a leading American scholar may be used to illustrate the importance of archival research.³¹ Carol Jacobs, Birgit Baldwin Professor of Comparative Literature and Professor of German Literature at Yale, made an important contribution with her 2004 article on *The Emigrants*, which received the rare (and very deserved) accolade of being translated into German (2007). This essay, unrevised despite the considerable amount of relevant research on *The Emigrants* published during the last decade,³² constitutes a chapter of her *Sebald's Vision* (2015). A blurb on the back cover by Michael G. Levine, another American Germanist, endorses the book as a "work of great patience, stamina, and critical vigilance. . . . *Sebald's Vision* is meticulously researched, beautifully written, and certain to become the standard by which future work on this important writer is measured."

Such high praise is misleading, since to anyone seriously engaged in Sebald scholarship, Jacobs provides nothing more than an elementary introduction to the author, framed around a somewhat obvious thematic of vision. In her readings, Jacobs very often displays what one reviewer calls "a tendency to cite the works and then largely re-cite them via her analysis" (Ward 2015). There is no evidence of any consultation of Sebald's papers, despite the potentially enriching and surprising material relating to her interests. There are also basic factual errors, such as the claim that Sebald delivered two lectures on the topic of air warfare and literature (Jacobs 2015: 76).³³ In her chapter on the Zurich lectures, Jacobs informs readers

31. See also Osborne 2013 and Finch 2013. Finch acknowledges a funded trip to Marbach, but she did not incorporate any archival material into her book.

32. Ceuppens 2009 is indispensable for any discussion of *The Emigrants*.

33. Jacobs probably inferred this from the structure of the book edition, published in English as *On the Natural History of Destruction*. As Sebald explains in his foreword,

that “Sebald was conceived under the sign of this image” (90), referring to the kitschy image of Jesus at Gethsemane, which, Sebald writes, “hung over my parents’ conjugal bed for many years” (Sebald 2004: 73).

Jacobs’s assumption is incorrect, as a visit to Marbach would have made clear. Sebald knew that he must have been conceived when his mother visited his father at the Bamberg army barracks in late August 1943. He recounts as much in the unpublished manuscript of the first Zurich lecture: “Irgendwann während der paar Tage, die dem Abschiednehmen vorausgingen, muß ich, wie ich mir ausgerechnet habe, gezeugt worden sein, eine Vorstellung, mit der ich mich bis heute nicht aussöhnen kann” (Deutsches Literaturarchiv [DLA]; According to my calculations, I must have been conceived at some point during this time, shortly before they parted ways—a fact that I have never really been able to reconcile with myself”).³⁴ The importance of this visit is also evident in two poems, “In Bamberg” in *Across the Land and the Water* (2011a), and the section “Dark Night Sallies Forth” in *After Nature*. The latter, in which the narrator speaks plainly about his mother realizing “she was with child” (Sebald 2002: 84), has been the subject of much speculation, so to advance a conjecture that contradicts both diegetic and extradiegetic evidence seems counterproductive. This is particularly regrettable, as the motivation behind Jacobs’s reading is to forge a misleading link between conception and the Holocaust, whereas Sebald locates his creation under the sign of militarism and the destruction of German cities by Allied bombing.

Jacobs closes her survey with a short chapter on Sebald’s interviews, a largely under-researched area in the scholarship. Regrettably, though, Jacobs fails to engage with the only pertinent research on the topic, an essay by Torsten Hoffmann, editor of the German collection of Sebald interviews (2009). Such neglect of an important and relevant work of research, whether deliberate or not, is characteristic of the approach Jacobs utilizes in her much longer chapter on *Austerlitz*, a text that has provoked literally thousands of critical interventions.³⁵ While it is by now impossible to pro-

he used only a part of his first lecture for the third section of the book, so when Jacobs talks about his “second lecture in Zurich” (2015: 87), she actually refers to the third lecture delivered in early December 1997. The dates of the three lectures can be found in the detailed chronology compiled by Richard Sheppard in Catling and Hibbitt 2011. On the manuscript of the first lecture, see Gotterbarm 2011.

34. Page 4 of the typescript (DLA).

35. A search of the keywords “Sebald” and “Austerlitz” in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin catalog returns 17,199 hits (accessed February 28, 2016).

cess the hypertrophic secondary literature on *Austerlitz*, it is unfortunate that Jacobs ignores it almost entirely, briefly referencing only five publications over forty-five book pages. Out of these, only J. J. Long's *W. G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity* can be considered to have made an important contribution to Sebald scholarship. Among Jacobs's sources—three of which are articles and books chapters, not monographs—is only one German-language essay. This essay, moreover, can hardly be classified as indispensable for a sophisticated discussion of *Austerlitz*.³⁶

I single out Jacobs's book because it supposedly represents a major publication on Sebald by an internationally renowned scholar. The book's deficiencies underscore the larger point that a writer as subtle, complex, and contradictory as Sebald—especially given the advanced development of the critical industry surrounding him—requires a degree of attention that can be attained only by drawing on the wealth of published research, especially the German-language criticism and the many still undiscovered treasures buried in Marbach.

The Tandem Oeuvre

It has been observed that many anglophone readers mistake Sebald's books for being written in English due to the high quality of the translations by Michel Hulse and Anthea Bell (in both instances supplemented by Sebald's own involvement in the translation process). Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting that Sebald's unique literary talent cannot be fully rendered in translation: "Clearly it is no slight on the excellent work of the translators . . . to state that the German and English versions of the texts are not the same, nor do they—nor *can* they—resonate in the same way with their respective readers. . . . In a writer as careful of language, as attentive to the historical and metaphysical resonances of style as Sebald, readers of him in English must be wary of the linguistic 'vertigo' occasioned by his translations" (Baxter et al. 2013: 5). Mark McCulloh, whose *Understanding W. G. Sebald* (2003) offered readers the first English-language introduction to Sebald, speaks of "two distinctive oeuvres" in his aptly titled chapter "Two Languages, Two Audiences: The Tandem Literary Œuvres of W. G. Sebald" (2006: 7). In addition to delineating the standard problems of translating German into English, like finding suitable equivalents

36. See Jeziorkowski 2007. This chapter follows the translation of Jacobs's contribution to the same volume.

for certain words and expressions that have multifarious significations peppering Sebald's writing, such as *Unglück*, McCulloh correctly underlines how the order in which Sebald's books appeared in English impacted the translations.

For example, the "success of [*The Emigrants*] influenced future lexical decisions in favor of seriousness and elegiac tone" (18), something that had a particularly acute effect on *Vertigo*. Overall, McCulloh observes that "a certain playfulness, based in allusions and linguistic associations, is sometimes vacated in the English versions in favor of pensive earnestness, while on the other hand the drier, more matter-of-fact descriptions in the German original often take on a more luminous, poetic character in the translations" (13). For this and other reasons, "neither the full gravity of Sebald nor the full playfulness of his writing comes through in English, though the renderings are generally accurate, appropriately literary, and eloquent. As befits Sebald, they are works of literature in their own right" (18).

Translating Sebald is certainly no walk in the park; after all, even native speakers of German occasionally find his prose difficult to understand. As the linguist Matthias Zucchi has observed in his groundbreaking article, the "linguistic coat"³⁷ the narrators of the respective texts don't reflect their environment (2007). Thus, there are expressions from southern Germany to be found in a story set in his native Allgäu, while *Austerlitz* features expressions specific to National Socialism. This discourse, in particular, is impossible to translate appropriately into English, as there is no corresponding fascist tradition (see Hulse 2011; Bell 2011). But these, as it were, misfit terms, phrases, and expressions add an important quality to Sebald's prose and, at the same time, undermine what Emily Apter calls the "translatability assumption" in her *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*; she reminds critics to "recognize the importance of non-translation, mistranslation, incomparability and untranslatability" (2003: 4).

Given that Sebald spent more than half his life in England, it seems surprising to some observers that, unlike his idols Joseph Conrad and Vladimir Nabokov, he refused to detach himself from his native tongue. "Moving from one language to another, generally, entails giving up your first language" (Sebald 2003c: 16), he commented in an interview. This was a

37. "I reached a point where I thought I can't string together another German sentence at all and I wondered whether I was now faced with this notorious problem of having to change my coat, my linguistic coat, as happened to some other writers. But it is too late for that in my estimation" (Bigsby 2006: 33).

sacrifice he was unwilling to make, declaring his loyalty to German simply but honestly: “I am attached to that language” (Angier 2010: 69). And, as Arthur Williams argues, “the multi-layered precision of his language is inevitably at its richest and sharpest in the original German” (2002). Alongside familiar regional expressions from his childhood in the south of Germany, his reliance on anachronistic words and phrases, some so antiquated that even a native speaker requires glossing, is an important component of an aesthetic strategy to hinder, confuse, and mystify readers, augmented by the uncaptioned images spliced into the text—effectively slowing the speed of reading and inviting readers to pause, doubt, and reflect. Moreover, they connect his texts with those written by his favorite nineteenth-century authors.

Occasionally, these hindrances take the form of provocation, like the double-page photo spread of dead bodies in *The Rings of Saturn*, showing victims of Bergen-Belsen. Sebald was also chided by critics for the claim the narrator makes in *The Rings of Saturn* that the brutal crimes committed by the Belgian Crown in the Congo left behind mental and physical deformities visible today in the country’s population: “I well recall that on my first visit to Brussels in December 1964, I encountered more hunchbacks and lunatics than normally in a whole year. One evening in a bar in Rhode St Genèse I even watched a deformed billiard player who was racked with spastic contortions” (Sebald 1998: 123). Not surprisingly, this choice of words garnered loud objections: “The argument leads to an association that I consider to be scandalous. Even though it doesn’t fully abide by the absurdity of Nazi teachings on race, it appears to draw upon fairly similar imagery of purity and depravity of language” (Martin 2007: 102). Even more contentious is the link *Austerlitz*’s narrator forges between the strong discomfort he experienced when his father bathed him as a child and the horrific torture of Jean Améry in Nazi custody. Obviously, it could be very easily argued that these two examples of suffering are profoundly incommensurable and that collapsing them cheapens Améry’s victimhood. While Sebald clearly intended to point out the overlap between the petty bourgeois cult of bodily cleanliness and the fascist obsession with racial cleansing, the reaction in Germany was governed more by the dogma of incommensurability.

The singularity of the Shoah was at the center of the *Historikerstreit* (historians dispute), the heated public debate in the second half of the 1980s between conservative and progressive historians of Germany. To this day, the doctrine of uniqueness, though having largely disappeared

from academic conversations, governs the politics of official Holocaust commemoration in Germany. *The Rings of Saturn* makes a strong case against such a restrictive view: the industrial murder of the Jews is contextualized against the backdrop of what he terms the natural history of destruction. In his final, posthumously published German-language interview, Sebald makes his case explicitly: “I do not at all perceive the disaster wrought by the Germans, horrendous though it was, as a unique event. It developed, with a certain consequentiality, from within European history” (Pralle 2001). One last time, Sebald found himself at odds with proscribed modes of thinking, challenging Germans to rethink how they imagine the Holocaust, just as he called out German letters for how it portrays victims of Nazi persecution.

Sebald's *Neger*

Sebald's repeated use of the word *Neger* and its cognates is particularly noteworthy, not only in terms of Apter's notion of untranslatability but also regarding the question of calculated and provocative language. In German, the term equates both to “nigger” and “Negro” in English. That is to say, it initially signified only black skin and was not loaded with any denigrating connotations (apart from the general racist assumption that “European” is superior to “African”). Increasingly, the word came to be employed in a pronouncedly racist fashion and eventually cemented itself to Nazi thinking—for example, the denunciation of jazz as *Negermusik*. As Diedrich Diederichsen has pointed out, Germany's postcolonial history differs greatly from those of Great Britain, the US, or France, insofar as the country saw considerably less African immigration and therefore not only has lacked commensurate discourses of postcolonial critique but also has not grappled with the representation of minorities to the same degree (1996: 93–98). According to one account, these issues have “been taken up in German political discourse in a way that perhaps differs from Anglo-American discourses of ‘PC’” (Johnson and Suhr 2003: 51). For example, the word *Zigeuner* (Gypsy) was replaced in the Federal Republic by *Sinti und Roma*,³⁸ while it continues to circulate with no apparent racist baggage across the anglophone world.

38. This collective noun, referring to the two largest ethnic groups in Germany, is creating a problem of its own when applied to an individual who belongs to only one (or none) of these two Gypsy groups.

At least since the late 1970s, *Neger* has been receding from official public discourse.³⁹ In the major German dictionaries, the first indications of the word's negative connotations appeared in 1975 (Akademie der Wissenschaften 1975: 2628) and by the mid-1980s, the term was undeniably off-limits (Duden 1984: 474). This is nicely illustrated by looking at titles of books from mainstream as well as academic publishers. For example, *Stride toward Freedom*, by Martin Luther King Jr., appeared in 1968 in German translation as *Freiheit! Der Aufbruch der Neger Nordamerikas (Freedom! The Awakening of the North American Negroes)*, with King described by the publisher as a “großer Negerführer” (great leader of Negroes). Probably the last book to feature this term in its title in a descriptive sense is an illustrated collection of children's fairy tales published in the early 1980s, *Wer bekommt das Opossum? Märchen und Geschichten der amerikanischen Neger (Who Will Get the Opossum? Fairy Tales and Stories of American Negroes)*. In 2013, increased media sensitivity in Germany led to calls for publishers to remove the offensive word in forthcoming editions of certain canonical children's literature of the 1950s and 1960s. This triggered a fierce public argument around books that have remained very popular in Germany, like Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Langstrumpf*, Michael Ende's *Jim Knopf und Lukas der Lokomotivführer*, and Otfried Preußler's *Die kleine Hexe*.⁴⁰

Yet, this problematic word peppers Sebald's writings on both the critical and literary registers as late as the 1990s. The two exceptions are the posthumously published poem “Schlechter Sommer in Franken” (“Poor Summer in Franconia”), most likely written in the early 1980s, where he uses another anachronistic albeit less socially taboo term, *Mohr* (Moor),⁴¹ while in *The Rings of Saturn* he employs the more politically correct yet still overly broad term *Afrikaner*—“Not far from me was a group of Afri-

39. For a view from the Norwegian context, see Svendsen 2014.

40. There was also a public controversy in early 2012 involving German actors wearing black makeup for a comedy production at a Berlin theater. While some critics maintained that this represented the practice of blackface, the well-known director clearly stated that the lack of a black actor in his eighties was behind the move.

41. The well-known Austrian coffee brand Julius Meinl still features the head of a black person wearing a red fez. The German chocolate manufacturer Sarotti has, since 1918, featured the iconic “Sarotti Moor” in its logo, revised in 2004 from servant to magician. The 1990s also saw a concerted effort to rebrand long-standing products with names such as *Negerkuss* (chocolate marshmallow) and *Negerbrot* (chocolate with hazelnuts). Some provincial Bavarian taverns still serve *Neger* (wheat beer with Coca-Cola) to customers.

cans” (Sebald 1998: 89)—and the collective noun “die Schwarzen” (Sebald 1997b: 154) when discussing the “the utterly merciless exploitation of the blacks” (Sebald 1998: 127) in the Belgian Congo. Other than these exceptions, *Neger* appears throughout his writings.

The first occurrence of the word can be traced to the manuscript of an article Sebald published on the poet Günter Eich in the left-liberal *Frankfurter Rundschau* in 1971. Recounting his childhood memories of the US Army’s invasion of his village, he describes the *Negersoldaten* (Negro soldiers) as the very first persons of African descent he ever encountered in his life. The autobiographical passage was cut entirely from the published article by the editor, but it is unlikely that this was related to the term since it was not yet deemed offensive; rather, the childhood reminiscence did not add to the critical analysis of the poems. Sebald refers to this scene of “first contact” two subsequent times: in the aforementioned poem “Ein schlechter Sommer in Franken” and in the unpublished script of the first Zurich lecture. In the latter, Sebald recollects how an American tank stopped directly in front of the family home: “Lang rührt sich nichts. . . . Schließlich geht die Luke auf und ein dunkler Mann mit einem hellgrünen Turban erscheint” (DLA; For a long time nothing happens. . . . Finally, the hatch opens and a dark-skinned man with a light green turban appears).

Notably, when speaking to an audience in the late 1990s, Sebald appears to have purposely avoided the undoubtedly offensive term. But in his writings, Sebald never shied away from *Neger* and its composite forms. The narrator of *Vertigo*’s “Il ritorno in patria” makes his way on foot from London’s National Gallery to Liverpool Street Station, bypassing an eerily deserted underground station—evidently one of several portals to the underworld in Sebald’s imagination. Unsure about this potential *katabasis*, he pauses and looks into “die dunkle Vorhalle, in der außer einer sehr schwarzen, in eine Art Schalterhäuschen sitzenden Negerfrau nicht ein lebendiges Wesen zu sehen war” (Sebald 1994c: 283). In English, this becomes “the dark ticket hall where, apart from a black woman sitting in her inspector’s box, there was no sign of life” (Sebald 2001b: 259). Understandably, the translation, which Sebald supervised, defangs *Negerfrau* since the more faithful rendering “Negro woman” would have been out of bounds for contemporary readers. Earlier, the narrator encounters a limousine driver: “drinnen an dem elfenbeinfarbenen Lenkrad saß ein Neger, der mir, als er vorbeifuhr, lachend seine ebenfalls elfenbeinfarbenen Zähne zeigte” (Sebald 1994c: 267). This passage is translated as, “Inside, at the

ivory-colored steering wheel, sat a black man who showed me his teeth, also ivory-colored" (Sebald 2001b: 244).

Neger makes two prominent appearances in *The Emigrants*. The first occurs in the narrator's childhood recollections, specifically the sharp contrast between the American occupation army and traditional German society and its customs: "Die Weiber gingen in Hosen herum und warfen ihre lippenstiftverschmierten Zigarettenkippen einfach auf die Straße, die Männer hatten die Füße auf dem Tisch, die Kinder ließen die Fahrräder in der Nacht im Garten liegen, und was man von den Negern halten sollte, das wußte sowieso kein Mensch" (Sebald 1994a: 102). The English translation reads: "The womenfolk went about in trousers and dropped their lipstick-stained cigarette butts in the street, the men put their feet up on the table, the children left their bikes out in the garden overnight, and as for those negroes, no one knew what to make of them" (Sebald 1997a: 70). Here, for the first and only time in English, *Neger* is rendered as "negroes," a justifiable decision given the narrator's undeniable sympathy for the foreign troops and their confrontation with conservative rural values. Later in the book, the translator opts for a more modern and therefore totally inconspicuous rendering of the term during the narrator's road trip through the US: "Beispielsweise befand ich mich einmal eine gute halbe Stunde in Begleitung einer Negerfamilie, deren Mitglieder mir durch verschiedene Zeichen und wiederholtes Herüberlächeln zu verstehen gaben, daß sie mich als eine Art Hausfreund bereits in ihr Herz geschlossen hatten, und als sie . . . von mir sich trennten . . . da fühlte ich mich wirklich eine Zeitlang ziemlich allein und verlassen" (Sebald 1994a: 154). In the translation, this passage reads as follows: "At one point, for instance, I drove in the company of a black family for a good half hour. They waved and smiled repeatedly to show that I already had a place in their hearts, as a friend of the family, as it were, and when they parted from me . . . I felt deserted and desolate for a time" (Sebald 1997a: 105–6).

Again, contextual clues suggest a sympathetic bond between the narrator and the family, but unlike the previous instance, in which the encounter takes place in the distant past and on German soil, it would now clearly be inappropriate to describe these Americans as a "Negro family." The specific context, however, conjures up a sheen of intimacy and kinship between a permanent resident of Great Britain with German roots and the Americans whose ancestors originated in Africa. And yet, or rather because of this context, Sebald in German again employs discordant lan-

guage. Perhaps because he wants to signal that the romantic idea of an authentic communion between foreigners from different cultures is not as easy as the rosy liberal-multiculturalist ethos claims.

Even more provocative, to come to the final example, is a passage from the posthumously published fragments of the Corsica project:

Es ist noch nicht lange her, da stand vor mir in der Kassenschlange eines Supermarkts ein sehr dunkelhäutiger, tatsächlich fast kohlrabenschwarzer Mensch mit einem großen, wie es sich herausstellte ganz leeren Reisekoffer. . . . Wahrscheinlich gestern erst zum Studium nach Norwich gekommen aus Zaire oder Uganda, dachte ich mir und vergaß ihn bis, gegen Abend desselben Tags, die drei Töchter eines unserer Freunde an der Haustür klopfen und die Nachricht brachten, daß ihr Vater vor Morgen an einem schweren Herzschlag gestorben sei. (Sebald 2003a: 36)

The English version of this passage reads:

Not long ago, when I was queuing at the supermarket checkout, a very dark-skinned man, almost pitch-black in color, stood in front of me with a large and, as it turned out, entirely empty suitcase. . . . He had probably arrived in Norwich only the day before from Zaire or Uganda to study, I thought, and then forgot him, until toward evening of the same day the three daughters of one of our neighbors knocked on our door bringing the news that their father had died before dawn of a severe heart attack. (Sebald 2006: 33–34)

Evidently, the student from Africa provides yet another Sebaldian allegory for the permanent presence of death in our daily lives. The context here is important: in the abandoned Corsica project, Sebald refers to harbingers of death in Corsican folklore, as detailed in Dorothy Carrington's cultural historical study *The Dream Hunters of Corsica* (1995). To the narrator, the skin color of the "kohlrabenschwarze" (raven-black) person symbolizes death, but the allegorical significance of his empty suitcase is even more important: it alludes to a journey on which no material possessions can be taken along.⁴² While it makes perfect literary sense to accord the student an allegorical role, referring to his skin color is, at the same time, in terms

42. Sebald must have been reminded of his 1993 poem "Ein Walzertraum" ("A Waltz Dream"), which should be read as a commentary to Jan Peter Tripp's painting *Das Land des Lächelns* (*The Land of Smiles*), which shows a resting traveler with an open, empty suitcase. Sebald's poem clearly interprets the scene as a transition from life to death.

of political correctness, very dangerous if not unacceptable. As Fuchs has highlighted, the allegory in the above quote is an involuntary “racial cliché of the ‘black man’” (Fuchs 2008: 67).⁴³

This observation, as far as I can see, is the only critical comment ever made on Sebald’s penchant to allegorically link black skin to death, as in the case of the *Negerfrau* sitting at the entrance to the London Underground.⁴⁴ By relegating her observation to a footnote, Fuchs, however, effectively pardons this allegory as an involuntary and unfortunate slip rather than confront its true nature. Similarly, Armin Schäfer, in the *W. G. Sebald Handbuch*, evades the problem of Sebald’s “politisch inkorrekte Lexik” (politically incorrect lexicon) and its clash with the “strikten moralischen Ansprüche, die Sebald ans Schreiben stellt” (strict moral standards Sebald applied to his writing) (Schäfer 2017: 148). He aims to defuse and avoid the confrontational nature of this passage by relegating the contentious use of language to the “Erzählstimme” (narrative voice) rather than the author, Sebald himself, and he also falsely claims that the use of the N-word should be understood as “zitierend” (quoting/citing) (148).

To the best of my knowledge, Sebald’s repeated use of *Neger* has so far not attracted scholarly attention, and no one has yet dealt with this difficult yet crucial issue. This should be surprising, given the vast amount of secondary literature on his oeuvre, but, in reality, it is only symptomatic of another problem: Sebald’s use of offensive language, which is difficult to overlook, is purposely avoided since it clashes with his received image.

Just to be clear, to accuse Sebald of racism would be entirely misguided. His track record as a writer and academic undeniably marks him as a very liberal, cosmopolitan person (albeit with an anarchistic streak). This very background may explain why the contentious use of the N-word has not been raised as an issue so far. And indeed, if this were an isolated instance, one would not need to dwell on it. However, not only the insistence with which Sebald employs a racist term throughout his career as a literary writer requires critical comment. In the light of other provocative patterns characterizing his oeuvre, his condemnation of novels written by a survivor of the Holocaust like Becker and his refusal of the singularity of the Holocaust are so closely connected to the ethical core of his literary writings that they simply cannot be ignored.

43. “Schwarzer Mann” in German refers to bugbears—that is to say, fictive figures used to scare children, like the bogeyman in the anglophone world.

44. Peter Schmucker notes that these two people represent figurations of Charon, but he refrains from any comment on the use of the term (2012: 110).

Tackling the issue of the *Neger* in Sebald's prose is hence indispensable for an understanding of his authorial figure. Not least so because there can be no truly satisfactory explanation; questions will always linger about this contradiction. The first explanation links up with his discussed use of outdated expressions: using a once commonplace term that later came to be associated with racist undertones, Sebald highlights the very fact that the German language has been tainted by the historical period of National Socialism. With a nod to Theodor Adorno, Sebald alerts the reader to the lost innocence, as it were, of the German language and culture. Particularly when using the word in a context that clearly suggests a deeply felt empathy with the person referred to, the word paradoxically turns into an appeal for a sense of human community beyond racial boundaries.

But there is more to the matter. From his experience as an academic, Sebald inevitably was well acquainted with the bureaucratic language that governs institutions like universities as well as the political use of language in higher education. It is likely that he viewed this type of neo-liberal language as a structural companion to the deformation of the German language that took place during the reign of the Nazis. Alongside this development, the universities were also the place where the discourse of political correctness was fostered as a means of advancing liberalization and social progress, a process that degenerated into ritual and lip service. Both these strands gained the function to couch negative developments in positive-sounding terms and cover up unwelcome conditions with blandishing words.

It would not be controversial to claim that at least part of the increased desire in societies dominated by white people to come up with a nondiscriminatory language for nonwhites effectively camouflages the problem of structural racism in Western societies. Given that Sebald demanded that language be used as a vehicle of communicating truth, it would be reasonable to hypothesize that these contraventions of the norms of political correctness were, to him, protests against power structures and that they are intrinsically discriminatory.

Against this background, it is instructive to look at an early essay written in 1974–75 that was probably intended as the opening chapter of a planned book with the working title *Reflections on the History of Jewish Assimilation in German Literature*. The project never fully materialized, but its outline can partly be reconstructed from Sebald's private papers (Schütte 2014: 157–69). In this extensive essay, published in 1984 as "Die Zweideutigkeit der Toleranz" ("The Ambiguity of Toleration"), Sebald

mainly deals with the relationship between Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Moses Mendelssohn to argue that Enlightenment endeavors to advance the emancipation of the Jewish minority in Germany were in fact sophisticated strategies aimed at disenfranchising and controlling Jews. This very mechanism—namely, to pretend that what is actually repression appears as an act of liberal tolerance—is transferred from the age of Enlightenment to contemporary conditions by Sebald:

Sieht man nicht noch heutigen Tages . . . Filme, in denen ein sympathischer Neger in makellosem Chefarztkittel einhergeht und die edelsten Prinzipien vertritt. In solchen Arrangements gratuliert die bürgerliche Gesellschaft sich selbst dazu, daß es in ihr ein jeder zu finanziellem und moralischem Erfolg bringen kann (Sebald 1984: 44; These days we see films in which a likeable Negro dons the immaculate white coat of the chief physician and embodies the most noble principles. Here bourgeois society congratulates itself for its ability to cultivate such financial and moral success).

In German society after the Holocaust, Sebald claims, the token *Neger* inherits the representational function of the *Edeljude* (noble Jew). Well before the notion of multiculturalism was appropriated by neoliberalism,⁴⁵ Sebald not only attacked philo-Semitism as a refined form of anti-Semitism, he also drew parallels between the treatment of minorities like German Jews and Afro-Germans in a white, Christian-dominated Germany. That Sebald employed the N-word when writing the essay in the 1970s is not really remarkable, though it is interesting that the editor of the prestigious journal aimed at teachers of German did not censor it in 1984. Plainly, the word is meant ironically, to highlight the self-deceiving role played by the black doctor in a shiny white coat, and for that reason it is acceptable in this context.

Its use in the imaginative writings of the 1990s, however, is a different matter. Here Sebald irrefutably operates in a different context. The continued use of a word which was by then fully banned from public discourse poses a calculated provocation that aims not to offend but to irritate the reader—in a productive way. His provocation is not a willful one⁴⁶ but is

45. Regarding the link between neoliberalism and multiculturalism, see Žižek 1998.

46. One could think of a provocative use of coarse language or obscene language—which Sebald relished in private conversations. The only instance of the latter, maybe running decidedly against the saint-like view of Sebald, can be found in his essay on Gerhard Roth's *Winterreise* (*Winter Journey*), where Sebald, adopting the pornographic discourse

intentionally linked to a very complex web of questions about racial persecution he explored in his literary work. In hindsight, one could even interpret his use of a notionally racist term as an insurance policy against unwanted misappropriation or idolization.

As Jo Catling points out, Sebald strongly resisted any attempt to be classified as a Holocaust writer (2014: 55). Especially in the aftermath of the immense success that the publication of the English version of *Austerlitz* had brought him in the US, Sebald was keen to stress to interviewers that he was not the philo-Semite many presumed him to be (Hoffmann 2009). As a somewhat puzzled Arthur Lubow states, Sebald “insisted, persuasively, that he was not interested in Judaism or in the Jewish people for their own sake. ‘I have an interest in them not for philo-Semitic reasons,’ he told me, ‘but because they are part of a social history that was obliterated in Germany and I wanted to know what happened’” (2010: 167).

What needs to be highlighted—particularly for the benefit of readers linguistically barred from Sebald’s larger oeuvre—is what could be described as his marked stubbornness. That is to say, his anarchistic reluctance to abide by expectations and his refusal to play roles forced on him. The contradiction between, on the one hand, a decades-long dedication to a literature of ethical restitution and of “speaking truth to power,” and, on the other, his at times mean-spirited attacks on a Holocaust survivor or intentional use of highly offensive and anachronistic language cannot be written off as idiosyncratic oddities. Rather, this paradox is a vital component of any serious understanding of Sebald’s multifaceted body of work.

Exhausted by both the writing and subsequent promotion of *Austerlitz*—the very demanding publicity tour across Germany, the UK, and the US probably cost him his life—Sebald had arranged to teach part-time until an early retirement in 2004. This was made possible thanks to a grant awarded by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) in 2000. One of the questions on the application form asked, “How do your achievements so far demonstrate that you have the attributes that we are seeking?” Sebald’s response was an apt assertion that perfectly encapsulates his unruly personality: “I was always determined to find my own way” (DLA).

of the novel, criticizes that “the narrative thrust only moves forward according to the digital logic of cunts and cocks” (Sebald 1994b: 158; bewegt sich . . . der Erzählvorgang nur noch vermittels der digitalen Logik der Löcher und Schwänze).

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