translation two-thirds of the complete passage from Keynes. Borges was surely a better translator than most, if not always a neutral editor. His editorial decision—to interpolate an expanded segment of the errant passage precisely where Wilkin and Keynes recommended—is in itself his most powerful translational act; and the very act of reading implies translation for Borges, at least in the sense of Menard's recontextualization. Indeed, according to Borges, 'nothing is as consubstantial with literature and its modest mystery [including its genesis and hermeneutics, for example] as the questions raised by a translation'.[51]

Browne spoke warmly of Platonic and Ciceronian bonds of friendship among men. He and Borges share an antiquarian, universalist, bookish spirit, so that the Borgesian and the Brownean could have been 'overlapping circles with a partially common circumference but no single center'.[52] Esteem between them might well have been mutual. Despite the apparent anachronism, it is not difficult to imagine a reciprocated friendship across three centuries for Borges on the part of Browne, who said he could love even the viper and the toad. What is certain is that the two writers' intellectual closeness, like that of Cervantes and Menard brought to life, has been sufficient to unbalance the scholarship on both figures, prompting some readers of Browne and Borges to conflate and commingle author and translator.

[51] 'Las versiones homéricas' (1932), cited by Emir Rodríguez Monegal and Alastair Reid (eds.), *Borges: A Reader* (New York, 1981), p. xi.

[52] For Alanus, Rabelais, Pascal, and others on *Sphaera cuius centrum est ubique, circumferentia nusquam* see Frank Livingstone Huntley, 'Sir Thomas Browne and the Metaphor of the Circle', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 14 (1953), 362; and David Newton-de Molina, 'A Note on Sir Thomas Browne and Jorge Luis Borges', *Antigonish Review*, 22 (1971), 33–40.

16

Thinking with Thomas Browne: Sebald and the *Nachleben* of the Antiquarian

Peter N. Miller

Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc liked chameleons. He received a male and female from Tunis on 18 October 1633. His letters of October and November are full of accounts of the chameleons in action. But the really interesting ones come after their deaths (the male on 31 October, the female on 10 November). For in two momentous letters to the great erudites Claude Saumaise in Leiden (14 November) and Gabriel Naudé in Rome (1 December), he described what the insides of the chameleon looked like after it had been cut open. In these descriptions *autopsia*-as-first-hand-examination takes on its modern meaning of autopsy-as-dissection.

We've found there amazing marvels in the eyes, four cartilaginous attachments in which are inserted so many double nerves that the animal could turn its eye in a circle, which the Ancients had such a hard time having us understand by their descriptions. But there was nothing more strange than the tongue, which I have seen many times darted out for catching flying gnats around more than 3 or 4 fingers' lengths from their mouths, which was nothing compared to what we find there in the dissection. Because we found, when pulling out the tongue—without any force at all—that it was more than a whole foot in length, and that the animal

could use it for catching, as if on a line, gnats or other insects without descending from the branches on which it likes to perch, having there a kind of bone at the root of the tongue of three fingers in length at the tip of which hangs a tube or nerve almost a foot long, which abuts a little bit of flesh, at the tip of which there is a point which is retracted for seizing the gnats or worms almost in the same way as the elephant with its trunk—which no author that I know of, neither ancient nor modern, had ever observed.[1]

In Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646) all this rates about half a sentence: 'But *Bellonius* hath beene more satisfactorily experimental, not onely affirming they feede on Flyes, Caterpillers, Beetles, and other insects, but upon exenteration he found these animals in their bellies: whereto we might also add the experimental decisions of the worthy *Peireschius* and learned *Emanuel Vizzanius*, in that Chameleon which had been often observed to drink water, and delight to feed on Meal-worms' (*PE* 3.21.242). Browne excuses himself for not yet having made the dissection himself.

We might take it for granted, or we might smile at its naïveté, but Peiresc and Browne and their colleagues believed that scholarship was a necessary part of the pursuit of truth. Peiresc was a keen experimentalist, as well as archaeologist, and was committed to the ideal of an inter-generational scholarly project. Indeed, it was this hope for an ongoing advancement of learning that often salved the frustration of working with other less forward-looking scholars.

But at the heart of the notion of the advancement of learning, back to Bacon and back beyond him to Biondo, was the idea that there was something actually being gained, as if salvaged from a giant shipwreck. Browne may affect some skepticism about this, but he absorbs the 'research' language common to this type of scholarship. Indeed, when Arnaldo Momigliano talked about the contribution of the antiquaries to the ethics of scholarship, he singled out both the dispassionate sifting of evidence and the passionate pursuit of truth that he saw in someone like Jean Mabillon.[2] In later years, as Momigliano himself traced some of the long-term impact of antiquarianism, he recurred to the importance of truth at several key junctures.[3] It's easier for historians of scholarship to study practices—and Momigliano bids fair to be the inspiration for this approach—but motives may be just as important, if a more elusive, quarry.

If Browne has the look and smell of the antiquarian it is because, like many of the best of them, he had trained as a medical doctor at Montpellier, Padua, and Leiden.[4] His written work shows a deep familiarity with the erudite literature of his age and the previous one. In *Urne-Buriall* he engages with one of the canonical subjects of the seventeenth-century antiquary, the funerary remain. And, like many antiquaries of his day, these investigations serve also as the starting-point for reflecting on how to live—antiquarianism as a philosophical exercise.[5]

But is Browne an antiquary?[6] If for someone like Peiresc, antiquarianism was a form of historical inquiry, for others, like Browne, it might have been an idiom, a language in which he could get at being 'philosophical'. Probably closer to Browne than Peiresc would be someone like the Silesian poet Martin Opitz. He, too, was a learned man, and also studied at Leiden, with Heinsius. But he was first and foremost a poet. His personal interest was in extracting the poetic truth, or moral message, or natural lesson, from the archaeological reality, as in his great poem *Zlatna*, a vision of the Roman past in Transylvania as a *lieu de memoire*.[7]

Browne goes even further in this direction. Opitz still thought in terms of a great antiquarian reconstructive summa as the end-point of his reflections, the *Dacia Antiqua*. Browne seems instead to make melancholy, and thus the inevitable impossibility of reconstruction, the outcome of his antiquarianizing. And, indeed, anyone who has read *Urne-Buriall* would emerge with the

[1] Peiresc to Naudé, 1 December 1633, Carpentras, Bibliothèque Inguimbertine, MS. 1875 f.4, quoted in Agnès Bresson, 'Un Zoologiste en quête de nouveaux savoirs', *Les Fiorettti du Quadricentenaire de Fabri de Peiresc*, ed. Jacques Ferrier (Avignon, 1981). Peiresc was so charmed by chameleons that he asked his man in Tunis for more, and duly received them in December 1635. Of the three that were sent, however, only one arrived. Its life story is narrated in a letter to Pierre Gassendi of 23 November 1635 and was then incorporated by Gassendi in 1649 into his *Syntagma Philosophiæ* (Vol. 1, Sec. 1 (in the section 'Physica'), Bk. vi, Ch. 4, 450).

[2] Arnaldo Momigliano, 'Ancient History and the Antiquarian' (1950), in *Contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (Rome, 1955), 102.

[3] For the general story see Miller, 'Introduction: Momigliano, Antiquarianism and Cultural History', in *Momigliano and Antiquarianism: Foundations of the Modern Cultural Sciences*, ed. Peter N. Miller (Toronto, 2007), 3–65.

[4] On this relationship between history and medicine see Gianna Pomata and Nancy Siraisi (eds.), *Historia: Empiricism and Erudition in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2005); and Momigliano, 'History Between Medicine and Rhetoric', *Ottavo contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (Rome, 1987), 13–25.

[5] For a general presentation of this idea see Miller, *Peiresc's Europe: Learning and Virtue in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven and London, 2000).

[6] For another discussion of this question, see Parry's essay in this volume.

[7] For Opitz see Miller (2000), 138–41.

impression that Browne does not really think it possible to understand the past. For learning itself drives home the cold futility of the learned life: 'To be read by bare Inscriptions like many in *Gruter*'—referring to the masterwork of Opitz's teacher Janus Gruter—'to hope for Eternity by Ænigmaticall Epithetes, or first letters of our names [as in inscriptions], to be studied by Antiquaries, who we were, and have new Names given us like many of the Mummies, are cold consolations unto the Students of perpetuity' (*UB* 5.166).[8] Browne, then, helps us discern better the distinct morphology of antiquarianism in early modern Europe, and some of the ways in which this fascination with the broken remains of the past was mobilized for cultural action.

I

The story of the very complex afterlife of the antiquarian in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, both as a social type and as a scholar, is still incompletely known.[9] Its outlines are familiar enough: antiquaries were easily identified with the Ancients and therefore could be painted as enemies of the Moderns—whether as pedants, erudite bats, or stuffed shirts—in the battles of the eighteenth century. Jean Seznec's lovely book of essays on Diderot and antiquity is a classic presentation of this tale.[10]

But there is also a nineteenth- and twentieth-century chapter in the history of the afterlife of the antiquarian. 'Professional' history, as it emerged in Germany, continued the work of the *philosophes* in discrediting the antiquaries. As history gained for itself a curriculum with the foundation of the Historical Institute at Göttingen in 1766, it became much easier to see why antiquarians and historians were two different species of beast. Indeed, we find lots of expressly 'historisch–antiquarisch' investigation in the nineteenth century, but not in universities and not by habilitated professors. It fell now into the province of the semi-popular Historical Associations. And where there was

[8] For Opitz see Miller (2000), 148–9.

[9] Parts of it are told in Miller (2000), 'Conclusion'; Miller (2007), ch.1; and François Louis and Peter N. Miller, *The Age of Antiquaries in Europe and China, 1500–1700* (New Haven, forthcoming).

[10] Jean Seznec, *Essais sur Diderot et l'antiquité* (Oxford, 1957). See more recently A. D. Nuttall, *Dead from the Waist Down: Scholars and Scholarship in Literature and the Popular Imagination* (New Haven and London, 2003).

direct comment on this kind of historical scholarship by professional historians, such as Ranke or Droysen, it was uniformly negative. Even the great Jacob Burckhardt, because he was an art historian and because he lectured to the general public and did not publish much—and not of the sort that academics had already come to expect from academics—was called a dilettante.[11] (Though even he kept his distance from these latter-day antiquarians.)

And yet, if we look closely, we do not find antiquaries disappearing. Instead, like water that always finds its level, this 'longing' for the past—Nietzsche actually uses the word *Sehnsucht*—issues forth in other ways, in other places, through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The occlusion from sight of the early modern antiquary has meant that this later history of related but transformed antiquarianism has similarly been invisible. What we need to try and understand is how the antiquary's intensive engagement with the broken ruins of the past could be the basis of so profound and so fundamental a feeling. Browne's antiquarianizing style points us in this direction, and helps us to recognize what we might call the metaphysics of reconstruction.

II

But to contribute a chapter to the 'reception history' of Browne *and* at the same time to that of the afterlife of the antiquarian I would like to turn, in what follows, to the *end* of this tradition. (It is, of course, the *end* only because it is happening *now*; the afterlife of the antiquarian will continue for as long as there is antiquity.) The contemporary German-English writer W. G. Sebald (1944–2001) presents us with the antiquarian in action and in spirit but now firmly located in the domain of imaginative literature.

In 'A Little Excursion to Ajaccio' (1996), the torso of a never-completed project on Corsica, Sebald announces his theme as 'trying to imagine what it would be like to live in one of these stone citadels, occupied to my life's end solely with the study of time past and time passing'.[12] It is difficult here not to

[11] This is discussed in my *Cultural History Before Burckhardt: Foundations of Material Culture* (forthcoming).

[12] W. G. Sebald, 'A Little Excursion to Ajaccio', *Campo Santo*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York, 2003; repr. 2005), 3.

catch an echo of the unforgettable opening lines of Eliot's *Four Quartets*. But perhaps we are meant to hear still more, even to Eliot's own 'antiquarian' reflection on life:

> Home is where one starts from. As we grow older
> The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated
> Of dead and living. Not the intense moment
> Isolated, with no before and after,
> But a lifetime burning in every moment
> And not the lifetime of one man only
> But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.[13]

These words are not just a fitting epitaph to Sebald's œuvre, but actually a guide to his works. If we keep them in mind as we read through Sebald's stories we will find ourselves as if in the presence of a person reflecting on these lines.

Sebald's narrators, or individual characters—none so very different from the author himself—are possessed by the need to repair some breach, close some circle, fill some gap in their lives. The worlds of Sebald's characters, and of 'Sebald' himself, are strange, and their patterns complicated, intertwined with each other and with other equally complex lives, and each in turn is woven into a gigantic inter-generational tapestry. In the tales of *The Emigrants*, for example, lives break like pots and, like pots, can be restored more or less well. Sebald-the-novelist focuses on the fissures and the attempts at restoration. The stories here are all about people whose lives have broken somewhere, and about Sebald's attempts to discover the breaks—which are at one and the same time 'connections' to other narratives.

In an essay published in November 2001, Sebald gave an account of 'my method of procedure'. He identified this as 'adhering to an exact historical perspective, in patiently engraving and linking together apparently disparate things in the manner of a still life.... I have kept asking myself since then what the invisible connections that determine our lives are, and how the threads run'.[14]

The assumption that the threads do hold together is a version of the antiquaries' confidence in wholeness, perhaps even a vestigial kind of sacred history. This same 'early modern' near-religious sense of obligation to

[13] T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (New York, 1963), 189.
[14] 'An Attempt at Restitution', in *Campo Santo*, 200.

reconstruct is clearly at work in Sebald's case, too, though now motivated less by a particular religion than by his being born German just after 1939. Yes, his family was touched by the war: the father spent the years 1940–5 on the Eastern and Western Fronts and the family itself relocated to the house of his maternal grandparents in an out-of-the-way corner of south-western Bavaria.[15] He was, therefore, of that generation of Germans whose coming-of-age coincided with the awakened realization that their parents had kept too silent about too many things that were too much in need of discussion. Nor was Sebald's immediate response—emigration—uncommon, nor even his long-term response—literature. But central to this felt need to narrate what was absent, a need which fills Sebald's stories in larger or smaller measure, is the fate of Europe's, and especially Germany's, Jews. Without at all being a 'Holocaust writer', Sebald is one of the most powerful voices of the absence created by the destruction of Europe's Jews.

In the fortress-turned-Nazi-prison of Breendonk, outside Mechelen in Belgium, the unnamed narrator is moved to reflect on the natural limits of memory. 'The darkness does not lift but becomes yet heavier as I think how little we can hold in mind, how everything is constantly lapsing into oblivion with every extinguished life, how the world is, as it were, draining itself, in that the history of countless places and objects which themselves have no power of memory is never heard, never described or passed on'.[16] Since this is the natural case, and generates the daily challenge facing someone wishing—or needing—to reconstruct the past, then those who willingly abet or accelerate memory's loss are not merely bystanders, but also culpable.

In the last of the four tales of *The Emigrants*, Sebald finds himself in the old, abandoned Jewish cemetery at Kissingen. After a few days there, and in a nearby town which, we are told, 'retained not the slightest trace of its former character', Sebald says he had to leave. 'I felt increasingly that the mental impoverishment and lack of memory that marked the Germans, and the efficiency with which they had cleaned everything up, were beginning to affect my head and my nerves'.[17] For the reconstructor, or for the antiquary 'in action', the active resistance to reconstruction—what Sebald terms 'memory'—is, then, not just culpable but sickening.

Sebald's investigation of resistance to reconstruction cannot avoid questions of culpability, however. Nor are these limited solely to the Germans'

[15] For further biographical discussion see Mark W. Anderson, 'Fathers and Son: W. G. Sebald', *Bookforum*, (December/January 2007), 28–31. Anderson is writing a biography of Sebald.
[16] *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York, 2001), 24.
[17] *The Emigrants*, trans. Michael Hulse (London, 1992; repr. 1996), 225.

reluctance to confront their crimes against the Jews. Indeed, the strength and scope of Sebald's critique of what we might call the non-antiquarian nature of modern German society—and is this perhaps to be taken as a stalking-horse for all modern, commercial societies?—are actually made clear in his stirring *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, translated as *The Natural History of Destruction*, which is actually an extended critique of this particular German failing. For were Sebald merely documenting the German resistance to taking responsibility for the Holocaust, it might be easier to see this as an unwillingness to confront culpability. But once Sebald demonstrates the German unwillingness to confront, and reconstruct, the historical reality of the destruction of *Germans* and *German* cities by Allied air attack, then the pathological character of resistance to reconstruction is unmistakably clear.

Destruction, whether on the individual or communal level, called for its own kind of literary response. Sebald does not discuss works such as *The Black Book of Russian Jewry*, compiled by Ilya Ehrenberg and Vassily Grossman in 1946 but not fully printed until 1993, or the various *Yizker-bikher* (memorial books) produced in the decades after 1945. These are disparate compilations of memory that make no attempt at the literary; Sebald, by contrast, gives art to their idea. But he does discuss Erwin Lichtenstein's account of the destruction of Danzig's Jews, which Grass later incorporated into his *Diary of a Snail*. 'Only the dimension of concrete remembrance', Sebald writes, 'lends substance to the central story of the school master nicknamed "Doubt", and on another level substance to the reflections on melancholy.'[18]

We will come to melancholy in a moment. But for now, let us remain attentive to the central role of truth, and its pursuit, and the literary style appropriate to it, within Sebald's mature œuvre. For in this same essay on Grass he worries aloud 'whether the dominance of fiction over what really happened does not tend to militate against the recording of the truth and the attempt to commemorate it'.[19] As if this link between truth and commemoration were not clear enough, he elsewhere explains that 'The ideal of truth contained in the form of an entirely unpretentious report proves to be the irreversible foundation of all literary effort'.[20] We ought, then, to read *The Natural History of Destruction* by this light, as his attempt to be as truth-telling and 'unpretentious' (unliterary?) as possible.

[18] W. G. Sebald, 'Constructs of Mourning: Günter Grass and Wolfgang Hildesheimer', in *Campo Santo*, 106.

[19] *Campo Santo*, 11.

[20] W. G. Sebald, 'Between History and Natural History: On the Literary Description of Total Destruction', in *Campo Santo*, 82.

Sebald's various and many commentators have gravitated to the unusualness of his voice. But they have not connected it to his explicit commitment to truth. Nor have they linked this in substance with the project of reconstruction and its antiquarian foundation in description.[21] But from this commitment to the pursuit of truth follows Sebald's often-remarked-upon precision of detail and incorporation of evidence into the narrative. Sontag came the closest to grasping Sebald's core: 'what keeps this writing always fresh, never merely rhetorical, is the saturated naming and visualizing in words; that, and the ever-surprising device of pictorial illustration'.[22]

Let us turn, now, to this incorporation of the machinery of evidence into his narrative—to his putting footnotes into the text, so to speak—except that in this case the evidence is visual. Perhaps the first clue to understanding the meaning of his photographs is that they are redundant. Sebald's argument does not necessitate images, and his language is so precise—often much more precise than the low quality of the photographic reproductions—as to render their function superfluous or at best supplementary to verbal ekphrasis. Thus the insertion of the images into the text has the effect of calling attention not to their content but to the act of inserting them into the text in the first place. Now why might Sebald have done this?

Martin Swales has observed that in Sebald 'the appeal to factual, historical—as one might put it, archaeological—accuracy coexists with an intensely, poetically atmospheric recreation of the interplay of past and present'.[23] Now, as it happens, the representation of evidence inside the body of the text was one of the revolutionary aspects of early antiquarian scholarship, whether in numismatics or epigraphy. One of the most striking examples of archaeological illustration is offered by a book that is antiquarian in imagination only, Francesco Colonna's erotic archaeological novel *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499). The implications of its remarkable illustrations have been studied in a half-century old but still-ravishing article entitled, with absolute clarity, 'Archaeology and Romance in the Italian Renaissance'.[24]

[21] See Miller, 'Description Terminable and Interminable', in Pomata and Siraisi, 355–97.

[22] Susan Sontag, 'A Mind in Mourning', *TLS*, 25 February 2000, 3–4. Also noted in Martin Swales, 'Intertextuality, Authenticity, Metonymy: On Reading W. G. Sebald', *Anatomist of Melancholy*, ed. Rüdiger Görner (Munich, 2003), 82.

[23] Swales, 83.

[24] William Mitchell, 'Archaeology and Romance in Renaissance Italy', *Italian Renaissance Studies*, ed. E. F. Jacob (London, 1960) 455–83.

The *Hypnerotomachia*'s images are as one imagines documentary material to be, but documenting such sorts of things as could never be. Sebald's images are like this, too, but with one twist: they are unimaginable because so blindingly quotidian, if not plain banal, whether of indistinct industrial landscapes, a demented Chinese quail pacing in its enclosure, advertising hoardings, the facades of Terezín, pages from newspapers, interior spaces of no especial quality, the admissions ticket for a museum of veterinary medicine out in the banlieus of Paris, or a diary whose contents he deciphers and transcribes in print. These give his text a documentary—sometimes a near-epigraphic—quality but also a phantasmagorical one.

The use of photography-as-evidence from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards was connected to a sense of its precision. Archaeologists, who were among the first to realize its potential, could argue, as did the archaeologist *and* photographer John Henry Parker, that 'the modern science of Archaeology is the oppposite of the local school of Antiquarians'.[25] But to Parker's, and contemporaries such as Thomas Ashby's, use of 'photography as record' and 'photography as notes' we need to add also that archaeological photographs supply 'ambience', whether intentionally or not. This brings us to other generic aspects of photography, then and now: the picturesque and the travelogue.[26] And the picturesque now, as then, trails off into the melancholic with the addition of a time signature.

That is why looking today at Parker's photos, or those of any early photographer, can be a dizzying experience. Because of the inexorability of ambience the hoped-for precision seems, with time's passage, to have turned the images from document to dream. As in Sebald one sometimes wonders what exactly the subject of the photograph actually was. The ordinariness of the nineteenth-century background seems more and more an artifact of a distant time—almost as far from our lives as the ancient ruins being foregrounded. As in Sebald, then, photographs that might once have had significance now take on a striking banality, are become mysterious and elusive altogether. In them the familiar has become de-familiarized. And yet it is also clear that Sebald stays on *this* side of the tendency to montage and collage that such a photographic style often devolves into. For Sebald the

[25] *Italienische Fotografen aus der Sammlung John Henry Parker 1806–1884*, ed. Christine Kühn with Annetta Alexandris (Berlin, 2000), 87.

[26] Michael Shanks, 'Photography and Archaeology', in *The Cultural Life of Images: Visual Representation in Archaeology*, ed. Brian Leigh Molyneaux (London, 1997), 76.

illustrative function remains central, and with it the commensurate dependence of image upon text. Sebald remains, as it were, on the side of the antiquarian; Benjamin, to choose an important example, does so as well. Aby Warburg, however, in his final, unfinished (because unfinishable?) *Mnemosyne Atlas* liberated the image from the word, and so pointed towards a different approach to the *Nachleben der Antiquar*.

Photographs, of course, also take us someplace else. One of the reasons why the frame of travel seems to have been so appealing to Sebald (*Vertigo*, *Rings of Saturn*, *The Emigrants*) is that the travelogue remains today one of the few genres where digression and mingling of surfaces and subjectivity are acceptable. In the great age of the antiquaries travel played a crucial and, some would say, even decisive role in shaping the skeptical, cosmopolitan culture of Western Europe.[27] No reader of François La Mothe le Vayer (1585–1672) goes away without thinking that travel's expanded horizons were intended as a solvent of old-fashioned obscurantism. 'Sebald' is himself always on the move; or rather, perhaps, is unable to stay home. As a result of this professional deformation, Sebald the author can take advantage of a genre perfectly suited to his own style.[28]

In this we can catch more than a resemblance to Jacques Austerlitz, the central figure of Sebald's eponymous masterpiece. Austerlitz travels through time, but he also travels through space. Indeed, he is constantly on the move. He meets the unnamed narrator off and on in different places. In London, where he owns a house, he wanders continually, often at night, from one end of the city to the other. One is reminded here of Socrates' statement, quoted by Montaigne, that travel would be no cure so long as one had oneself as a companion. The therapy, in other words, had to come first.

Perhaps a sense of Sebald's radical use of evidence in transforming fiction into some new kind of para-historical genre can be grasped by turning, briefly, to a work of pure history that reaches towards images and spatial realities from its own standpoint. This is Karl Schlögel's stunning *Im Raume lesen Wir die Zeit* (2003).[29] Focusing on maps and the spatial imagination,

[27] On this see the seminal essays of Joan-Pau Rubiés, 'New Worlds and Renaissance Ethnology', *History and Anthropology*, 6 (1993) 157–97; and 'Instructions for Travellers: Teaching the Eye to See', *History and Anthropology*, 9 (1996), 139–90, both now reprinted in Rubiés, *Travellers and Cosmographers: Studies in the History of Early Modern Travel and Ethnology* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2007).

[28] The essays of John Beck, Massimo Leone, and John Zilcosky, in *W.G. Sebald—A Critical Companion*, ed. J. J. Long and Anne Whitehead (Edinburgh, 2004) all deal with this theme.

[29] Karl Schlögel, *Im Raume lesen Wir die Zeit. Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik* (Munich and Vienna, 2003), esp. the sections 'Kartenlesen' and 'Augenarbeit'.

Schlögel ranges from representations of the Kovno Ghetto in diaries of the destroyed, to Benjamin's route to the Bibliothèque Nationale, to the world as represented in Marlene Dietrich's address book, to Jefferson's map of the United States c.1783, pre-Second World War German atlases, a profile of Sándor Radó, the famous mapmaker and spy 'Dora' (who warned an unbelieving Stalin of the imminent launch of Operation Barbarossa), the shape of pavements in Berlin, domestic interiors, train timetables for Eastern Europe—and all of these with photographic evidence. Where Schlögel's work generates so much of its power is in its ability to start from a focus on the banal and ordinary and end with a complex vision of the European past and global future. If we had to draw one sure contrast between Schlögel's kaleidoscopic view of the material world and Sebald's, it would be that the former, like a scholar, tries to take the strange and make it intelligible, whereas somewhere near the heart of Sebald's is, instead, the making strange of the familiar.

Another genre that allows for constant digression and endless detail is, of course, biography—what *Austerlitz* masquerades as, but which is found throughout Sebald's œuvre. Indeed, one could take the tale of 'Max Ferber', the last of the *Emigrants*, with its embedded memoir of his deported mother, Luisa Lanzberg, as the model for *Austerlitz*—the child sent away to England by parents doomed to die, who lives uprooted and rootless seeking a past never to be restored. The very unpredictability of human lives, and how individual stories cut across others, intertwine with them, and sometimes change beyond recognition, is a constant echo in Sebald's work.

Austerlitz gives us the life of Jacques Austerlitz, *Kinder-transport*-ed from Prague, raised in Wales, but resettled nowhere. This tale, in which melancholy pervades every page, is a quest for reconstruction, but in the most murky of terrains—an individual's own earliest memories. Jacques Austerlitz's search for himself, after so many years, down so many darkened alleys, is the *ne plus ultra* of Sebald's project of truth-seeking because it is one long set-piece on reconstruction: on the reconstruction of memory through the reconstruction of the spaces in which the remembered events took place. What one studied as 'architectural history' one relives, therapeutically, as antiquarian reconstruction.

And, indeed, how could the protagonist of *Austerlitz*, therefore, have been anyone other than an art historian trained in the manner of the Courtauld and Warburg Institutes in London (Sebald doesn't say which)? His lifelong and

uncompleteable scholarly project was a total history of architecture in the age of bourgeois capitalism. The intertwining of this with his equally incomplete personal history describes the book's gathering storm. When we first meet him, Austerlitz is talking about the railway station in Antwerp. At London Liverpool Street Station the carapace of his memory first cracks open. At the Gare d'Austerlitz in Paris he contemplates the route of his father's flight from the Nazis in 1940. At Wilsonova Station in Prague he re-experiences his 4-year-old self's departure. In each of these places, it is intensive examination of shape and light and patterns—the superficial work of the art historian—that opens blocked doors into the self. Yet only when he contemplates the bleak view from Prague's Holešovice Station on his way to Terezín, in the footsteps of his newly discovered mother, do we finally grasp the subterranean source of the mysterious hold railways have over him.

Austerlitz's field of study, the architecture of nineteenth-century capitalism in its widest sense, ought to remind us of Walter Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*, originally called by him 'Paris, Capital of the XIXth Century'. Indeed, Austerlitz himself tells us that when he was in Paris in 1959 reading in the Bibliothèque Nationale, he studied 'the six-volume work pointing me the way in my own research, on *Paris, ses organes, ses fonctions et sa vie dans la seconde moitié du XIXème siècle* by Maxime du Camp—one of Benjamin's own, key, sources.[30] Now, Benjamin famously wrote *his* book in this same Bibliothèque Nationale that Sebald celebrates with photographs and, even, with a cameo scene occurring in the downstairs catalogue room where Benjamin was himself photographed working in 1937. Benjamin's theory of the ruin, put forward in his failed *Habilitationschrift* of 1925, *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, reappears here in Austerlitz's description of the Palace of Justice in Brussels: 'somehow we know by instinct that outsize buildings cast the shadow of their own destruction before them, and are designed from the first with an eye to their later existence as ruins'.[31] And when Austerlitz buries his no-longer-precious life's work explaining everything about the nineteenth century in the compost heap at the back of the garden, this at least faintly echoes Benjamin's briefcase, lost or stolen in Port Bou, and containing or not

[30] *Austerlitz*, 287.

[31] Ibid., 19. For Benjamin's notion of 'ruin' see the classic article by Charles Rosen, 'The Ruins of Walter Benjamin', reprinted in *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections*, ed. Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 129–75.

containing his own great masterwork on the nineteenth century. Born under Saturn, as Susan Sontag so precisely described him, excluded from the Warburg circle in Hamburg by Panofsky despite Warburg's own initial interest (he had himself instructed Saxl to buy the book on German tragic drama), and destroyed by the rise of Nazism in a different way from Austerlitz, Benjamin presents us with one of the most comprehensive examples of the antiquarian mode in the twentieth century.[32] And while the rather narrow question of Benjamin's importance for Sebald is not ours, others have pointed out that a large poster of Benjamin on the wall adjacent to Sebald's university office was likely not there by chance.[33]

Austerlitz's attempt to recapture, and thus relive, his life leads him into more explicit reflections on time present and time past than in Sebald's other works. Thinking about the XIII[e] *arrondissement* in Paris, where he believed his father to have lived after fleeing Prague, Austerlitz comments that fifty years later he still half expected to see his father materialize. 'Such ideas infallibly come to me in places which have more of the past about them than the present. For instance, if I am walking through the city and look into one of those quiet courtyards where nothing has changed for decades, I feel, almost physically, the current of time slowing down in the gravitational field of oblivion.'[34] Benjamin had explicitly described Paris as a better home for the flaneur because it had *less* history, and thus exerted less distracting pull of place. But in this explicit reference, Sebald gives us an Austerlitz for whom Paris was as full of history as Rome, and thus implicitly criticizes the limits of Benjamin's sense of what constituted history.

It is as if we are being reminded here, again and always, that history is always personal. Austerlitz goes on, invoking yet another icon of modern antiquarianism: 'It seems to me then as if all the moments of our life occupy the same space, as if future events already existed and were only waiting for us to find our way to them at last.' This is Freud's extraordinary image of the human mind as a magical archaeological site in which all strata of building

[32] On Benjamin as a kind of antiquary see Miller, 'Momigliano, Benjamin and Antiquarianism After the Crisis of Historicism', in Miller (2007), 334–78.

[33] Jo Catling, 'Gratwanderungen bis an den Rand der Natur: W. G. Sebald's Landscapes of Memory', in Görner (2003), 23. Another commentator has gone so far—too far, I think—in suggesting Sebald as 'the reincarnation of Walter Benjamin' (Massimo Leone, 'Textual Wanderings: A Vertiginous Reading of W. G. Sebald' (Long and Whitehead), 91).

[34] *Austerlitz*, 257–8.

are simultaneously present and accessible. Austerlitz wonders if we ha commitments to the past, 'in what has gone before and is for the mo part extinguished, and must go there in search of places and people wh have some connection with us on the far side of time, so to speak.'[35] Ar when, a few pages later, in the new Bibliothèque Nationale, where he ha gone fruitlessly seeking information about his father, Austerlitz is informe that on the very spot where he was standing—the library obliterated th warehouses that had been there—the Germans brought the belongings Paris's Jews before they distributed them as war booty, the many layers that Rome of the mind are brought together: physical space, memory, an history.

III

These genres of travel writing and biography are among the last survivin heirs of what we might call the early modern antiquarian style. As Momiglian pointed out in his study of ancient Greek biography, what biography an antiquariaism had in common was their reliance on a pre-existing framewor or skeleton, on which details could be hung: in the case of the former th existence of such-and-such a person; and in the latter the existence an Ancient World. Both relieved the researcher of the burden of narrativ construction or of a principle of discrimination.

It was precisely the prior existence of an easily discernible framework tha allowed the antiquarian and the biographer to engage in a comprehensiv reconstructive fantasy—that they could amass enough material to recreat past life adequately, whether of a city or a person. This tendency wa described, already in the seventeenth century, with some discomfort an perhaps disdain, too, as 'micro-history' (*micrologion*). As the writing of histor became more focused on arguments and more attentive to narrative re quirements and audience, these *micrologia* looked more and more like digres sions rather than significant details.

The most micrological of Sebald's works is *The Rings of Saturn* (1995; trans 1998) originally subtitled 'An English Journey' (*Eine englische Wallfahrt*). I

[35] *Austerlitz*, 257–8.

begins and ends with Thomas Browne. Along the way, wandering through Browne's East Anglian countryside, it thinks with Browne about the nature of human life. Only now, rather than the funereal urn as *Denkmal*, or thing to think with, it is monuments of twentieth-century devastation, such as the concentration camp of Jasenovac on the Sava, obsolete industrial wastelands, the feelings of a caught herring, abandoned coastal stations, the hurricane of October 1987, or the history of sericulture in the West.

If the voice is detailed, the tone is melancholic. In that overgrown and abandoned cemetery of Ajaccio, in his Corsican essays, while looking out to sea, Sebald has another of those moments where Browne meets Opitz, *Urne-Buriall* meets *Zlatna*, and the future the past:

> But here and there among the thin flower stems, the blades and ears of grass in the graveyard of Piana, a departed soul looked out from one of those oval sepia portraits set in thin gilded frames which until the sixties used to be placed on graves in the Mediterranean countries: a blond hussar in his high-collared uniform tunic; a girl who died on her nineteenth birthday, her face almost extinguished by the sun and the rain; a short-necked man with his tie in a large knot, who had been a colonial civil servant in Oran until 1958; a little solider, forage cap tilted sideways on his head, who came home badly wounded from the futile defense of the jungle fortress of Dien Bien Pho.[36]

Et in Arcadia ego, Sebald seems to be saying here: the twentieth-century German in the Mediterranean.[37]

The already dead, the newly dead, and the soon-to-be-dead loom over each of Sebald's pages. Sebald may have begun with his discovery of the German desire to remember no longer, but he ends with the even larger species-wide rejection of the burden of remembering. For Sebald this was concentrated, as ever, in death, and the unwillingness to honor the dead. 'We can no longer speak of everlasting memory and the veneration of our forebears', Sebald writes. 'On the contrary: the dead must now be cleared out of the way as quickly and comprehensively as possible'.[38] If Alain Schnapp's brief survey of the origins of antiquarian research in the age-old—nearly primeval—desire to achieve some kind of victory over mortality in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, and Greece is right, then what Sebald is raising is the prospect of the end of antiquarianism with the end of reverence for the dead.[39]

[36] *Campo Santo*, 18–19.
[37] He refers explicitly to Poussin on p. 26.
[38] *Campo Santo*, 31.
[39] Alain Schnapp, *The Discovery of the Past* (1994) (trans., London, 1996), Introduction and ch. 1.

Browne, in dedicating *Urne-Buriall*, proclaims that 'to preserve the living and make the dead to live, to keep men out of their Urnes, and discourse o humane fragments in them, is not impertinent unto our profession; whos study is life and death, who daily behold examples of mortality, and of al men least need artificial *memento's*, or coffins by our bed side, to minde us o our graves' (*UB* Preface, 132). Sebald ends *The Rings of Saturn* with a discussio of Browne's *Musæum Clausum*, a catalogue of rare—actually, non-existent- books, pictures, and antiquities. He gestures at the collections of Aldrovand and Rudolf II and Ole Worm. Browne, by professional deformation, migh not have needed to collect as a philosophical exercise. But perhaps Sebald— whose profession after all could also be said 'to preserve the living, and mak the dead to live, to keep men out of their Urnes, and discourse of human fragments in them... whose study is life and death, who daily behol examples of mortality'—perhaps Sebald did.

For the idea of a 'Musæum Clausum', or 'Inaccessible Museum,' lies clos to the heart of Sebald's practice. Thus, at the very end of *Austerlitz*, th narrator tells how the Anglo-Jewish writer Dan Jacobsen, described as colleague of Austerlitz's, had inherited from his grandfather, Heshel, ': pocket calendar, his Russian identity papers, a worn spectacle case containin not only his glasses but a faded and already disintegrating piece of silk, and studio photograph of Heshel in a black coat with a black velour top hat o his head'. The 'Musæum Clausum', in other words, may be a clutch of famil heirlooms, or even treasured memories. With these items Jacobsen had trie to peer back into the past, but instead faced a 'chasm into which no ray o light could penetrate'. Sebald does not even try to provide a photograph a this crucial juncture.

Hegel, most profoundly, and others more accessibly, have made this poin about the antiquarian venture. But does no light emerge from the black hol of the past? Austerlitz gains knowledge of his identity, finally, even if no perfect knowledge, and even if unable to undo the lifetime's damage tha this prior oblivion had inflicted upon him. In any event, he seems slightl better off at the novel's end than at its beginning. Yes, it is true that often al we have to work with is the outsides of things—Hegel describes historica reconstruction as 'an external activity—the wiping-off of some drops of rair or specks of dust from these fruits, so to speak'—though in the hands o

master historians like the medievalists Chris Wickham and Michael McCormick, archaeology goes far towards bringing the ways of the past to life.[40]

But where Hegel was right, he was also wrong. And writers like Sebald represent the answer. If the antiquarian could not summon the lived past back to life from the inside, the writer, through an imagination as finely trained as an antiquarian's but with the freedom of empathy, could, just barely. Sebald's effort shows that it is, almost, possible to pull light out from darkness, to reach back in time to origins, and if not wholly and completely, then at least to convey partial meaning to future generations. The old Chasidic myth that culminates with the late-born rabbi not knowing where to intercede with God, and not knowing how to intercede with God, instead telling the story of past intercessions and achieving redemption through this story-telling, might be an apt legend for the modern antiquarian enterprise, as Sebald lived it.

If there is one driving force linking the Peirescs and Brownes/Mabillons of yore with the Sebalds of today and tomorrow, it is, as Momigliano noted long ago, the shared commitment to pursue truth. Sebald owned this himself in the first lines of 'Dark Night Sallies Forth':

> For it is hard to discover
> the winged vertebrates of prehistory
> embedded in tablets of slate.
> But if I see before me
> the nervature of past life
> in one image, I always think
> that this has something to do
> with truth.[41]

[40] Michael McCormick, *The Origins of the European Economy: Commerce and Communication, 300–900* (Cambridge, 2001); Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800* (Oxford, 2005).

[41] *After Nature*, trans. Michael Hamburger (2002) (New York, 2002), 83. Though published posthumously in translation, it is worth noting that these poems were actually written in 1988, *before* the prose literature for which he became famous.

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