READING ETHICALLY IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

THROUGH *AUSTERLITZ* AND *2666*

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Thesis Abstract

Oya Erez, "Reading Ethically in the Context of Globalization Through *Austerlitz* and *2666*"

This study focuses on the question of how to read ethically in the present context of globalization. Globalization is a process that integrates literary markets, introducing a vast amount of new and historical material into global literary circulation, while, at the same time, spreading the condition of postmodernity to every corner of the world. Its impact on contemporary reading practices and possible solutions to this challenge have been studied by theoreticians of world literature. However, these studies are directed towards an academic audience and not concerned with the ethics of reading. This study attempts to recover a contemporary history and ethics of reading through the analysis of W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* and Roberto Bolaño's *2666*, and finds in them an argument for an ethical reading practice that calls for retelling the stories we encounter through reading and listening, and makes an additional argument for writing, when possible, in order to transmit these stories to those "others" geographically and temporally removed from us.

Tez Özeti

Oya Erez, "Küreselleşme Bağlamında *Austerlitz* ve *2666* İle Etik Okuma"

Bu çalışma günümüzün küreselleşme bağlamında nasıl etik bir şekilde okunabileceği sorusuna odaklanmaktadır. Küreselleşme, edebiyat pazarlarını birbirine entegre eden, bir yandan çok sayıda yeni ve tarihi okuma materyelini global edebiyat dolaşımına sokarken, diğer bir yandan, postmoderniteyi dünyanın her yanına yayan bir süreç. Bu sürecin günümüzdeki okuma pratiklerine etkileri ve bunların getirdiği sorunlara verilebilecek cevaplar, dünya edebiyatı üzerine yazan kuramcıların konu edindikleri bir mesele olmakla beraber, bunların çalışmalarının okuma etiğini irdelemekten ziyade, akademik bir kütle için bazı pratik çözümler getirmeye yönelik olduklarını görüyoruz.

Bu çalışma, W. G. Sebald'ın *Austerlitz* adlı eseri ve Roberto Bolaño'nun *2666* adlı eserini inceleyerek güncel bir okuma tarihi ve etiğini bulmayı amaçlamaktadır. Sonuçta bulunan etik "okuma pratiği," dinleme ve okuma yoluyla karşılaştığımız hikayeleri yeniden anlatmayı gerektirir, ve bu yeniden anlatmayı bizlerden coğrafi ve zamansal olarak uzakta olan "başka"larına aktarabilmek için, mümkün olduğunda, yazılı olarak yapmayı öngörür.

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To my grandfather, Haldun Özbudak

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The question I ask in my thesis is this: how can one read ethically in the age of globalization? My point of departure here is less the phenomenology of reading as an activity, and more the lifelong individual practice of reading, which, despite being unique to each person, nevertheless shows discernible patterns within and across historical periods and geographical locations. I further conceptualize reading as a practice linking readers and writers in a network of relationships. It is this relational aspect of reading that makes it possible to discuss both its ethics and the impact of social context on its ethics.

If my reading practice brings me into relationships with multiple 'others', that is the writers of the texts I am reading, then what are my responsibilities towards them? How can I shape my reading practice to reflect these responsibilities? Is shaping my reading practice enough, or is there anything else I can do? Examining these questions within the context of globalization opens up additional ones: What kind of impact does globalization have on my reading practice? What kind of challenges does it bring to my attempt to read responsibly? I approach globalization here as a process that integrates literary markets, introducing an overwhelming amount of new and historical material into global literary circulation, while, at the same time, spreading the condition of postmodernity to every corner of the world. To put my initial question another way, then: what kind of challenges does globalization, with its explosion of reading materials and its spread of the postmodern condition, bring to individuals'

practices of reading, and is it possible, as an individual, to respond ethically to this challenge?

My discussion of ethics in this thesis is primarily informed by Judith Butler's discussion of postmodern ethics in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, which I review in the next chapter. Similarly, my understanding of postmodernity is informed by that of Jean-François Lyotard, which I also review in the following chapter. Butler's postulation of a postmodern subject who is "not self-grounding", or "opaque" to itself, and the implications this opacity has for responsible conduct are central to my discussion of the ethics of reading. If globalization spreads the postmodern condition as described by Lyotard to all corners of the world, then this means the contemporary reader (as well as the contemporary writer) are both postmodern subjects. To approach globalization through Butler and Lyotard's frameworks, then, casts a new light on my question.

In search for an answer, I turn, again in Chapter 2 to a recent area of criticism that seems to offer itself as fertile ground for theoretical matters related to the globalization of literature: recent theories of world literature. The issue of 'how to read' in the era of globalization is one that is central to world literature discussions. David Damrosch and Franco Moretti, the two primary world literature theoreticians I discuss both refer to a sense of being overwhelmed in the face of this explosion in reading material, and offer different strategies of attack. While Moretti bans close reading altogether ("we know how to read texts, now let's learn how *not* to read them" (*Conjectures*, 151)), Damrosch takes a more tempered approach that allows for close reading, but still calls for "a more detached

engagement" (*What Is*, 301). In seeking a possible answer to my main question in their writings, I come across several useful considerations (which I will discuss later), but more importantly, two problems common to both critics: neither directly addresses the ethics of the reading practices he advocates; neither concerns himself with reading practices outside of academia. On closer look, their 'how to read' has less to do with ethical considerations than with working around practical (linguistic, cultural, historical) limitations that arise in academic studies of world literature. What, then, of the non-specialist reader? How is he or she to read?

After my investigations in theories of world literature, I next turn to contemporary fiction to attempt to construct an answer to my question through the close analysis of two novels: W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, and Roberto Bolaño's *2666*. These two novels depict a wide range of contemporary readers and reading practices that are central to their narratives. Trying to answer a question of ethics through the close reading of fiction is admittedly somewhat of an oblique approach, but perhaps less so when the subject at hand is that of reading itself. In fact, in making this move, I have followed two suggestions that Robert Darnton, a historian of the book, makes in "First Steps toward a History of Reading". There, he makes five suggestions for recovering the history of reading, which, even if they are not made for discovering an *ethics* of reading, can still be useful for that purpose. These are: studying depictions of reading in works of literature and art; studying the way reading was learned; studying autobiographical accounts; studying the range of potential responses to a text, against which one can weight its actual history of reception; and finally, studying books as physical objects.

After reviewing Darnton's five suggestions at the end of Chapter 2, I take up two of them in attempting to 'recover' a global ethics of reading from contemporary fiction: in Chapters 3 and 4, I examine the depictions of reading found in *Austerlitz* and *2666* respectively, and I further discuss some of the possible responses that these texts elicit from a reader. My reasons for choosing the work of Sebald and Bolaño, and *Austerlitz* and *2666* in particular are numerous, and I will discuss these in detail in their respective chapters. Briefly, though, both of these late writers spent the larger part of their lives in self-imposed exile—Sebald in England, and Bolaño variously in Mexico, El Salvador, France and Spain. Thus, they had considerable insight into the processes of globalization, which gets reflected in their works. They similarly both make significant use of intertextuality and ekphrasis, and are very rich in depictions of the relationships between readers, writers, literary critics and publishers. They are very adamant about articulating the ethics of their writing practices in the interviews they gave and articles they wrote, which suggests to me that looking for an ethics of reading in their work is not a senseless enterprise. My choice of *Austerlitz* and *2666* is primarily a result of the relative density, in these two works, of depictions of reading and writing, and the networks of relationships reading and writing produce. Finally, I also believe the two novels form a balanced pair in that *Austerlitz* centers on the main relationship between the narrator and the protagonist, while *2666* is rich in a multiplicity of reading and writing relationships that provide various alternative practices of reading.

In Chapter 5, finally, I bring together the conclusions of the previous chapters to construct a coherent answer to the main question of this thesis. While the novels I discuss neither depict the same reading practices, nor produce the same implied readers, I argue, after a discussion of these differences, that the reading practices and implied readers in each novel ultimately point to a particular ethical reading practice common to both. Surprisingly, this practice entails retelling, as much as it entails reading, and it remodels readers into amateur reader-writers who not just read, but hopefully also write, not just write, but also write fiction, recounting both their own stories, and the stories of those they read and listen to. The key here, though, is to keep in mind that I less find an argument for rewriting and writing than do I for simply retelling with the addition of input from one's own store of stories. In concluding my thesis, I discuss the wider implications, in the context of globalization, of such an ethics of reading—and retelling.

CHAPTER 2

A FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I build the theoretical framework against which I conduct my textual analysis in the following chapters. I start by providing an overview of Judith Butler's discussion of ethics within a contemporary social frame. I continue by reviewing some key ideas related to postmodernity in Jean-François Lyotard's work that are important to my discussion of globalization. I then move on to analyze how critics of world literature theory have taken up the issue of "how to read" in the age of globalization. Among them, I focus specifically on David Damrosch and Franco Moretti. I finally turn to Robert Darnton for suggestions on how to recover the contemporary practices and ethics of reading from present-day novels, which constitutes my project in the following two chapters.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler concerns herself with the development of the ethical subject and the implications this development has on our current ethical practices. According to Butler, in the "contemporary social frame" of postmodernity, we are all opaque subjects by way of the development of our sense of selves: there is an integral aspect to all of us which cannot be narrated or accounted for because of the inter-relational and dependent way our sense of self forms (3). Butler calls for a new kind of ethics where we, as ethical subjects, recognize and accept this integral opacity and givenness unto the other, which is inherently painful, but can also be productive and can be realized through love. This acceptance means doing away with ideas of complete self-mastery and power over one another. It also means not asking for full accountability—for the kind of

accountability that none of us can give because of the impossibility of full self-knowledge.

Here, Butler treats the practice of giving an account of oneself, "in order to justify [one's] actions and [one's] very way of being" (Simmons 85), as the main component of ethical conduct. By account giving, Butler means answering to any queries by an 'other', ranging from accusory ones such as "Was it you [who committed this crime]?" (Butler 11) or "Do you have anything to say for yourself?" (13) to more inquisitive ones such as "Who are you?" (31). Butler analyzes different practices of asking for and giving an account, and through this analysis, investigates the possibility of responsible conduct for the postmodern subject. She asks, "Does the postulation of a subject who is not self-grounding, that is, whose conditions of emergence can never fully be accounted for, undermine the possibility of responsibility and, in particular, of giving an account of oneself" (19)? Butler's specific focus on the postmodern subject is what I believe makes her discussion of ethics relevant to my analysis of the ethics of reading in the age of globalization. As I will discuss below, I approach globalization as a process by means of which the condition of postmodernity has spread to all corners of the globe, creating, in effect, postmodern subjects of all humans.

In her analysis, Butler is concerned with the ethics of the practice of giving an account of one's self, existence and conduct. While, as Butler herself emphasizes, "Telling a story about oneself is not the same as giving an account of oneself," I will argue here that her analysis of the "scene of address" of two individuals between which the account giving occurs is also very appropriate to the analysis of the

relationship between a storyteller and a listener, or a writer and a reader (12). I claim that the dynamics that Butler describes in the scene of account giving are also valid for the dynamics found between the storyteller and the audience of any account, oral or written, real or fictional. In claiming so, I diverge from Butler and one of her primary sources, Emmanuel Levinas, who both privilege the verbal exchange over the written one, and I side more with Maurice Blanchot, for whom the dynamics of the verbal exchange also extend to writing. Below, I provide an overview of Butler's analysis and expand upon it to suggest some ways in which it could apply to the exchange that takes place through the medium of writing, and more specifically, through the medium of fictional writing.

Judith Butler proposes that in any exchange between two people which involves one or the other giving an account of herself, the expectation that the one giving an account achieve complete narrative coherence amounts to ethical violence against that person. According to Butler, every person has, as an integral part of what constitutes her as a person, a certain opacity that is simply impossible to account for through language in any way. I hold that this opacity has implications for any kind of writing and reading practice. I will suggest a few of these more obvious implications here, but will leave the full development of my argument to the following two chapters where I explore my ideas through Sebald's *Austerlitz* and Bolaño's *2666*.

To begin with, the effects of a constitutive opacity on autobiographical writing are easier to claim then they are on fictional writing: these effects make it impossible to realize the dream of mastery of one's autobiography. To uphold such

a dream will result in ethical violence towards the raconteur—violence generated both internally by the raconteur, and externally, by the audience of the autobiography. The effects of a constitutive opacity on non-autobiographical, and especially fictional writing are less straightforward. Below, I first summarize Butler's conception of "the scene of address" between two people, and then situate autobiographical and fictional writing in that scene. I then discuss Butler's description of how mutual expectations in this scene of address (and by extension, in the exchange that takes place between the writer and reader of a work) can lead to ethical violence. It is this possibility of ethical violence for which I will seek an answer in the chapters to come.

Butler formulates her concept of "the scene of address" based on Nietzsche's theory of how we become reflective beings with a sense of self. According to Butler, Nietzsche posits that we become reflective and start to possess a sense of self after we inflict an injury or injustice on another, get confronted about it, and in return, have to accept responsibility for our actions. In such a context, "we find ourselves in the position of having to give an account of ourselves […] We start to give an account only because we are interpellated as beings who are rendered accountable by a system of justice and punishment" (10). Here is Butler's scene of address: a scene where one is asked by another to give an account of herself. For Nietzsche, this scene only takes place within the context of injury and punishment. Butler, on the other hand, extends the scene to encompass other encounters where one asks of the other who the other is, and in response, receives an account. Butler says, "There may well be a desire to explain and narrate that is not prompted by a terror

of punishment. Nietzsche did well to understand that I begin my story of myself only in the face of a "you" who asks me to give an account. Only in the face of such a query or attribution from another – "Was it you?" – do any of us start to narrate ourselves, or find that, for urgent reasons, we must become self-narrating beings" (11).

Butler doesn't equate giving an account with narrating a story—giving an account requires the acceptance of the self as having causal agency (perhaps in the suffering of another, but regardless, an agency in something). However, giving an account takes a narrative form, "which not only depends on the ability to relay a set of sequential events with plausible transitions but also draws upon narrative voice and authority, being directed towards an audience with the aim of persuasion" (12). Through the narrative, the self is established or denied as the causal agent of the account being given.

Although Butler doesn't directly apply the scene of address to writing (while she does briefly talk about giving varying autobiographical accounts to others in our lives), it is not a stretch to claim that any autobiographical writing takes place, at a very basic level, within the framework of a scene of address. The narrative in any autobiography refers to the self of the author, and places the self at the center of the actions being described. As such, it is an account of who one is, where one comes from, how one is constituted. The scene of address that forms the framework of the autobiographical writing at the simplest level involves one other person to whom the autobiography is being addressed. While non-autobiographical, and especially fictional writing introduces more complex

dynamics to this basic relationship, I suggest that similar issues of recognition giving and acceptance hold true for any writing/reading exchange, albeit on multiple levels which I discuss below.

Now, Butler describes a manifold opacity in the construction of one's self within the scene of address. This opacity is significant to one's account of oneself in that it sets the limits of what can be narrated within this account. According to Butler, these limits are extant in any person as an integral part of their personhood and are impossible to overcome as well as being impossible to account for through narration.

The opacity of one's self, according to her, has several reasons. She summarizes these as follows. The first one is that what establishes a person's singularity in the presence of another is a physical exposure to another. One's bodily presence "cannot be narrated but constitutes the bodily condition of one's narrative account of oneself"(39).

Secondly, the primary relations that as an infant form one's consciousness are irrecoverable in the sense of not being remembered, but also, even the latter reiterations of the original interchange between an infant and a caretaker contain a non-narrativizable element that is a result of what Butler calls the overwhelming demands of another's presence on the infant. According to Laplanche, whom Butler quotes, the inaugural moment of the self, the "I" comes when the self is face to face with her primary caregiver. This moment of address by the caregiver (first through eye contact, or through touch) is the moment when the "I" and the subconscious are simultaneously created. Butler says, "The other is, from the start, too much for

me, enigmatic, inscrutable. This 'too-much-ness' must be handled and contained for something called an 'I' to emerge in its separateness" (54). The infant becomes dispossessed of a part of herself, and the unconscious, not so much as a "topos into which this 'too-much-ness' is deposited" but as a survival strategy, emerges (54). The infant, in the meanwhile, goes through the process of working out what the source of this overwhelming feeling is: "In this context, the question of the 'who' emerges: 'By whom am I overwhelmed?' 'Who is she?' 'Who are you?' are all, in a sense, the question that the infant poses to the demands of the adult: 'Who are you and what do you want of me?'" (55). This not-knowing makes the infant realize herself as a separate entity while also making her aware of a mirroring entity making overwhelming demands of her. In this manner, the sense of self is formed for the first time. By way of its formation, it is forever bound by and dependent upon a relationality to the other, and the dispossession that simultaneously results in the formation of the subconscious results in a limiting of one's ability to narrate the source of one's consciousness.

Thirdly, the reiterations of these primary relations result in a history that establishes one's partial opacity to herself. On top of these, there are social and linguistic norms that facilitate and structure, and at the same time limit one's telling about oneself. Finally, Butler says that "this last dispossession in language is intensified by the fact that I give an account of myself to someone, so that the narrative structure of my account is superseded the *structure of address* in which it takes place" (39). Summarized thus, these factors result in not only the opacity of

the subject to herself, but also the limits of the subject to narrate an account of herself.

By extension, any autobiographical writing hits upon the exact same limitations. Try as she might, any writer of an autobiography will be constrained by her self-opacity and will only be able to make up for the limits of her self narration by resorting to fiction. And this is exactly how I suggest the dynamics found in the scene of autobiographical account giving extend to those in the writing and reading of fiction: just as any autobiographical writing is in part fictional, I propose all fictional writing is in part autobiographical, or derives partly from first or second hand autobiographical accounts of others. That is to say, we can conceptualize fictional writing as an interconnected chain of real or imagined account give-and-takes, in which each link constitutes a scene of address for which Butler's analysis holds true.

Next in her analysis, Butler asks the following question: if it is indeed impossible to fully account for one's actions and give a full account of one's own story, then what does it mean to demand a complete account of another person? According to her, this demand adds up to an ethical violence against the other person: if we hold the other person responsible for something she can never fully account for, then our demand amounts to an ethical violence. In the specific context of autobiographical writing, demanding full mastery of one's self-narrative represents the same kind of violence. If we conceptualize fictional writing as before, as a chain of account give-and-takes, then, fictional writing also becomes a

possible site of ethical violence. How to counteract this is one of the issues I examine in the next two chapters.

One must realize, however, this threat of ethical violence is a threat only against a certain kind of subject, a subject who is presumed to be fully transparent to herself. Butler says:

> In the language that articulates opposition to a non-narrativizable beginning resides the fear that the absence of narrative will spell a certain threat, a threat to life, and will pose the risk, if not the certainty, of a certain kind of death, the death of a subject who cannot, who can never, fully recuperate the conditions of its own emergence. But this death, if it is a death, is only the death of a certain kind of subject, one that was never possible to begin with, the death of a fantasy of impossible mastery, and so a loss of what one never had. (65)

Needless to say, for Butler, the death of such a fantasy is, despite the loss and the grief, a necessary step towards self-acceptance as being partially opaque, partially non-accountable, and similarly a step towards accepting the same opacity and non-accountability in others. This latter step results in us ceasing our demands for narrative mastery in others, which eliminates the ethical violence that otherwise would result from an impossible demand, and paves the way for a non-violent interaction between humans. In this scenario of non-violence, the self-narrative, the autobiography is accepted as being always part fiction, always incomplete, always interruptible and alterable. Perhaps in this manner, it takes away the anxiety of giving a single unified account of one's story, and leads to richer and more variegated accounts. Similarly, any fictional account, seen as consisting of a multiplicity of autobiographical exchanges, offers a fertile site for non-violent, inquisitive interactions between the reader and the writer rather than accusative or punishing ones.

In a frequently quoted letter addressed to Thomas E. Carroll, later published with the title "An Answer to the Question: What is the Postmodern?" Lyotard "investigates the potential that art has to demonstrate that the world in which we live is discontinuous and not capable of being explained entirely by any rational system. In fact, the point of art for Lyotard is its ability to highlight the failings in such systems" (Malpas 42). While the main focus of Lyotard's letter is to distinguish between three different types of artistic and cultural presentation (realist, modern and postmodern), I think the letter also serves as a useful summary of Lyotard's approach to postmodernity and its relationship with art. Lyotard's approach to postmodernity has also greatly informed that of Butler, and to focus here on Lyotard is to get more clarification on what Butler means by "a contemporary social frame" in her own discussion (Butler 3). Below, I highlight some of Lyotard's ideas that are essential to my analysis in the following chapters.

Most importantly for my purposes, Lyotard says that capitalism, which I take as the motor of the process of globalization, has "a capacity to derealise familiar objects, social roles and institutions" (Lyotard 5). He continues onto specify:

> The objects and thoughts issuing from scientific knowledge and the capitalist economy bring with them one of the rules underwriting their possibility: the rule that there is no reality unless it is confirmed by a consensus between partners on questions of knowledge and commitment. […] Modernity, whenever it appears, does not occur without a shattering of belief, without a discovery of the *lack of reality* in reality – a discovery linked to the invention of other realities. (9)

According to Lyotard, this sense of "lack of reality" that capitalism brings constitutes for humans something "unpresentable" through language or art. What it

creates is a feeling of Kantian sublime, which "brings both pleasure and pain, or rather in it pleasure proceeds from pain" (10). I argue that globalization, through the spread of capitalism, also instills this feeling in all contemporary subjects, and creates common problem of presentation.

Lyotard further elaborates on the sublime and the contradiction it brings in creating a pleasure which issues from pain, and the issue of presentation: "This contradiction (which others might call neurosis or masochism) develops as a conflict between all of the faculties of the subject, between the faculty to conceive of something and the faculty to 'present' something" (10). He then describes 'taste' in art as a demonstration of "an accord between the capacity to conceive and the capacity to present an object corresponding to the concept," which "may be felt in the form of pleasure" (10) He goes onto link the sublime to the unpresentable as follows:

> The sublime is a different feeling. It occurs when the imagination in fact fails to present any object which could accord with a concept, even if only in principle. We have the Idea of the world (the totality of what is) but not the capacity to show an example of it. We have the Idea of the simple (the non-decomposable), but we cannot illustrate it by a sensible object which would be a case of it. We can conceive of the absolutely great, the absolutely powerful; but any presentation of an object – which would be intended to "display" that absolute greatness or absolute power – appears sadly lacking to us. These Ideas, for which there is no possible presentation and which therefore provide no knowledge of reality (experience), also prohibit the free accord of the faculties that produces the feeling of the beautiful. They obstruct the formation and stabilisation of taste. One could call them unpresentable. (10-11)

Before moving onto the distinction between realist, modern and postmodern presentation, which Lyotard develops from this discussion of the sublime and the unpresentable, I will stop for a moment to dwell on how these link to the opaque

subject of Butler. To put Butler's discussion in the framework of Lyotard's analysis of the postmodern condition, one can say that a subject's opaqueness to herself and her inability to account for herself is strengthened in the context of globalization, and this, in turn, strengthens the need to counteract the possibility of ethical violence in accounts we give one another.

Lyotard distinguishes between realism, modernism and postmodernism as follows: for him, realism "can be defined only by its intention of avoiding the question of reality implied in the question of art" (7), while modernism approaches the unpresentable through nostalgia in that "it allows the unpresentable to be invoked only as absent content, while form continues to offer the reader or spectator material for consolation and pleasure" (14). On the other hand, the postmodern is that which "invokes the unpresentable in presentation itself, that which refuses the consolation of correct forms, refuses the consensus of taste permitting a common experience of nostalgia for the impossible, and inquiring into new presentations – not to take pleasure in them, but to better produce the feeling that there is something unpresentable" (15). To put it in another way, postmodern art is precisely the way in which opaque subjects face to face with globalization can find a way to reflect the unpresentability of their condition.

It is important to take a step back here and note a very important bias in Lyotard's discussion in favor of the producer of art, and by extension, the writer. By privileging the creation of postmodern art as a site for tackling the postmodern condition, Lyotard creates a distinction between the producer and the audience, or the writer and a reader. While I agree with his identification of postmodern art as

the sole one which can do justice to the postmodern condition, I also believe that his discussion eschews the issue of how a reader can read in the contemporary context. For an answer to that question, I will now turn to two theoreticians of world literature.

Many recent writings on world literature have taken up the issue of how to read when faced with the overwhelming amount of reading material that globalization has brought about, both through opening up previously unavailable texts, and through bringing those and newer works to the global literary marketplace. While the solutions to this issue span a wide range, I will review here only those of Moretti and Damrosch, as their articulations have been widely discussed by others, and also represent two alternative views. Before moving on, it is important to note that Moretti and Damrosch's discussions of how to read in the age of globalization rest on the issue of what exactly world literature is. Because that concern is not central to the argument of my thesis, I will briefly offer here Damrosch's definition. In making this definition, Damrosch also identifies two problems which are central to his and Moretti's discussion of 'how to read'.

In defining world literature, Damrosch says in *What is World Literature*, "the sum total of the world's literatures can be sufficiently expressed by the blanket term 'literature'," and world literature is "a subset of the plenum of literature" (3). He continues, "I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language (Virgil was long read in Latin in Europe)" (3). From there, he goes onto identify the two main problems one faces when attempting to tackle world literature:

> A viable concept when delimited in this way, world literature still consists of a huge corpus of works. These works, moreover, stem from widely disparate societies, with very different histories, frames of cultural reference, and poetics. […] Lacking specialized knowledge, the foreign reader is likely to impose domestic literary values on the foreign work, and even careful scholarly attempts to read a foreign work in light of a Western critical theory are deeply problematic. (3-4)

These two problems are, therefore: a. the amount of works; b. their widely disparate contexts. This passage also introduces the underlying assumption that 'how to read' world literature is more a problem for the scholarly reader than the lay one. As will also become clear from Moretti's discussion below, the emphasis in writings of world literature are mainly on the scholarly reader, and leave aside the more universal concerns of the lay reader. Damrosch, for instance, raises the following warning: "Scholars of world literature risk becoming little more than the literary ecotourists described by Susan Lanser, people 'who dwell mentally in one or two (usually Western) countries, summer metaphorically in a third, and visit other places for brief interludes" (Damrosch 3). In saying so, he implicitly identifies non-scholarly readers of world literature as ecotourists, and in a way, undermines the possibility that they can engage in any meaningful way with writings outside of their own cultural contexts, never mind build an ethical reading practice. In fact, "the spectre of amateurism" looms large for Damrosch (284). He says, "The variability of a work of world literature is one of its constitutive features—one of its great strengths when the work is well presented and read well, and its great vulnerability when it is mishandled or misappropriated by its newfound foreign friends" (4). This emphasis on 'mishandling' and 'misappropriation' in reading world literature appears to be what drives his answer to 'how to read'. Before

moving onto Damrosch's answer, though, I will first touch upon Moretti's since Moretti's is in some ways simpler, and since Damrosch himself makes his argument against that of Moretti.

In "Conjectures on World Literature," Moretti asks, "What does it mean, studying world literature? How do we do it?" (148). About what Margaret Cohen calls the 'great unread', Moretti says, "there are thirty thousand nineteenth-century British novels out there, forty, fifty, sixty thousand – no-one really knows, no-one has read them, no-one ever will. And then there are French novels, Chinese, Argentinean, American … Reading 'more' is always a good thing, but not the solution" (148-149). According to Moretti, if one is to tackle world literature at all, one must abolish close reading altogether. He says, "we know how to read texts, now let's learn how *not* to read them" (151). Of course, his initial question here betrays again the underlying assumption that reading world literature is primarily a concern for those *studying* world literature. In a similar move, when he says, "there will always be a point where the study of world literature must yield to the specialist of the national literature, in a sort of cosmic and inevitable division of labour," (160) he betrays the idea that not only is reading world literature a concern of the world literature specialist, but that close reading is a concern of the national specialist. Moretti's world systems approach, as Damrosch also recognizes, is useful for a certain kind of analysis and understanding. However, as Damrosch says, Moretti's approach

> shares some of the problems experienced by those who attempted to apply the insights of structural linguistics directly to complex literary works. Deep structures could be elucidated, but literary effects are often achieved by highly individual means, and generative grammars of

> narrative had difficulty providing much insight into works more elaborate than folktales or detective stories. (26)

Damrosch himself makes a different argument, that as readers of world literature, "we don't face an either/or choice between global systematicity and infinite textual multiplicity […] Much can be learned from a close attention to the workings of a given cultural system, at a scale of analysis that also allows for extended discussion of specific works" (26). Therefore, Damrosch takes a more moderate approach that does Moretti: to read world literature, for him, means to both take a removed approach for a wider perspective, and to dip into close reading for insights that would otherwise be missed. Of course, that is an oversimplification of Damrosch's answer, which addresses, among other things, issues of language study, working in translation and working in collaboration. While those issues are of great importance to the question of 'how to read', as a scholarly reader or otherwise, I want to dwell less on their specifics and more on the resulting argument they produce. Damrosch finally says that reading and studying world literature requires a *detached* mode of engagement:

> Immersion in a single culture represents a mode of relatively direct engagement with it, aptly symbolized by efforts to acquire 'near native fluency' in the culture's language. Reading and studying world literature, by contrast, is inherently a more detached mode of engagement; it enters into a different kind of dialogue with the work, not one involving identification or mastery but the discipline of distance and of difference. We encounter the work not at the heart of its source culture but in the field of force generated among works that may come from very different cultures and eras. (300)

It is not only Moretti and Damrosch's scholarly approaches to the question of how to read, but also this detached mode of engagement which undermines the possibility of the kind of direct interaction that Butler's 'scene of address' on which

I base my ethical discussion suggests. Globalization accentuates the opacities we carry within ourselves and with respect to each other, and thus calls for a kind of writing that can address these opacities through recreating the feeling of sublime that the global spread of capitalism produces. Globalization, by extension, also calls for an interpersonal engagement that helps to counteract the ethical violence that lurks in exchanges which call for full accountability and full knowledge. In the final count, neither Moretti's, nor Damrosch's answers to how to read in the age of globalization seem to address the issue of how to shape our writing—and more importantly to the main concern of my thesis, our reading—to deal with those challenges that globalization brings.

In continuing to search for an answer, I will next turn to some suggestions Darnton makes for recovering the history of reading practices, and take them up in the following chapters in an attempt to recover from the works of Sebald and Bolaño what I term the contemporary practices and ethics of reading. If contemporary theory yet seems to lack a full articulation of what constitutes an ethical practice of reading, I believe contemporary fiction offers some pointers to such an articulation, and thus, is a fruitful resource to turn to in search of an answer.

Robert Darnton, in "First Steps Toward a History of Reading," asks how it would be possible to recover the history of reading. He reviews a number of existing studies of reading and says, "The historians of the book have already turned up a great deal of information about the external history of reading. Having studied it as a social phenomenon, they can answer many of the 'who', the 'what',

the 'where', and the 'when' questions, which can be of great help in attacking the more difficult 'whys' and 'hows'" (162). As becomes clear in Darnton's discussions of the historical changes in the 'whys' and 'hows' of reading, his use of those questions also includes the ethics of reading. For that reason, I will briefly review here the suggestions he makes for tackling the 'whys' and 'hows' of reading, and then make use of two which are appropriate to my project in the following chapters.

To "learn about the ideals and assumptions underlying reading in the past", his first suggestion is to "study contemporary depictions of reading in fiction, autobiographies, polemical writings, letters, paintings, and prints in order to uncover some basic notions of what people thought took place when they read" (169). After discussing examples from history which reveal important information as to how specialist readers read, he turns, refreshingly, to the issue of how ordinary readers read. He says, "My second suggestion for attacking that problem concerns the ways reading was learned" (170). Here, he gives examples of how French children first began to read not French, but Latin, through memorized passages, and how in the middle ages, many learned how to read long before they learned how to write. He is aware, though, that it is nevertheless hard to recover "the experience of the great mass of readers [which] lies beyond the range of historical research," and goes onto suggest a third approach for capturing "something of what reading meant for the few persons who left a record of it." For this, he says, historians can "begin with the best known autobiographical accounts [...] and move on to less familiar sources" (171). His fourth suggestion is to study

the range of potential responses to a text, against which one can weight its actual history of reception. His suggestion, of course, arises from the lessons of reader response theory. He says:

> Time is ripe for making a juncture between literary theory and the history of books. The theory can reveal the range in potential responses to a text—that is, to the rhetorical constraints that direct reading without determining it. The history can show what readings actually took place—that is, within the limits of an imperfect body of evidence. By paying heed to history, the literary critics may avoid the danger of anachronism […] By taking account of rhetoric, the historians may find clues to behaviour that would otherwise be baffling […] I would therefore argue for a dual strategy, which would combine the implicit readers of the texts with the actual readers of the past and, by building on such comparisons, to develop a history as well as a theory of reader response. (171)

Finally, he adds a fifth suggestion based on analytical bibliography: "By studying books as physical objects, bibliographers have demonstrated that the typographical disposition of a text can to a considerable extent determine its meaning and the way it was read" (174).

Among these five suggestions, two stand out as being useful for my purposes. These are: studying depictions of reading in works of literature; and discussing the potential responses a given text can elicit from a reader. In the following chapters, I will take up these two suggestions to attempt to find a global ethics of reading in two examples of contemporary fiction. In doing so, I hope to start to articulate an answer to the question of how to read ethically in the age of globalization.

CHAPTER 3

AUSTERLITZ

Close to the ending of W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, the book's nameless narrator repeats what the book's protagonist, Jacques Austerlitz, tell him about the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, which has been moved to its new location: "[…] it is, I realized on my first visit, said Austerlitz, both in its outer appearance and inner constitution unwelcoming if not inimical to human beings, and runs counter, on principle, one might say, to the requirements of any true reader" (275-276).

My main concern, in this chapter, is to examine who this "true reader" of Jacques Austerlitz is, and how the significant economic, political and cultural changes that globalization has brought about have affected the reading practices of this reader. While I do not wish to claim the stated views of either the protagonist or the narrator of *Austerlitz* as those of Sebald himself, I do believe that a close look at the thrust of the story, the verbal and written interactions of its characters, and the statements made by those characters gives a good account of Sebald's take on the impact of globalization on reading practices, and on what an ethical response to this challenge involves.

In my analysis, I follow the two suggestions by Darnton that I discussed in the previous chapter, and examine the text with an eye toward the different readers and reading practices found in it, and the kind of reader that the text itself produces. Central to my analysis will be the relationship between the narrator and the protagonist, Jacques Austerlitz. In examining any narrator/narratee or writer/reader relationship in the novel including that central one, I will make use

of Butler's analysis and terminology of the 'scene of address', which I reviewed in the previous chapter. Below, I argue that the relationship between the reader and Sebald are modeled after that between the narrator and Austerlitz.[1] I further argue that this relationship is designed to affect the 'true reader' whose needs Austerlitz believes the new Grande Bibliothèque runs counter to. My aim is to get a better understanding of this true reader, and by extension, of Sebald's vision for a reading practice which answers to the challenges of globalization.

Austerlitz, published in 2001 in the German original as well as in a translation by Anthea Bell, is W.G. Sebald's final novel. It has similar formal features to those found in Sebald's previous works of fiction, but is somewhat different in that it can be more properly called a novel than the collection of fictional and non-fictional stories and anecdotes that constitute the other works. Among their shared formal features are frequent uses of photographs and other images such as maps, diagrams and newspaper clippings, ekphrases of imaginary and real works, apocryphal stories about well-known historical events and persons that mix fact and fiction, and digressions of narrative. I believe these formal features combined make for a rich and direct commentary on contemporary history while at the same time refusing to impose a single point of view. That Sebald uses these techniques to write fictions about the recent history of changes faced by Europe has compelled me to focus on his work in my thesis. My main reason for choosing *Austerlitz* among Sebald's novels was the fact that it centers on one dominant narrator/narratee

[1] I must emphasize here that in talking about Sebald in reference to his novel *Austerlitz*, I mean not Sebald the man, but Sebald the implied author of *Austerlitz*—a distinction made by Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (151).

relationship, which, even at first reading, suggested itself to me as a model for the relationship between the reader of *Austerlitz* and Sebald. I felt that this dominant but complex relationship would provide a good counterpoint to the variety of relationships in Bolaño's *2666*, my other choice of novel for textual analysis.

The story of *Austerlitz* unfolds during a number of chance encounters between the narrator and the protagonist, Jacques Austerlitz, which take place over a span of about thirty years between the 1960s and 1990s. During these encounters, which last from a few hours to a few days, Austerlitz and the narrator first talk primarily about architectural history, and eventually about the life story of Austerlitz, which Austerlitz himself discovers over the course of these thirty years of intermittent encounters. Austerlitz, as he learns and we find out, arrived in Britain in 1939 as a *kindertransport* child and was placed with a Welsh Calvinist minister and his ailing wife. Austerlitz spent his childhood in Wales, listening to the minister's Sunday sermons, and to the locals' ghost stories and legends. He then was sent off to a public school where he discovered his real name, heretofore unknown to him, and was taken under the protection of a history teacher who encouraged him in his studies. In the meetings between Austerlitz and the narrator, Austerlitz starts with these earlier memories as well as later ones of his studies and a romantic relationship in Paris, and then moves onto recounting how, following a nervous breakdown as an adult academic, he starts to recover some of his very early memories, tracks down a close friend of his parents in Prague, where he is originally from, and goes off in search for anything he can find on his parents. He

learns that his mother perished in the Theresienstadt concentration camp, and that his father escaped to Paris, eventually also perishing in a camp in the Pyrenees.

Below, I examine the novel in the sequence of its development, referring backwards and forwards in the narrative as necessary. In my analysis, I have a number of specific focuses: the development of the relationship between the narrator and Austerlitz; the depictions of various other narrator/narratee relationships in the novel; the effects of Austerlitz's narrative (as it is recounted to the narrator) on the narrative of the novel itself (as it is recounted by the narrator to the reader); the uses of pictures and historical details.

Austerlitz opens with descriptions from an excursion the narrator took to Antwerp in 1967, and builds up to the narrator's first encounter with Jacques Austerlitz in the *Salle de pas perdus* in Antwerp's Centraal Station. The descriptions in these first few pages prior to their meeting are full of details that turn out to contain echoes of the stories Austerlitz later recounts to the narrator. Numerous details from these pages return later in the novel, but two conspicuous examples are that of "an aviary full of brightly feathered finches and siskins fluttering about" (3) by the Centraal Station, next to which the narrator rests, and that of the impression the railway passengers in the Centraal Station create on the narrator as being "somehow miniaturized, whether by the unusual height of the ceiling or because of the gathering dusk," and which prompts in the narrator "the passing thought, nonsensical in itself, that they were the last members of a diminutive race which had perished or had been expelled from its homeland" (7). The aviary returns twice in Austerlitz's story, first as a cockatoo colony at his public school

friend Gerald's family's Andromeda Lodge in the Welsh countryside (81), and later, as a pigeon loft that Austerlitz encounters on a trip he takes with his lover Marie to Marienbad (214). Similarly, the 'miniaturized' members of a diminutive race expelled from its homeland later get echoed in the descriptions which Evan the Welsh village cobbler gives to Austerlitz of ghosts as being "a little shorter than they had been in life, for the experience of death, said Evan, diminishes us, just as a piece of linen shrinks when you first wash it" (54), and of course, the emerging details of Austerlitz's Jewish origins.

Such details in the first passage of the novel can be read as coincidental anticipations of the coming encounter and relationship, or, conversely, as an evidence of the strong imprint that the narrator's relationship with Austerlitz has left on the narrator, coloring his memories of a time before their encounter. In not making a clear distinction between the two possibilities, Sebald introduces two themes that get developed through the rest of the novel: coincidence as an essential element shaping one's life, and the influence narrator/narratee relationships have on one's formation as a subject.

The first time the narrator meets him in 1967, following this initial passage, Austerlitz is "occupied in making notes and sketches," and taking numerous photographs of Antwerp's Centraal Station. At this point in the narrative, we learn that the narrator has gotten possession of "the many hundreds of pictures" of Austerlitz in the winter of 1996. Many of these pictures, placed throughout the text, get similarly passed along from the narrator to the implied reader of the novel, and from Sebald to actual readers. These images play a critical role as a lynchpin

fastening together the different layers of narrator/narratee interactions taking place in the novel: they help to eradicate the distance between the account giver and receiver by providing a reference (real or imagined) through which they can mediate their account. Below, I will further discuss the role of these images in conjunction with a similar role played by the many pilgrimages both Austerlitz and the narrator make to the settings of the stories they recount.

In the first few encounters between the narrator and Austerlitz, the latter does not share anything about his private life, and their conversations turn around architectural history (*Austerlitz* 7). These conversations about railway architecture, fortifications and such introduce the main themes of the book in a somewhat impersonal, academic manner. Austerlitz, does, however, start to hint at a more personal connection to his subject matter:

> On that day, after we had left our viewing point on the promenade to stroll through the inner city, Austerlitz spoke at length about the marks of pain which, as he said he well knew, trace countless fine lines through history. In his studies of railway architecture, he said when we were sitting in a bistro in the Glove Market later that afternoon, tired from our wandering through the city, he could never quite shake off thoughts of the agony of leave-taking and the fear of foreign places, although such ideas were not part of architectural history proper. Yet, he said, it is often our mightiest projects that most obviously betray the degree of our insecurity. The construction of fortifications, for instance—and Antwerp was an outstanding example of that craft—clearly showed how we feel obliged to keep surrounding ourselves with defenses, built in successive phases as a precaution against any incursion by enemy powers, until the idea of concentric rings making their way steadily outward comes up against its natural limits. (14)

This passage, of course, will make sense in the light of what Austerlitz comes to find out about himself: as a five year old sent from his native Prague to unknown lands, he himself has felt and then pushed down to his subconscious "the agony of leave-taking and the fear of foreign places" he mentions here. The idea that the mightiest

projects often betray a degree of insecurity gets repeated soon again when he says, "[…] the largest fortifications will naturally attract the largest enemy forces, and that the more you entrench yourself, the more you must remain on the defensive" (16). This can apply equally to Austerlitz's subconscious defenses against the discovery of his origins, and to his own father's view of the history of the German people, as later recounted by his nursemaid Vera.

Austerlitz continues to talk about the sizes of different buildings and the kinds of impression they produce, and says that smaller buildings

> […] are those that offer us at least a semblance of peace, whereas no one in his right mind could truthfully say that he liked a vast edifice such as the Palace of Justice on the old Gallows Hill in Brussels. At most we gaze at it in wonder, a kind of wonder which in itself is a form of dawning horror, for 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. (17-18)

These sentiments, which get echoed in the narrator's own comments about the fortress of Breendonk, which the narrator visits shortly after the present conversation with Austerlitz, and similarly, much later, in Austerlitz's comments about the new Bibliotheque Nationale, introduce the idea of the destruction that the project of civilization brings with it. Here, the "kind of wonder which in itself is a form of dawning horror," if read in reverse, as "a form of dawning horror which in itself is a kind of wonder" is precisely that feeling of Kant's sublime, as Lyotard discusses it.

The narrator, having listened to these words by Austerlitz, comes the next day upon an article in a newspaper "about the fortress of Breendonk, from which it emerged that in 1940, when for the second time in its history the fort had to be surrendered to the Germans, it was made into a reception and penal camp which

remained in existence until August 1944, and that since 1947, preserved unchanged as far as possible, it had been a national memorial and a museum of the Belgian Resistance" (18). The narrator goes to see it that very day, and finds himself face to face with "a low-built concrete mass", of which he says, "I found myself unable to connect it with anything shaped by human civilization, or even with the silent relics of our prehistory I looked at it, the more often it forced me, as I felt, to lower my eyes, the less comprehensible it seemed to become" (20-21).

The movement of the story here follows a pattern that repeats in the rest of the novel, and for that reason, I believe is very important to the narrator/narratee relationship between the narrator and Austerlitz. Here, Austerlitz has given an account of that which instills in him an unrecountable feeling of the sublime, and in response, strengthened in his reaction by the element of coincidence, Austerlitz makes a pilgrimage to an actual site where he has a feeling of the dawning horror of the sublime himself. I argue that the pilgrimage here, to one of the settings of Austerlitz's narrative is a move not just fuelled by curiosity, but also by a sense of responsibility, the narrator having sensed the presence of an unrecountable element in Austerlitz's narrative. To return to the use of photographs in the novel, the reader faces numerous photographs and blueprints of the Breendonk castle, which produce a similar feeling. Not just recounting Austerlitz's narrative, but while doing so, inserting these pictures in his narrative is as important to the narrator's responsibility to Austerlitz as his actual visit to the sites themselves. For the reader, simply looking at the images offered and reading the account given are

akin to making a pilgrimage to the sites themselves. Whether to look and to read is enough, however, is something that is further elaborated later in the novel.

In his visit to the Breendonk, the narrator makes the few direct comments in the novel about his own Germanness. In his comment, he both identifies himself with and distances himself from the perpetrators of the crimes that took place at the fortress: "I could well imagine the sight of the good fathers and dutiful sons from Vilsbiburg and Fuhlsbuttel, from the Black Forest and the Bavarian Alps, sitting here when they came off duty to play cards or write letters to their loved ones at home. After all, I had lived among them until my twentieth year" (23). The narrator, in voluntary exile in England like Sebald himself, has a complicated relationship to his native land, at once trying to account for its crimes, and bear witness to its victims.

The narrator talks also about his present memory of Breendonk, and in doing so, brings up the idea that places and objects are the only things left to bear witness to human life when other humans cannot:

> Even now, when I try to remember them, when I look back at the crab-like plan of Breendonk and read the words of the captions […] 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. Histories, for instance, like those of the straw mattresses which lay, shadow-like, on the stacked plank beds and which had become thinner and shorter because the chaff in them disintegrated over the years, shrunken—and now, in writing this, I do remember that such an idea occurred to me at the time—as if they were the mortal frames of those who lay there in that darkness. (24)

Again in recounting his visit to Breendonk, the narrator makes reference to a book by Jean Amery that describes the tortures that have taken place there. This is a

lengthy example of ekphrasis where Sebald quotes at length from and retells the story of the book, not sparing dreadful details about the kinds of torture done to the victims of Breendonk.

On their next meeting with Austerlitz, they start again by talking about architecture, but soon Austerlitz diverges into all kinds of personal stories about the lives that have taken shape around the structures that are the subject of their discussions. The narrator notes: "I heard several such apocryphal stories from Austerlitz, anecdotes in curious contrast to his usual rigorous objectivity, not only that day, but on our later encounters" (30-31). The many apocryphal stories that Austerlitz tells and the narrator retells throughout the book serve to introduce an element of humanity into the factual world of 'rigorous objectivity'. Of course, as Austerlitz's research gets more and more personal, it is these same apocryphal stories issuing by coincidence from the various written and personally recounted narratives that play a significant role in helping him unearth his and his parents' past.

Again by chance, the narrator and Austerlitz discover that they have booked a place on the same ferry back to England, and it is only during that night crossing does the narrator learn that Austerlitz is "a lecturer at a London institute of art history" (31). They have several more encounters in London where they continue to talk about architectural history.

At this point in the novel, the narrator does not see Austerlitz for two decades, until 1996, when another chance circumstance makes them meet. The author is going through a temporary decline in eyesight, which he says, fills him

with concern, but also "with a vision of release in which I saw myself, free of the constant compulsion to read and write, sitting in a wicker chair in a garden, surrounded by a world of indistinct shapes recognizable only by their faint colors" (35-36). This compulsion to read and write is one which Austerlitz himself later comments on as serving to create a 'compensatory memory' filling in the space of those immense gaps in his past. On a trip to see the ophthalmologist in London, the narrator happens again upon Austerlitz, little changed. He says to the narrator: "Though I really gave up my architectural studies long ago, he said, I sometimes relapse into my old habits, even if I don't make notes and sketches anymore, but simply marvel at the strange edifices we construct" (41).

Austerlitz finally embarks upon his personal story, which he has discovered over the past twenty years, by saying, "he had been thinking of our encounters in Belgium, so long ago now, and telling himself he must find someone to whom he could relate his own story, a story which he had learned only in the last few years and for which he needed the kind of listener I had once been in Antwerp, Liege, and Zeebrugge" (43-44). He then starts to talk about his childhood in the Welsh countryside, in the care of a minister and his wife, growing up listening to Sunday sermons from the minister and to local lore from "Evan the cobbler, whose workshop was not far from the manse and who had a reputation for seeing ghosts" (53).

Austerlitz says about the years he spent in the Wales, "I never shook off the feeling that something very obvious, very manifest in itself was hidden from me" (54). In recounting those years, he starts to make reference to his slowly emerging

identity. He says about the children's bible he reads, "I immersed myself, forgetting all around me, in a full-page illustration showing the desert of Sinai looking just like the part of Wales where I grew up, with bare mountains crowding close together and a gray-hatched background, which I took sometimes for the sea and sometimes for the air above it […] I knew that my proper place was among the tiny figures populating the camp. I examined every square inch of the illustration, which seemed to me uncannily familiar" (55-58).

While he is limited to reading his bible in Bala, when he goes to public school, he is surrounded by many books that he can now take refuge in: "[…] it seemed as if a new door were opening whenever I turned a page. I read everything in the school library, which contained an entirely arbitrary selection of works, and everything I could borrow from my teachers" (61). These are the beginnings of his love of reading and writing. At school, Andre Hilary, the history teacher who is "familiar with every detail of the Napoleonic era," takes him under his wing and teaches him to love history. Hilary's comments on the recounting of history are noteworthy for they describe the task that anyone, including Sebald himself, faces in trying to address historical events:

> All of us, even when we think we have noted every tiny detail, resort to set pieces which have already been staged often enough by others. We try to reproduce the reality, but the harder we try, the more we find the pictures that make up the stock-in-trade of the spectacle of history forcing themselves upon us […] Our concern with history, so Hilary's thesis ran, is a concern with preformed images already imprinted on our brains, images at which we keep staring while the truth lies elsewhere, away from it all, somewhere as yet undiscovered. (71-72)

In the light of these, it is not surprising that Austerlitz, the narrator, and even Sebald the author focus so much on the apocryphal stories surrounding historical

events. In a similar vein, precisely because it is impossible to recount history without resorting to 'set pieces', one needs the aid of imagination, and by extension, fiction.

Austerlitz continues his story with his friendship with another student at school, Gerald. Austerlitz's visits to Gerald's family's estate in Wales, their walks in nature and to the various houses in the vicinity further inspire Austerlitz to study architecture history. In this section, Austerlitz, and in his turn, the narrator, make reference to obscure stories about historical figures. Gerald's sister Adela "had once told him, said Austerlitz, that the transformation of Andromeda Lodge into a kind of natural history museum had begun in 1869, when Gerald's parrot-collecting ancestor made the acquaintance of Charles Darwin, then working on his study of the Descent of Man in a rented house not far from Dolgellau. Darwin had paid frequent visits to the Fitzpatricks of Andromeda Lodge in those days, and according to family tradition he always praised the wonderful view from the house" (83-84). Such stories serve a similar function to the photographs placed in the novel, serving as reference points against which to anchor the narrative.

At some point, the narrator pays a visit to Austerlitz in his London flat. Austerlitz has spread several dozen photographs on a table, and tells the narrator about a game he plays with the photographs:

> Austerlitz told me that he sometimes sat here for hours, laying out these photographs or others from his collection the wrong way up, as if playing a game of patience, and that then, one by one, he turned them over, always with a new sense of surprise at what he saw, pushing the pictures back and forth and over each other, arranging them in an order depending on their family resemblances, or withdrawing them from the game until either there was nothing left but the gray tabletop, or he felt

> exhausted by the constant effort of thinking and remembering and had to rest on the ottoman. (119)

This game is interesting because it presents a way to introduce the element of chance in one's relationship to photographs. As Austerlitz himself later suggests about buildings and objects, one's relationship to photographs also changes through time. This game is in a way models that change and provides a way to contemplate it.

Austerlitz continues telling his story to the narrator, and describes his wanderings around London. During one of them, Austerlitz enters by mistake the Liverpool Street Station's old waiting room, closed off for construction and starts to remember images of a small boy arriving there by train, and soon realizes that it is himself. "As so often, said Austerlitz, I cannot give any precise description of the state of mind this realization induced; I felt something rending within me, and a sense of shame and sorrow, or perhaps something quite different, something inexpressible because we have no words for it, just as I had no words all those years ago when the two strangers came over to me speaking a language I did not understand" (137). This significant moment is the key that starts to unlock his suppressed past, in whose trail he soon sets out. Inevitably, the issue of memory and it recovery becomes central to Austerlitz's narrative. In a long passage on the subject, Austerlitz says:

> I realized then, he said, how little practice I had in using my memory, and conversely, how hard I must always have tried to recollect as little as possible, avoiding everything which related in any way to my unknown past. Inconceivable as it seems to me today, I knew nothing about the conquest of Europe by the Germans and the slave state they state they set up, and nothing about the persecution I had escaped, or at least, what I did know was not much more than a salesgirl in a shop, for instance, knows about the plague or cholera. As far as I was concerned the world

> ended in the late nineteenth century. I dared go no further than that, although in fact the whole history of architecture and civilization of the bourgeois age, the subject of my research, pointed in the direction of the catastrophic events already casting their shadows before them at the time. I did not read newspapers because as I now know, I feared unwelcome revelations, I turned on the radio only at certain hours of the day, I was always refining my defensive reactions, creating a kind of quarantine or immune system which, as I maintained my existence in a smaller and smaller space, protected me from anything that could be connected in any way, however distant, with my own early history. Moreover, I had constantly been preoccupied by that accumulation of knowledge which I had pursued for decades, and which served as a substitute or compensatory memory. (139-140)

Sebald seems to be making a strong statement here about the academic accumulation of knowledge which serves as "a substitute or compensatory memory," which could be interpreted also as a "false memory" blocking the way of the "unwelcome" true memories. There are other examples further in Austerlitz's narrative which support such an anti-academic reading. I will discuss these below in the order they appear in the narrative, but briefly, they have to do with limits of libraries as repositories of memories, and the limits of the new kind of library that runs counter to the needs of Sebald's "true reader".

At this point in the narrative, Austerlitz starts to have a break down and takes to wandering around London. He ventures into an antiquarian bookshop where he hears part of a radio program about *kindertransport*. Recognizing this story as his own, he decides to visit the State Archives in Prague and look for any traces of his past. He is very lucky, and manages to find his parents' last address. Soon, he is in his old neighborhood, and in his parents' old apartment building meets Vera, his old nursery maid and close friend of his parents. He says, "Vera led me through the dark hall into a room where everything was just as it had been almost sixty years ago […] Throughout my entire life, which was now unraveling

headlong before me, all this had stayed in the same place because as Vera told me, said Austerlitz, once she had lost me and my mother, who was almost a sister to her, she could not bear to alter anything" (153). The well-preserved space evokes in Austerlitz the sense that spaces retain memories of events that humans cannot. As he listens to Vera talking about his early years, he starts getting images in his mind, which, "ranged themselves side by side, so that deeply buried and locked away within me as they had been, they now came luminously back to my mind as I looked out the window" (156). These passages also introduce the idea of reading as a source of comfort for Austerlitz: "I saw Vera as she had been then, sitting beside me on the divan telling me stories from the Riesenbirge and the Bohemian forest" or "Later, I now remembered, while she sat in the next room over her books I liked to lie awake for a while, safe as I knew myself to be in the care of my solicitous guardian and the pale glow of the circle of light where she sat reading" (157).

Vera starts to tell Austerlitz about his mother and father, and the coming of the Germans, which overshadows all the years of Austerlitz's early childhood. In one uncanny passage about his father Maximilan's account of his visit to Austria and Germany in the 1930s,Vera says, "Maximilan told us that a bird's-eye view showed a city of white tents extending to the horizon, from which as day broke the Germans emerged singly, in couples, or in small groups, forming a silent procession and pressing ever closer together as they all went in the same direction, following, so it seemed, some higher bidding, on their way to the Promised Land at last after long years in the wilderness" (169). This image of the white tents extending to the

horizon, eerily recalls the full-page illustration showing the desert of Sinai in his Welsh children's bible (56-57).

Austerlitz learns from Vera about the Germans occupation of Prague and the restrictions placed on the Jewish population, which ensnares his own mother. His father escapes to Paris, hoping to be soon joined by his wife and son. Fearing more and more for their security, Austerlitz's mother decides to send him away with *kindertransport* to England, hoping to escape afterwards, find his husband and reunite with his son. But, as Austerlitz finds out from Vera, Agata gets taken away to the Theresienstadt concentration camp.

When Vera comes to the end of her tale, she produces two photographs. Austerlitz says, "She had found them by chance the previous evening inside one of the fifty-five carmine-red volumes of Balzac which she had happened to pick up, she did not know why" (181). One of them shows two people on the stage of a provincial theater, and the other is Austerlitz himself as a five year old. Austerlitz cannot remember himself in the picture, and he wonders if the two figures in the other photograph are his parents, which Vera explains are not. Vera's comments, however, on that photograph introduce the idea of photographs standing witness to human events and having a memory of their own:

> Minutes went by, said Austerlitz, in which I too thought I saw the cloud of snow crashing into the valley, before I heard Vera again, speaking of the mysterious quality peculiar to such photographs when they surface from oblivion. One has the impression, she said, of something stirring in them, as if one caught small sighs of despair, *gemissements de desespoir* was her expression, said Austerlitz, as if the pictures had a memory of their own and remembered us, remembered the roles that we, the survivors, and those no longer among us had played in our former lives. (183)

Shortly after this, Austerlitz decides to go to Teresienstadt, now known as Terezin. There, he comes across an antique store with many objects and bric-a-bracs in the window. Contemplating these bibelots depicting rivers, squirrels and figures on horses, he says

> What, I asked myself, said Austerlitz, might be the significance of the river never rising from any source, never flowing out into any sea but always back into itself, what was the meaning of *veverka*, the squirrel forever perched in the same position, or of the ivory-colored porcelain group of a hero on horseback turning to look back, as his steed rears up on its hindquarters, in order to rise up with his outstretched left arm in an innocent girl already bereft of her last hope, and to save her from a cruel fate not revealed to the observer? They were all as timeless as that moment of rescue, perpetuated by forever just occurring, these ornaments, utensils, and mementoes stranded in the Terezin bazaar, objects that for reasons one could never know had outlived their former owners and survived the process of destruction, so that I could now see my own faint shadow image barely perceptible among them. (197)

This passage about the bibelots echoes Vera's observation about photographs having a memory of their own and remembering those documented in them. The sentiment, in fact, gets echoed again at a few more critical points in the narrative. One of these comes in a narrative digression about his ex-lover Marie, whom he recalls visiting Marienbad with in the past. As Austerlitz and Vera talk, Austerlitz realizes that he has in fact been to Marienbad as a child, and that the vague memories of that trip were what made him so uncomfortable in his second trip with Marie. During that trip, as the two of them walk on the streets of Marienbad, he cannot explain "how it even seemed to me as if the silent facades of the buildings knew something ominous about me" (216).

The second instance when the idea of objects and places having memories and standing witness comes during the rail journey he makes from Prague to the Hook of Holland from where he had sailed to England as a child. When he stops in

Pilsen, he has a vague memory of a cast-iron column at the train station there. He says

> What made me queasy at the sight of it, however, was not the question of whether the complex form of the capital, now covered with a puce-tinted encrustation, had really impressed itself on my mind when I passed through Pilsen with the children's transport in the summer of 1939, but the idea, ridiculous in itself, that this cast-iron column, which with its scaly surface seemed almost to approach the nature of a living being, might remember me and was, if I may so put it, said Austerlitz, a witness to what I could no longer recollect for myself. (221)

Back in London, Austerlitz has another nervous breakdown: "reason was powerless against the sense of rejection and annihilation which I had always suppressed, and which was now breaking through the walls of its confinement" (228). In trying to recover, he takes up a light horticulture job at a nursery garden. While working as an assistant gardener, he starts to read through an eight-hundred page book, published in 1955, "on the subject of the setting up, development, and internal organization of the Theresienstadt ghetto" (233). He continues, "Reading this book, which line by line gave me insight into matters I could never have imagined when I myself visited the fortified town, almost entirely ignorant as I was at that time, was a painstaking business because of my poor knowledge of German" (233). Reading the next 6 or so pages from this point on is very difficult for the reader as we directly confront, through Sebald's use of ekphrasis, the operations of the concentration camp. At the end of this book, the author mentions a brief propaganda film shot at the camp, which Austerlitz finally tracks down, in hope of finding a trace of his mother. He slows down and watches the film over and over again to maybe catch a glimpse of his mother:

> In the end the impossibility of seeing anything more closely in those pictures, which seemed to dissolve even as they appeared, said Austerlitz,

> gave me the idea of having a slow-motion copy of this fragment from Theresienstadt made, one which would last a whole hour, and indeed once the scant document was extended to four times its original length, it did reveal previously hidden objects and people, creating, by default as it were, a different sort of film altogether, which I have since watched over and over again. (246-247)

However, his mother is actually not in the film. His search for a visual documentation of his mother ends when he finds her photograph in the Prague theatrical archives, which Vera then verifies.

Austerlitz then sets on his father's trail in Paris. The rest of the book consists essentially of Austerlitz's travails in Paris in trying to search for a trace of his father in various agencies, archives and libraries. Austerlitz's account of his searches are also the most important part of *Austerlitz*, in terms of the richness of commentary on archives, libraries and changes in reading practices. I believe these constitute the essence of Sebald's thoughts on the ethics of reading.

In Paris, the officials at the many agencies Austerlitz visits are markedly unhelpful. At a loss for exactly where to search, Austerlitz decides to escape to the Bibliotheque Nationale, the memory of which is still strong in his mind:

> As for myself, Austerlitz continued his story after a long pause, during my first stay in Paris, and indeed later in my life as well, I tried not to let anything distract me from my studies. In the week I went daily to the Bibliotheque Nationale in the rue Richelieu, and usually remained in my place until evening, in silent solidarity with the many other immersed in their intellectual labors, losing myself in the small print of the footnotes to the works I was reading, in the books I found mentioned in those notes, then in the footnotes to those books in their own turn, and so escaping from factual, scholarly accounts to the strangest of details, in a kind of continual regression expressed in the form of my own marginal remarks and glosses, which increasingly diverged into the most varied and impenetrable ramifications. (260)

However, the old library of his memories has been closed, and the new one, he finds severely short of his liking and needs:

> The old library in the rue Richelieu has been closed, as I saw for myself not long ago, said Austerlitz, the domed hall with its green porcelain lampshades which cast such a soothing, pleasant light is deserted, the books have been taken off the shelves, and the readers, who once sat at the desks numbered with little enamel plates, in close contact with their neighbors and silent harmony with those who had gone before them, might have vanished from the face of the earth. I do not think, said Austerlitz, that many of the old readers go out to the new library on the quai François Mauriac. In order to reach the Grande Bibliothèque you have to travel through a desolate no-man's-land in one of those robot-driven Metro trains steered by a ghostly voice, or alternatively you have to catch a bus in the place Valhubert and then walk along the wind-swept riverbank towards the hideous, outsize building, the monumental dimensions of which were evidently inspired by the late President's wish to perpetuate his memory whilst, perhaps because it had to serve this purpose, it was so conceived that it is, as I realized on my first visit, said Austerlitz, both in its outer appearance and inner constitution unwelcoming if not inimical to human beings, and runs counter, on principle, one might say, to the requirements of any true reader. (275-276)

At this point, he talks about the pines that have been removed from a forest nearby and installed in a courtyard in the middle of the library building, and about the birds that lose their way and crash against the building, falling lifeless to the ground. These, to him, are signs of a system that while attempting perfection and total control, tends inevitably towards its own destruction:

> Sitting at my place in the reading room, said Austerlitz, I thought at length about the way in which such unforeseen accidents, the fall of a single creature to its death when diverted from its natural path, or the recurrent symptoms of paralysis affecting the electronic data retrieval system, related to the Cartesian overall plan of the Bibliotheque Nationale, and I came to the conclusion that in any project we design and develop, the size and the degree of complexity of the information and control systems inscribed in it are the crucial factors, so that the all-embracing and absolute perfection of the concept can in practice coincide, indeed ultimately must coincide, with its chronic dysfunction and constitutional instability. (281)

These words echo Austerlitz's first few comments in the book, when he talks about "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" (18). He seems

to be saying here that the principle that runs counter to the "needs of a true reader" is the same principle that in striving for a totalizing, inhuman perfection actually sows the seeds of destruction. Because of the way in which the prior passages in the book are echoed here in the way Austerlitz talks about the library, we can infer that his comments on the new library runs means much more than a mere critique of the relative comforts or conveniences of the space, or simply, an indication of personal preference. After all, for Austerlitz, spaces form and reflect the people who occupy them.

Still on his father's trail, Austerlitz attempts another search in this new library about his father. However, there is nothing to be found there:

> At any rate, as far as I myself was concerned, a man who, after all, had devoted almost the whole of his life to the study of books and who had been equally at home in the Bodleian, the British Museum, and the rue Richelieu, I for my part, said Austerlitz, found that this gigantic new library, which according to one of the loathsome phrases now current is supposed to serve as the treasure house of our entire literary heritage, proved useless in my search for any traces of my father who had disappeared from Paris more than fifty years ago. (281-282)

At this point, coincidence again gets him further on his trail. He starts to read Balzac at the library, and the following ensues: "I was in the reading room again and, on opening an American architectural journal—this was exactly at six in the evening—I came upon a large-format photograph showing the room filled with open shelves up to the ceiling where the files on the prisoners in the little fortress of Terezin, as it is called, are kept today" (283). He realizes that he should have gone to the records room in Terezin in the first place. Before he embarks on another journey, he happens upon Lemoine, an old librarian who recognizes him

from the old days. Their conversation follows up on Austerlitz's prior comments about the new library

> […] we began a long, whispered conversation in the *Haute-de-jardin* reading room, which was gradually emptying now, about the dissolution, in line with the inexorable spread of processed data, *l'effrondement*, as Lemoine put it, of the Bibliotheque Nationale which is already under way. The new library building, which in both its entire layout and its near-ludicrous internal regulations seeks to exclude the reader as a potential enemy, might be described, so Lemoine thought, said Austerlitz, as the official manifestation of the increasingly importunate urge to break with everything which still has some living connection to the past. (286)

Lemoine proceeds to tell Austerlitz about the depot for items collected from the Jews, which literally lies underneath the library, called Les Galeries d'Austerlitz. The comparison here between the collection of items from deported Jews of Paris, among whom was probably Austerlitz's father, and the collection of books in the library is inevitable. Both collections are as sealed from the public as possible, and disturbingly dead to present memory as one another. Sebald seems to imply, through this critical exchange between Austerlitz and Lemoine, that collections should be public and shared, and open to being reintegrated into life.

Austerlitz finally gets news from the records center in Paris, where he had previously made an application to no avail, and learns that his father "had been interned during the latter part of 1942 in the camp at Gurs, a place in the Pyrenean foothills which he, Austerlitz, must now seek out" (290). Before he leaves for Gurs, Austerlitz gives his keys to his flat in London to the narrator. This is the last time we encounter him directly in the narrative.

On his way back from London to Paris, the narrator decides to go once again, after thirty years, to Breendonk. In this way, he is retracing the steps of his old pilgrimage, post-Austerlitz, his reading of the fortress having been changed by the

thirty years of being a listener of Austerlitz's story. At Breendonk, he is accompanied by a book Austerlitz had given him on their first meeting in Paris. The narrator says, "It was by Dan Jacobson (a colleague of his, although unknown to him all these years, Austerlitz had said), and it described the author's search for his grandfather Rabbi Yisrael Yehoshua Melamed, known as Heshel" (296). This Dan Jacobson's grandfather had emigrated to South Africa, sparing his family destruction. Jacobson talks in the book about some forts in Lithuania that echo the story of all the forts the narrator and Austerlitz have been talking about. These forts also change hands and eventually get turned into Wehrmacht command posts.

The novel ends thus: "Sitting by the moat of the fortress of Breendonk, I read to the end of the fifteenth chapter of *Heshel's Kingdom*, and then set out on my way back to Mechelen, reaching the town as evening began to fall" (298). The changes we witness in the narrator's reading of this work reflect those of Austerlitz, between the time the latter was studying, visiting and documenting fortresses for the purpose of studying architectural history, and the time when he became concerned with uncovering his own history. Of course, the reader's view of Breendonk has similarly changed from the beginning of the book, through, first of all, the narrator's narrative, which itself has been a distillation, interpretation and recounting of Austerlitz's narrative, and also possibly through the acts of research and extra-reading instigated by *Austerlitz*, the book. This is one of the instances in the novel where the collapse of several layers of reading into one becomes evident. *Heschel's Kingdom*, it seems, is what suggests finally to the narrator that he himself must also tell the story of Austerlitz.

To finally go back to the question of how to read ethically, let us review what the narrator does with Austerlitz's story. He is a careful listener who first and foremost stands witness to the story being told. He notes, documents, and collects the pieces of the story as they slowly unravel, never expecting a completeness that Austerlitz cannot provide. He seems to be the kind of "other", envisioned by Butler, for Austerlitz's account of himself, one that allows for silences when Austerlitz cannot articulate. What is important, though, is that he does not stop there. He reads the materials Austerlitz suggests, studies the photographs that Austerlitz entrusts him with, and pays pilgrimage to the sites that evoke some of the same feelings Austerlitz tries but sometimes fails to describe. Another important point is that he opens himself up to coincidence and accepts its role in his interactions with Austerlitz.

To take a step back from the narrator of *Austerlitz* to its author Sebald, Sebald himself has listened to the stories of many "others", taken notes, documented, collected, revisited, and finally added a part of himself to create a fictional piece that gives an account of and bears witness to Germany's crimes in the Second World War. For neither the author, nor his fictional narrator, listening sufficed.

If we follow Sebald's example, then, we, as readers, are to also talk and, if possible, write about events taking place around us, listen to the many 'apocryphal' and personal stories related to these events, recount them, and where we cannot describe events or stories directly, find a way to construct the narrative in such a way as to make our own listeners and readers imagine that which our protagonists

cannot themselves narrate, and have to be silent about. While doing these, it is important that we do not fear personal investment and closeness. In the final count, *Austerlitz* suggests that retelling others' stories through whatever means possible is our ethical obligation as readers.

CHAPTER 4
2666

In contrast to W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* with its dominant reading-writing relationship between the book's narrator and Jacques Austerlitz, Roberto Bolaño's *2666* presents the reader with what feels like a whole universe of reading-writing relationships. In it, there are not just readers and writers, but ghostwriters, failed writers, literary critics, academicians, journalists and publishers. In this manner, we can say that on the surface, *2666* seems to looks less for one "true reader," as was the case in *Austerlitz*, but more for various possibilities of reading ethically in the age of globalization. I defend below, though, that at the end, all of these various possibilities still converge into what seems to be like an argument for an ethics of reading that in the final count is very similar to that of Sebald's.

In my analysis in this chapter, I specifically focus on a few of the key readers and reading practices found in it. Because there are so many instances of reading and writing in *2666*, it is impossible to do justice to all of them within the scope such a short space as I have here. I have therefore decided to select what I deem to be the most central instances. In examining any narrator/narratee or writer/reader relationship in the novel, I again make use of Butler's analysis and terminology of the 'scene of address'. I find a central contrast in the novel between the critics and their reading practices, and Archimboldi the writer and his reading practice. There are many instances where Bolaño holds out the possibility of simply reading without producing anything in return, or reading analytically and producing criticism. It also seems, at first, as if he were making a case for the difficulty and ultimate futility of trying to write. On closer look, though, it becomes

apparent that the only way to read ethically for Bolaño, is to read for an eye towards retelling, which in his case, mostly (but not always) involves writing.

2666, published in 2004 in Spanish, and in 2008 in Natasha Wimmer's English translation is Roberto Bolaño's final, incomplete novel. Bolaño died shortly after submitting his first draft to his publisher. This draft consists of five loosely related parts the last one of which is incomplete and at the center of which are the real, unsolved murders of women in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico (named Santa Teresa in the novel), and the story of one elusive German writer, Benno von Archimboldi, whose literary critics attempt unsuccessfully to track him down in Mexico. The five parts of the novel are: "The Part About the Critics", "The Part About Amalfitano", "The Part About Fate", "The Part About the Crimes", and "The Part About Archimboldi". The first part is about the relationships and careers of four literary critics who have dedicated themselves to the works of Benno von Archimboldi. The second part focuses on Oscar Amalfitano, a professor of philosophy at the University of Santa Teresa, whose mental stability disintegrates as the narrative progresses. The third part is about Oscar Fate, an African-American journalist who finds himself on assignment to cover a boxing match in Santa Teresa, and becomes interested in covering the murders. The fourth part is a long installation of short sections, each depicting what is known about the murder of one woman. These sections slowly build up the narrative of the futile attempts of the police to solve the crimes, and at the end, one prime suspect, a German American by the name of Klaus Haas emerges as an enigmatic figure. The last part of the novel reveals the true identity of Benno von Archimboldi. He is Hans Reiter, a German soldier whose

experiences during the Second World War on the Eastern Front compel him to start writing.

Below, I examine the novel in a number of main rubrics. I have generally tried to stay true to its sequence of its development, but given the scope and size of the novel, it would be impossible to build my argument while following the full trajectory of the narrative, as I attempted to do in the previous chapter. In my analysis, I have two specific focuses: the relationship between the critics and Archimboldi; the relationship between Archimboldi and Ansky, the vanished writer of the hidden notes that Archimboldi finds in the hearth of a Ukrainian village house. I will also touch upon the general outline of Bolaño's treatment of the stories of the murdered women in Mexico.

The Part About the Critics traces the developments of the careers and the personal relationships of four literary critics of Archimboldi's works: Jean-Claude Pelletier, a Frenchman; Piero Morini, an Italian; Manuel Espinoza, a Spaniard; and Liz Norton, an English woman. These four come to discover Archimboldi and embark upon their careers in different manners. Here, I will focus on Pelletier and Espinoza's discoveries, as Bolaño's descriptions of these start to divulge his views on criticism in general. This, of course, gets developed through the rest of this first part, and gets taken up again in the last part of the novel.

Bolaño says about Pelletier's discovery:

> Pelletier could think back on the day when he first read Archimboldi, and he saw himself, young and poor, living in a chambre de bonne, sharing the sink where he washed his face and brushed his teeth with fifteen other people who lived in the same dark garret, shitting in a horrible and notably unhygienic bathroom that was more like a latrine or cesspit, also shared with the fifteen residents of the garret, some of whom had already

> returned to the provinces, their respective university degrees in hand, or had moved to slightly more comfortable places in Paris itself, or were still there—just a few of them—vegetating or slowly dying of revulsion. He saw himself, as we've said, ascetic and hunched over his German dictionaries in the weak light of a single bulb, thin and dogged, as if he were pure will made flesh, bone, and muscle without an ounce of fat, fanatical and bent on success. A rather ordinary picture of a student in the capital, but it worked on him like a drug, a drug that brought him to tears, a drug that (as one sentimental Dutch poet of the nineteenth century had it) opened the floodgates of emotion, as well as the floodgates of something that at first blush resembled self-pity but wasn't (what was it, then? rage? very likely), and made him turn over and over in his mind, not in words but in painful images, the period of his youthful apprenticeship, and after a perhaps pointless long night he was forced to two conclusions: first, that his life as he had lived it so far was over; second, that a brilliant career was opening up before him, and that to maintain its glow he had to persist in his determination, in sole testament to that garret. This seemed easy enough. (4-5)

Pelletier is sentimental, fueled by less by love than self-aggrandizing pity, and hell-bent on success. Bolaño underlines the determination of not just Pelletier, but the rest of the critics, as well. A few pages on, he says, "Besides Archimboldi, there was one thing Morini, Pelletier, and Espinoza had in common. All three had iron wills" (8). Literature, then, is a way for them to seek recognition and escape an anonymous life.

The description of Espinoza's path puts a life in criticism in stark contrast to a life dedicated to writing: "Manuel Espinoza came to Archimboldi by a different route. Younger than Morini and Pelletier, Espinoza studied Spanish literature, not German literature, at least for the first two years of his university career, among other sad reasons because he dreamed of being a writer" (6). Later, Bolaño continues

> […] Espinoza discovered two things that helped him mightily in the early days: he would never be a fiction writer, and, in his own way, he was brave. He also discovered that he was bitter and full of resentment, that he oozed resentment, and that he might easily kill someone, anyone, if it

> would provide a respite from the loneliness and rain and cold of Madrid, but this was a discovery that he preferred to conceal. Instead he concentrated on his realization that he would never be a writer and on making everything he possibly could out of his newly unearthed bravery. (7-8)

These aren't exactly kind words about how one comes to be a literary critic. Like Pelletier, Espinoza is also full of bitterness and resentment, and turns to a career in literature to rescue himself from a life of failure.

The four critics meet one another over the course of a few conferences and cement their friendship based on similar approaches to Archimboldi's works. They represent one of the two main, warring camps on Archimboldi. As their relationships with one another grow more and more complicated and sexual in nature, so does their desire to actually hunt down the ever elusive Archimboldi. In one conference, a Swabian they meet recounts to them his not terribly impressive tale of encountering Archimboldi during a regional author reading a long while ago. Despite being unimpressive, the tale is the only thing they can go on to in their efforts to track Archimboldi down. When they finally visit his publisher, Mrs. Bubis, the wife of the deceased original publisher, takes them to her house and starts telling them about the writer. To their dismay, though, the she has no photographs of the man. Instead, she tells a few obscure anecdotes and then shares "a very odd review that had appeared in a Berlin newspaper after the publication of *Lüdicke*, Archimboldi's first novel" (27). The passage is worth quoting in its entirety as it constitutes one of a long series of attacks by Bolaño on the practice of criticism:

> The review, by someone named Schleiermacher, tried to sum up the novelist's personality in a few words.
> Intelligence: average.
> Character: epileptic.
> Scholarship: sloppy.

> Storytelling ability: chaotic.
> Prosody: chaotic.
> German usage: chaotic.
> Average intelligence and sloppy scholarship are easy to understand. What did he mean by epileptic character, though? that Archimboldi had epilepsy? that he wasn't right in the head? that he suffered attacks of a mysterious nature? that he was a compulsive reader of Dostoevsky?
> There was no physical description of the writer in the piece. (27-28)

Bolaño contrasts this sort of categoristic yet vague criticism against what he terms "ultraconcrete criticism" in the novel (54). I will examine this shortly, but the point is that neither forms of criticism come out looking better. It's important to try to understand where exactly Bolaño situates his critique, and it seems to have to do with the fact that what literary critics want (at least the four critics in *2666* want) is the sort of personal connection which they fail to arrive at. In a very cynical paragraph concluding the visit to Mrs. Bubis's house, we find:

> In a word, and bluntly: as they walked around Sankt Pauli, it came to Pelletier and Espinoza that the search for Archimboldi could never fill their lives. They could read him, they could study him, they could pick him apart, but they couldn't laugh or be sad with him, partly because Archimboldi was always far away, partly because the deeper they went into his work, the more it devoured its explorers. In a word: in Sankt Pauli and later at Mrs. Bubis's house, hung with photographs of the late Mr. Bubis and his writers, Pelletier and Espinoza understood that what they wanted to make was love, not war. (29)

As the critics fail in their mission to track down Archimboldi, and have a direct personal relationship with him, they turn to each other. The three male critics all become lovers of Liz Norton, and the rest of part one also chronicles the rises and falls of their relationships.

To go back to the issue of criticism, at a conference, they meet a Serbian critic, who

> published a strange article in the journal overseen by Pelletier, an article reminiscent in a certain sense of the minuscule findings on the Marquis de Sade published many years ago by a French critic, which comprised

> the facsimile reproduction of loose papers testifying vaguely to the Marquis's visit to a laundry, an aide-memoire of his relations with a certain theater impresario, a doctor's bill complete with medicines prescribed, an order for a doublet specifying buttonwork and color, etc., all of it accompanied by lengthy notes from which only a single conclusion could be drawn: Sade had existed, Sade had washed his clothes and bought new clothes and maintained a correspondence with beings now definitively wiped from the slate of time. The Serb's text was very similar. In this case, the person traced was Archimboldi, not Sade, and the article consisted of a painstaking and often frustrating investigation that began in Germany, continued through France, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, returned to Italy, and ended at a travel agency in Palermo, where it seemed Archimboldi had bought a plane ticket to Morocco. An old man, a German, said the Serbian. The words old man and German he waved like magic wands to uncover a secret, and at the same time they supplied the stamp of ultraconcrete critical literature, a nonspeculative literature free of ideas, assertions, denials, doubts, free of any intent to serve as guide, neither pro nor con, just an eye seeking out the tangible elements, not judging them but simply displaying them coldly, archaeology of the facsimile, and, by the same token, of the photocopier. (54)

Our four critics are taken aback by this article, although initially they concede for a role of such criticism, the writing of which is "like the lowest of menial tasks" (54). Eventually, though, they are "forced to recognize flaws in the Serb's approach. There had to be research, literary criticism, interpretive essays, even informational pamphlets if required, but not this hybrid between science fiction and half-finished roman noir, said Espinoza, and Pelletier was in complete agreement" (57). What is ironic, of course, is that they themselves are on the exact same path that comes across in the Serbian critic's ultraconcrete criticism. A certain while later, they learn at a seminar, from a minor Mexican writer that he met Archimboldi in Mexico. The critics listen to the account of their meeting, and are convinced. They decide to again try to track down Archimboldi, this time in Mexico. Bolaño's description of their excitement and decision process is quite sarcastic:

> They decided not to tell anyone else what they knew. By keeping quiet, they reasoned, they weren't betraying anyone, merely behaving with prudence and discretion, as the case merited. They soon convinced themselves that it was best not to raise false hopes. According to Borchmeyer, Archimboldi had come up again as a possible Nobel candidate this year […] Imagine, said Pelletier, Archimboldi wins the Nobel and at that very moment we appear, leading him by the hand. […] At first Norton was least eager to go tracking him down. The image of them returning to Europe with Archimboldi by the hand seemed to her the image of a gang of kidnappers. Of course, no one planned to kidnap Archimboldi. Or even barrage him with questions. Espinoza would be satisfied just to see him. Pelletier would be satisfied if he could ask him whose skin the leather mask was made of in his homonymous novel. Morini would be satisfied if he could see the pictures they took of him in Sonora. (104-106)

Bolaño seems to be saying here that what our critics want to achieve is precisely that which they find problematic in the Serbian critic's article: simply a sense that Archimboldi exists. This is further underlined when they actually go to Mexico and meet a few people who they hope will get them on the right trail. One of these, Oscar Amalfitano (who is the central character of the next part of the novel) questions them about their motives:

> […] Amalfitano learned that no one had ever seen Archimboldi in person. The story struck him as amusing, though he couldn't say exactly why, and he asked why they wanted to find him when it was clear Archimboldi didn't want to be seen. Because we're studying his work, said the critics. Because he's dying and it isn't right that the greatest German writer of the twentieth century should die without being offered the chance to speak to the readers who know his novels best. Because, they said, we want to convince him to come back to Europe. (118)

The critics themselves cannot articulate exactly why they feel this need to find Archimboldi and merely see him in person. They don't know what they need of him. Bolaño, though, has already given us our answer in the prior passages I have referred to above: that they need a sense of human connection, which somehow they are unable to get through the mere act of reading. One has to ask if this has to

do with the manner in which they read or don't read, and what they do with the material they have read.

We can first have a closer look at exactly how they read Archimboldi, and then what they do with it. The simpler answer would be that first they read for enjoyment (as in Bolaño's descriptions of their very first encounters with Archimboldi), then they read critically and finally write articles about it. However, Bolaño doesn't make direct commentary of this kind of process of reading. Instead, his descriptions of what happens when this process breaks down is telling. Pelletier has come to Mexico with only a few books by Archimboldi, and intends to work on a new article. As the story progresses, though, we see him reading in a different manner. We learn of what he is reading daily through his encounters at the hotel with Espinoza. The first day:

> When he got to the hotel, Pelletier was on the terrace reading Archimboldi. Espinoza asked him what book it was and Pelletier smiled and answered that it was Saint Thomas.
> "How many times have you read it?" asked Espinoza.
> "I've lost count, although this is one of the ones I've read least."
> Just like me, thought Espinoza, just like me. (142)

The next day:

> When Espinoza got back to the hotel he found Pelletier reading Archimboldi. Seen from the distance, Pelletier's face, and in fact not just his face but his whole body, radiated an enviable calm. When he got a little closer he saw that the book wasn't Saint Thomas but rather The Blind Woman, and he asked Pelletier whether he'd had the patience to reread the other book from start to finish. Pelletier looked up at him and didn't answer. He said instead that it was surprising, or that it would never cease to surprise him, the way Archimboldi depicted pain and shame.
> "Delicately," said Espinoza.
> "That's right," said Pelletier. "Delicately." (143)

The following day:

> At the hotel, stretched out on a deck chair beside the empty pool, Pelletier was reading, and Espinoza knew, even before he saw the title, that it wasn't Saint Thomas or The Blind Woman, but another book by

> Archimboldi. When he sat down next to Pelletier he could see it was Lethaea, not one of his favorites, although to judge by Pelletier's face, the rereading was fruitful and thoroughly enjoyable. When he sat down in the next deck chair he asked Pelletier what he'd done all day.
> "I read," answered Pelletier, who in turn asked him the same question. (145)

The following day:

> When he returned to the hotel Pelletier was reading Saint Thomas again. when he sat down beside him Pelletier looked up from the book and said there were still things he didn't understand and probably never would. Espinoza laughed and said nothing. (147)

And finally:

> At the hotel, when he got back, Pelletier was always on the terrace or at the pool or sprawled in an armchair in one of the lounges, rereading Saint Thomas or The Blind Woman or Lethaea, which were, it seemed, the only books by Archimboldi he'd brought with him to Mexico. Espinoza asked whether he was preparing some article or essay on those three books in particular and Pelletier's answer was vague. At first he had been. Not anymore. He was reading them just because they were the ones he had. Espinoza considered lending him one of his, and all at once he realized with alarm that he'd forgotten all about the books by Archimboldi hidden away in his suitcase. (149-150)

It is precisely when the process of reading critically and producing articles breaks down that we get a sense of what Bolaño seems to find problematic with that process. I will argue that he deems this process unproductive and unfulfilling in some measure, such that the emptiness that the critics feel needs to be filled in some other manner, namely through the futile attempt to find Archimboldi in person.

Towards the end of the chapter, Liz Norton has flown back to England, and only the three men remain in Mexico. They are sitting together when they finally have the realization that they will not get what they want from this trip.

> Sitting on the brick wall, Pelletier said:
> "We aren't going to find Archimboldi."
> "I've known that for days," said Espinoza.
> Then he leaped and leaped again until he was sitting on the wall, his legs dangling down toward the tennis court.
> "And yet," said Pelletier, "I'm sure Archimboldi is here, in Santa Teresa."

> […] "Believe me," said Pelletier in a very soft voice, like the breeze that was blowing just then, suffusing everything with the scent of flowers, "I know Archimboldi is here."
> "Where?" asked Espinoza.
> "Somewhere, either in Santa Teresa or else nearby."
> "So why haven't we found him?" asked Espinoza.
> […] "That doesn't matter. Because we've been clumsy or because Archimboldi is extraordinarily good at self-concealment. It means nothing. The important thing is something else entirely."
> "What?" asked Espinoza.
> "That he's here," said Pelletier, and he motioned toward the sauna, the hotel, the court, the fence, the dry brush that could be glimpsed in the distance, on the unlit hotel grounds. The hair rose on the back of Espinoza's neck. The cement box where the sauna was looked like a bunker holding a corpse.
> "I believe you," he said, and he really did believe what his friend was saying."
> "Archimboldi is here," said Pelletier, "and we're here, and this is the closest we'll ever be to him." (158-159)

This passage again underlines the fact that all the critics have been looking for is a sense of connection to the actual human behind the books that have become a part of their lives. The irony, of course, is that Espinoza has actually seen the writer in an empty bar a short while before this passage, but failed to recognize him because "[h]e looked like a farmer or a rancher on a visit to the city" (139). Bolaño does not give a clear answer in this part of the book as to what they could do to actually fill this emptiness in a meaningful way. For that, we have to turn to part five of the book.

"The Part About Archimboldi," the last part of the novel traces the career of Benno von Archimboldi, whose real name is Hans Reiter. Hans Reiter starts out as a seemingly simple-minded but verocious reader who has an encounter during his time as a soldier in the Second World War that acts as a catalyst that gets him to start writing. Below, in order to find an answer to the question Bolaño has set up in

the first part of the book through the critics, I will examine the trajectory Reiter/Archimboldi goes through as a writer.

Hans Reiter's first book is a stolen book called "Animals and Plants of the European Coastal Region" (640). As a young child, he reads it obsessively again and again, and interprets his existence through it. This book is so precious to him that many years later, he goes off to the Eastern Front with only this book in his bag (669). Before the war, though, he has a series of unsuccessful jobs before he is finally "put to work at the country house of a Prussian baron," where one of his duties is to dust the books in the huge librar of the baron: "And Hans Reiter, who had never in his life seen so many books all together, dusted them one by one and handled them with care, but didn't read them either, partly because he was satisfied with his book of marine life and partly because he feared the sudden appearance of the baron" (652). Things change when the baron's nephew, Hugo Halder, comes to the library. The two of them become friends, and soon Reiter starts to help Halder steal volumes upon volumes from the baron's library. Halder is "the first to get Hans to read something other than Animals and Plants of the European Coastal Region" (656). The first book Reiter picks is a medieval epic, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*:

> When Halder saw him with it he smiled and told him he wouldn't understand it, but he also said he wasn't surprised he had chosen that book and none other, because in fact, he said, though he might never understand it, it was the perfect book for him, just as Wolfram von Eschenbach was the author in whom he would find the clearest resemblance to himself or his inner being or what he aspired to be, and, regrettably, never would become, though he might come this close, said Halder, holding his thumb and index finger a fraction of an inch apart. (658)

But Halder is wrong (as it later turns out, in more than one respect):

> Hans read Parzival from beginning to end, sometimes aloud, out in the fields or on his way along the path home from work, and not only did he understand it, he liked it. And what he liked most, what made him cry and roll laughing in the grass, was that Parzival sometimes rode (my hereditary office is the shield) wearing his madman's garb under his suit of armor. (659)

Reiter continues to read volumes from the library until in 1939 he gets drafted. Despite having read many other books at this point, he still has his *Animals and Plants of the European Coastal Region* with him, and reads it in the many different places he travels through as a soldier. On a beach in Normandy, for example, "he chose a rock well out of sight, and after swimming and diving naked for hours, he would stretch out on his rock and eat and drink and reread his book *Animals and Plants of the European Coastal Region*" (676).

Reiter eventually ends up in Ukraine, and gets stationed in one village where something significant happens that will eventually compel him to start writing. He takes up residence in one of the empty farmhouses in the village. He has a suspicion at this point about the fact that the former residents of the village might have been Jewish, but he doesn't know for a fact until, "In a big chest he found a number of books, most in Russian, but some, to his surprise, in German. Since he knew that many Eastern European Jews spoke German, he guessed that the house had in fact belonged to a Jew" (706). After spending some time in the house, one day, he finds out, by chance a hiding place behind the kitchen hearth, and in it, "the papers of Boris Abramovich Ansky," which "[s]ometimes, in the afternoons, he got into the hiding place, armed only with Boris Ansky's papers and a candle, and he sat there until well into the night, until his joints were stiff and his limbs frozen, reading, reading" (708).

A long, extended section of part five is dedicated to the ekphrasis of Ansky's papers. We find out that Ansky

> was born in 1909, in Kostekino, in the same house that Reiter the soldier now occupied. His parents were Jews, like almost all the villagers, and they made a living selling shirts, which his father bought wholesale in Dnepropetrovsk and sometimes in Odessa and then resold in the neighboring villages. (708)

As a young man, Ansky moves to Moscow and starts to participate in cultural and political activities. Around this time

> he met Efraim Ivanov, the science fiction writer, at a literary cafe, the best literary cafe in Moscow, or rather on the terrace of the cafe, where Ivanov drank vodka at a table off to one side, under the branches of a giant oak that stretched up to the third floor of the building, and they became friends, in part because Ivanov was interested in Ansky's outlandish ideas and in part because Ansky displayed, at least at the time, unqualified and unreserved admiration for Ivanov's science writing, as Ivanov liked to call it, rejecting the official and popular label of fantasy writer. (710)

Ivanov is essentially a party writer, who, after laboring fruitlessly for many years, becomes successful with a science fiction tale called "The Train Through the Urals", whose "reception was overwhelming". The narrator's comments about the indicent are not kind:

> The first to be surprised, it must be said, was the writer himself. The second was the editor, who had read the story pencil in hand and didn't think much of it. Letters arrived at the magazine's offices asking for more contributions from Ivanov, that "unknown," that "promising voice," "a writer who believes in tomorrow," "a writer who inspires faith in the future we're fighting for," and the letters came from Moscow and Petro-grad, but also from combatants and political activists in the farthest corners of the country who identified with the grandfather character, which kept the magazine editor up at night, since he, a dialectical and methodical and materialist and in no way dogmatic Marxist, a Marxist who as a good Marxist hadn't studied only Marx but also Hegel and Feuerbach (and even Kant) and who laughed heartily when he reread Lichtenberg and had read Montaigne and Pascal and was relatively familiar with the writings of Fourier, couldn't believe that of all the good things (or, to be fair, the few good things) the magazine had published, it was this story, cloyingly sentimental and with no scientific basis, that had

> most moved the citizens of the land of the Soviets. Something is wrong, he thought. (712)

Unfortunately for Ivanov, who keeps writing successful story after successful story based on the same formula, his stories grow old, and he starts to fall out of favor with the public.

> By the time Ansky met Ivanov, the latter was no longer a sales success and his novels and stories, which many considered precious or insufferable, no longer aroused the enthusiasm they had in earlier days. But Ivanov kept writing and he kept being published and he kept bringing in money each month for his arcadian visions. He was still a party member. He belonged to the Association of Revolutionary Writers. His name figured on the official lists of Soviet creators. On the surface he was a happy man, a bachelor with a big, comfortable room in a house in a nice Moscow neighborhood, a man who slept every so often with prostitutes who were no longer young and with whom he ended up singing and weeping, a man who ate at least four times a week at the writers' and poets' restaurant. Inside, however, Ivanov felt that something was missing. The decisive step, the bold stroke. The moment at which the larva, with a reckless smile, turns into a butterfly. Then came the young Jew Ansky and his peculiar ideas, his Siberian visions, his forays into cursed lands, the plenitude of wild experience that only a young man of eighteen can possess. (713)

Upon Ansky's offer, Ivanov and Ansky make a deal, and in exchange for a steady stream of stories and books shadow written for Ivanov by Ansky, Ansky gets introduced to some of the comforts of life as a party writer. The first book Ansky writes and Ivanov publishes under his own name is widely acclaimed, and even gets Ivanov a letter of praise from Gorky. Of course, Ivanov's conscience isn't entirely clear despite his success, and he has fears:

> Ivanov's fear was of a literary nature. That is, it was the fear that afflicts most citizens who, one fine (or dark) day, choose to make the practice of writing, and especially the practice of fiction writing, an integral part of their lives. Fear of being no good. Also fear of being overlooked. But above all, fear of being no good. Fear that one's efforts and striving will come to nothing. Fear of the step that leaves no trace. Fear of the forces of chance and nature that wipe away shallow prints. Fear of dining alone and unnoticed. Fear of going unrecognized. Fear of failure and making a spectacle of oneself. But above all, fear of being no good. Fear of forever

> dwelling in the hell of bad writers. Irrational fears, thought Ansky, especially when the fearful soothed their fears with semblances. As if the paradise of good writers, according to bad writers, were inhabited by semblances. As if the worth (or excellence) of a work were based on semblances. Semblances that varied, of course, from one era and country to another, but that always remained just that, semblances, things that only seem and never are, things all surface and no depth, pure gesture, and even the gesture muddled by an effort of will, the hair and eyes and lips of Tolstoy and the versts traveled on horseback by Tolstoy and the women deflowered by Tolstoy in a tapestry burned by the fire of seeming. (722-723)

This sort of fear gets echoed again later when Reiter himself first starts to write. Before moving onto that, though, let us conclude the section on Ansky. Ansky writes two more novels for Ivanov, Ivanov falls out of favor with the party, gets arrested and finally killed. After Ivanov's death, "Ansky's notes grow chaotic, apparently haphazard, although amid the chaos Reiter divined a structure and a kind of order" (728). It is in this part of Ansky's notebook that Reiter first reads about

> the Italian painter Arcimboldo, Giuseppe or Joseph or Josepho or Josephus Arcimboldo or Arcimboldi or Arcimboldus (1527-1593). When I'm sad or bored, writes Ansky, although it's hard to imagine Ansky bored, busy fleeing twenty-four hours a day, I think about Giuseppe Arcimboldo and the sadness and tedium vanish as if on a spring morning, by a swamp, morning's imperceptible advance clearing away the mists that rise from the shores, the reed beds. (729)

Interspersed with his jottings about literature and art are Ansky's coded descriptions of his flight from Moscow. Ansky eventually returns to his village Kostekino. His last notes are brief and

> Around this time Hitler invades Poland and World War II begins. Warsaw falls, Paris falls, the Soviet Union is attacked. Only in chaos are we conceivable. One night Ansky dreams the sky is a great ocean of blood. On the last page of his notebook he sketches a map to join the guerrillas. (736)

Reiter's division soon moves on from the village, and Reiter takes the notes with him, reading and rereading them until he has memorized them word by word. One

day, implausibly, Reiter finds himself back in Kostekino. After a while of staying at the now completely deserted village (the Germans are gone), he decides that he should desert and leave Kostekino right away. "Before he left the farmhouse he returned Ansky's notebook carefully to the chimney hiding place. Let someone else find it now, he thought. Then he opened the door, closed it with care, and left the village with great strides" (744). This is the ending of the section about Ansky. Reiter keeps thinking about Ansky's words, but there is yet no indication that he feels in any way compelled to write. For that, the end of the war will have to come. When the Americans come, Reiter gets put in an American camp for German soldiers. It is in this camp that Reiter kills a person, for the first and last time, having been through the whole war without killing anyone at all. After that incident, he takes to hiding from the Americans and stars to spend his time reading, and writing. The reason the narrator seems to give for Reiter's writing seems deceptively simple:

> During the day he wrote and read. Writing was easy, because all he needed was a notebook and a pencil. Reading was a little harder, because the public libraries were still closed and at the few bookshops one could find (most of them mobile) the prices were exorbitant. Even so, Reiter read and he wasn't the only one: sometimes he looked up from his book and everyone around him was reading too. As if all the Germans cared about was reading and food, which wasn't true but sometimes seemed to be, especially in Cologne. (768)

On the other hand, though, many small details about Reiter's writing, which slowly surface in the rest of this part of the book indicate something different. I argue that they indicate a sense of responsibility towards Ansky, who has been the main person that Reiter has been in a reader/writer relationship. If Ansky has been silent, first through his own arrangement with Ivanov, and then later literally

silences by death, then Reiter seems to feel the responsibility of writing to be able to speak for Ansky—not directly, but indirectly through transferring into his stories some of what he has picked up from Ansky's notes and his life story. We get a better sense of this sense of responsibility as we read on in the text.

After meeting Ingeborg, his future wife, and starting to live with her, Reiter settles into a writing routine, and after a while finishes his first novel, *Lüdicke*. It is during his search for someone who could rent a typewriter that he meets a man that will try to give him advice on writing which echoes some of Ansky's observations about Ivanov's fears. Himself fearing being tracked down by the authorities for the crime he has committed, Reiter makes up a new name for himself on the spot: Benno von Archimboldi, which is of course inspired by Ansky's favorite painter. The old man from whom Reiter/Archimboldi rents the typewriter says that he himself used to be a writer, but that he gave it up. He says that if one isn't going to write a masterpiece, one might as well not write: "[…] one day I understood that I might go so far as to publish excellent articles in magazines and newspapers, and even books that weren't unworthy of the paper on which they were printed. But I also understood that I would never manage to create anything like a masterpiece" (785). He then says of the writer of a minor work:

> There's nothing inside the man who sits there writing. Nothing of himself, I mean. How much better off the poor man would be if he devoted himself to reading. Reading is pleasure and happiness to be alive or sadness to be alive and above all it's knowledge and questions. Writing, meanwhile, is almost always empty. There's nothing in the guts of the man who sits there writing. Nothing, I mean to say, that his wife, at a given moment, might recognize. He writes like someone taking dictation. His novel or book of poems, decent, adequate, arises not from an exercise of style or will, as the poor unfortunate believes, but as the result of an exercise of concealment. […] Every work that isn't a masterpiece is, in a sense, a part

> of a vast camouflage. You've been a soldier, I imagine, and you know what I mean. Every book that isn't a masterpiece is cannon fodder, a slogging foot soldier, a piece to be sacrificed, since in multiple ways it mimics the design of the masterpiece. When I came to this realization, I gave up writing. (783-786)

He continues on to finally declare: "The day came when I decided to give up literature. I gave it up. This was in no way traumatic but rather liberating. Between you and me, I'll confess that it was like losing my virginity. What a relief to give up literature, to give up writing and simply read!" (783-790) One should stop to consider whether this actually constitutes an argument on Bolaño's part for giving up writing altogether unless one is going to produce a masterpiece. I would argue the contrary, given Bolaño's take on terms such as "masterpiece" or "fame" or "success". In fact, shortly after this encounter in the story, Archimboldi shops around a number of publishing houses and keeps getting rejected until he finally receives a letter from one Mr. Jacob Bubis, who tells him he wants to publish Archimboldi's first novel. Archimboldi is ecstatic, and accepts the offer. This is the first time he realizes that he might one day achieve fame:

> Until that moment Archimboldi had never thought about fame. Hitler was famous. Goring was famous. The people he loved or remembered fondly weren't famous, they just satisfied certain needs. Doblin was his consolation. Ansky was his strength. Ingeborg was his joy. The disappeared Hugo Halder was lightheartedness and fun. His sister, about whom he had no news, was his own innocence. Of course, they were other things too. Sometimes they were even everything all together, but not fame, which was rooted in delusion and lies, if not ambition. Also, fame was reductive. Everything that ended in fame and everything that issued from fame was inevitably diminished. Fame's message was unadorned. Fame and literature were irreconcilable enemies. (803)

If fame and literature are irreconcilable enemies, so probably are what are deemed "masterpieces" and literature. In that case, we can treat the prior passage about the typewriter man as implying the exact opposite view: that it is worthwhile to write

regardless of whether the end product will be deemed a minor work or a masterpiece, camouflage/cannon fodder or the real soldier.

After the encounter with the typewriter man, Archimboldi starts to write frentically, and shortly after the publication of his first novel, finishes a second one, *The Endless Rose*. The narrator says the following about the development of Archimboldi's writing process and how he himself perceives his writing:

> Archimboldi's writing, the process of creation or the daily routine in which this process peacefully unfolded, gathered strength and something that for lack of a better word might be called confidence. This "confidence" didn't signify the end of doubt, of course, much less that the writer believed his work had some value, because Archimboldi had a view of literature (though the word view is too grand) as something divided into three compartments, each connected only tenuously to the others: in the first were the books he read and reread and considered magnificent and sometimes monstrous, like the fiction of Doblin, who was still one of his favorite authors, or Kafka's complete works. In the second compartment were the books of the epigones and authors he called the Horde, whom he essentially saw as his enemies. In the third compartment were his own books and his plans for future books, which he saw as a game and also a business, a game insofar as he derived pleasure from writing, a pleasure similar to that of the detective on the heels of the killer, and a business insofar as the publication of his books helped to augment, however modestly, his doorman's pay. (817)

This sort of approach to writing is, of course, almost diametrically opposed to all of the opinions we have encountered in the text so far about writing, and I would say indicates a more honest statement by Bolaño.

Following this, archimboldi's story unfolds, and more books get written and published. Archimboldi disappears on the European continent after his wife dies on a trip they take to Italy. Ever elusive, Archimboldi keeps sending a steady stream of new work to his publishing house.

At some point, the narrator turns to the story of Archimboldi/Reiter's sister, Lotte, who is living a quiet, middle-class life. One day Lotte gets a phonecall from

Mexico, and finds out that her son, Klaus Haas, from whom she hasn't heard in a long time, is in prison. Klaus Haas, of course, is the main convict in the case of the murdered women, and he has gotten extensive treatment in the fourt part of the book. Lotte starts to visit his son in prison. On one of her trips to Mexico, she by chance picks up one of her brother's books, *The King of the Forest*:

> The book, no more than one hundred and fifty pages long, was about a one-legged father and a one-eyed mother and their two children, a boy who liked to swim and a girl who followed her brother to the cliffs. As the plane crossed the Atlantic, Lotte realized in astonishment that she was reading a part of her childhood. (887)

Upon returning to Germany, Lotte tracks his brother down, and in a brief encounter, Archimboldi learns about his nephew in jail. The story breaks off literally incomplete right after Archimboldi sets off on his journey to Mexico.

So, what is one to make of the futile attempts of the four critics to track Archimboldi down, feeling dissatisfied with merely their academic work on him, in contrast with Archimboldi's own struggle to do justice to the memory of Ansky, and expand Ansky's stories as best as he can. Similarly, what is one then to make of Roberto Bolaño's attempt to patch together the numerous stories of the killed women, doing the best he can with what one can glean from police and media reports? I would say Archimboldi's attempt to do justice to Ansky is exactly mirrored by Bolaño's own attempt to do justice to these women.

Through the treatment of the critics and Archimboldi, Bolaño seems to come down strongly on the side of not merely reading, even if it is easier, but also retelling and if possible writing. Neither is it enough to read thoroughly and obsessively with the goal of producing a critical piece of writing. Bolaño clearly shows this to be an insufficient way to interact with the text. In the final count, the

best seems to be to do what Archimboldi does with Ansky's manuscript: to read, to absorb as completely as possible, but then to put it aside and do justice to it by incorporating it in some way in your own storytelling or writing. At the end, despite the differences in treatment, Bolaño's argument for an ethical way to read turns out to be the same as that of Sebald.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

I set out in this thesis to investigate how one can read ethically in the present context of globalization. As a possible source for an answer, I first turn to Damrosch and Moretti, two frequently referred to theoreticians of world literature. While they do address the question of "how to read" in the age of globalization, their answers are designed to provide more of a practical, academic roadmap for scholars of world literature than an ethics of reading for a non-specialist reader. Therefore, I take up two suggestions by Darnton for discovering the contemporary history and a possible ethics of reading from contemporary world literature.

In my investigation, I approach globalization as the globalization of Lyotard's postmodernity, and I follow Butler's theoretical model for the formation of the contemporary ethical subject. I apply Butler's 'scene of exchange,' in which the subject gives his or her account to an 'other,' to the exchanges that take place between a writer and a reader, or a narrator and a narratee. Within this theoretical framework, I analyze Sebald's *Austerlitz* and Bolaño's *2666*, two novels that provide a counterbalance between a central narrator/narratee relationship and a multiple of literary relationships.

In the two novels I have examined here, I see an argument for an ethical reading practice This practice calls at the least for retelling the stories one encounters through reading and listening. That many of the central characters of both *Austerlitz* and *2666* also write makes an additional argument for writing, when possible, like Sebald and Bolaño themselves have chosen to, in order to

transmit these stories to those "others" geographically and temporally removed from us. Nevertheless, the most important component of a reading practice seems to be retelling with the addition of one's own stories. Both writers also seem to defend a dedicated amateurism in the face of an impersonal professionalism.

The argument I find in these works does not obliterate the need for a culturally informed approach to literature from around the world or a sensible way to tackle—academically or otherwise—the vast number of literary works already in and still entering circulation. The insights and approaches of the theoreticians of world literature remain as crucial as ever; without them, we would indeed risk becoming the literary ecotourists of Susan Lanser.

What I suggest here, though, is a much more basic, but, in my opinion, fundamental answer to the question of "how to read". If globalization can shorten physical distances, it can also further entrench those opacities within and between us. To accept their existence as a constitutive part of each person, as Butler proposes, is the first step we can take to counter the problem of ethical violence that inheres in each scene of address, each account give and take between two people. To allow in others a certain opacity, a certain unrecountability is only the first step, however. In order to counteract the impersonality that globalization brings into our lives and our selves as subjects, it is imperative that we become readers (and listeners) who retell the stories of the "others" we encounter deliberately or through chance, adding to these a part of our own stories, and accepting fiction as an essential part of the act of recounting. If we can write some of these down, all the better.

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