



## Telegrams of the Soul: Selected Prose

*Peter Altenberg , Peter Wortsman (Translator)*

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“If it be permitted to speak of ‘love at first syllable,’ then that’s what I experienced in my first encounter with this poet of prose.” So wrote Thomas Mann of the work of Peter Altenberg. A virtuoso Fin de Siecle Viennese innovator of what he called the “telegram style” of writing, Altenberg’s signature short prose straddles the line between the lyrical and the narrative, fiction and observation, harsh verity and whimsical vignette. Inspired by the prose poems of Charles Baudelaire, the tales of Hans Christian Andersen and the Viennese Feuilleton, a light journalistic reflection current in his day, Altenberg carved out a spare, strikingly modern aesthetic that speaks with an eerie prescience to our own impatient time. Peter Wortsman’s new selection and translation reads like a sly lyrical wink from the turn-of-the-century of the telegram to the turn-of-the-millennium of e-mail.

**Peter Altenberg**, also known as Richard Engländer, 1859–1919, was born into a well-to-do Viennese Jewish family, lived in hotels and listed as his official address the Café Central, Vienna’s intellectual clubhouse (also the sometime haunt of Leon Trotsky and his chess partner Vladimir Ilyich Lenin). A renowned eccentric, Altenberg pioneered the very notion of loose-fitting leisure attire, designed a line of necklaces and favored sandals, walking sticks, slivovitz and the company of prostitutes. His literary admirers included Karl Kraus, Heinrich and Thomas Mann, Robert Musil and Arthur Schnitzler.

Recipient of the Beard’s Fund Short Story Award, **Peter Wortsman** is the author of *A Modern Way To Die: Small Stories and Microtales* and the play *The Tattooed Man Tells All*. His translations from the German include *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author* by Robert Musil and *Peter Schlemiel: The Man Who Sold His Shadow* by Adelbert von Chamisso.

### Telegrams of the Soul: Selected Prose Details


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## From Reader Review Telegrams of the Soul: Selected Prose for online ebook

### Eddie Watkins says

Well this guy's a real charmer and character. Supposedly inspired by Baudelaire's Paris Spleen, but in temperament more like Henri Rousseau (similarly "innocent" but much more wily, and like Rousseau his imagination was stoked by exotica envisioned from deep within an urban comfort zone). Altenberg also has a plein aire feeling. Reading this book of sketches and flights of fancy and feuilletons one can easily see him ensconced in his cafe (with his celebrated walrus mustache) watching what's before him while dashing off piece after piece. He championed a life of bohemian leisure, attired himself in very loose fitting clothing (which I think he designed himself) and open-toed sandals, and passed his days as an endearing public eccentric sipping coffee and ogling lovely adolescent girlies. He had a very good run in artsy free-spirited fin de siecle Vienna and into the early 20th c., but apparently ended his days in a mental hospital.

For some reason the translator of these pieces felt the need to champion Altenberg at the expense of Schnitzler & Hofmannsthal (calling them dowdy and dated). I would agree that Altenberg reads like more of 21st c. author than Schnitzler and Hofmannsthal, perhaps because his writing style is so spontaneous and resolutely present-tense, but all three of these writers are applicable to readers of today for different reasons.

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### Aveugle Vogel says

"spayed goat horn handle"

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### Kobe Bryant says

Sounds like he had a cool life

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### AC says

<http://books.google.com/books?id=ovii...>

This is not the whole book - but gives a flavor of it - interesting -- a bit like Seinfeld's Uncle Leo -- was ist so nur...?

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### Elazar says

How wonderfully refreshing! A delightful collection of short prose poems written more than 100 years ago. Highly recommended. I hope that more of his books will be translated. Otherwise I may need to learn reading in German...

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### **Ttonistown says**

Altenberg is one of my new favorite authors. Although his prose is over 100 years old, his pieces remain relevant. Absolutely loved this book!

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### **Lauren Albert says**

This book was a tremendous disappointment. I'd long looked forward to reading this as I had heard wonderful things about this Austrian eccentric. His fans included such great writers as Thomas Mann and Robert Musil. There were some gems but an awful lot of tedious pieces as well. Most of his work has never been translated into English. I wonder if the problem is either a poor translation or a poor selection from his writings. As always, I've put passages from it on my Notes page. 4/09

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