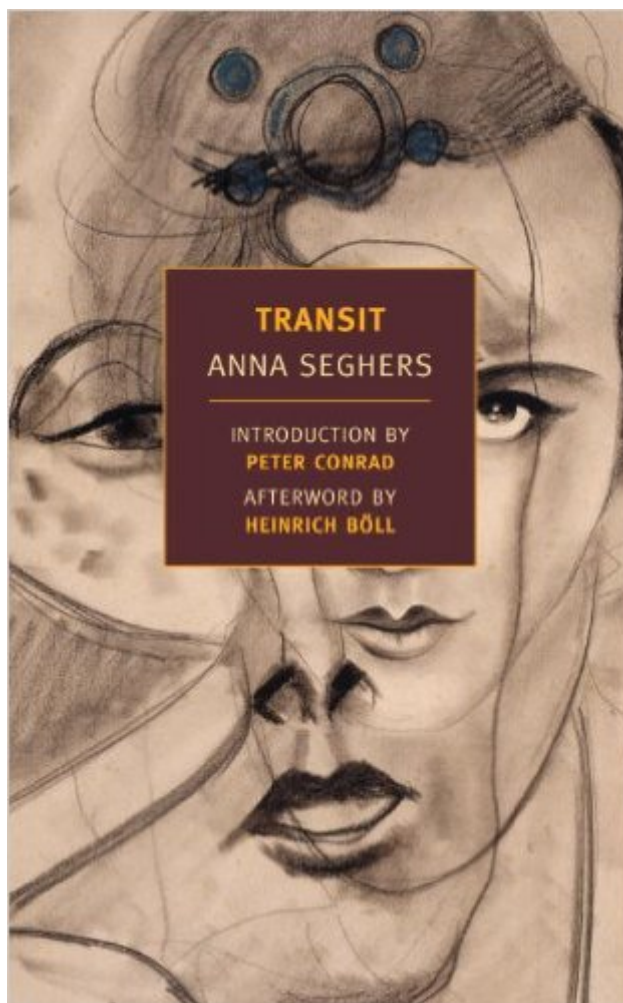


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Transit (New York Review Books Classics)



Synopsis

Anna Seghers's *Transit* is an existential, political, literary thriller that explores the agonies of boredom, the vitality of storytelling, and the plight of the exile with extraordinary compassion and insight. Having escaped from a Nazi concentration camp in Germany in 1937, and later a camp in Rouen, the nameless twenty-seven-year-old German narrator of Seghers's multilayered masterpiece ends up in the dusty seaport of Marseille. Along the way he is asked to deliver a letter to a man named Weidel in Paris and discovers Weidel has committed suicide, leaving behind a suitcase containing letters and the manuscript of a novel. As he makes his way to Marseille to find Weidel's widow, the narrator assumes the identity of a refugee named Seidler, though the authorities think he is really Weidel. There in the giant waiting room of Marseille, the narrator converses with the refugees, listening to their stories over pizza and wine, while also gradually piecing together the story of Weidel, whose manuscript has shattered the narrator's deadly boredom, bringing him to a deeper awareness of the transitory world the refugees inhabit as they wait and wait for that most precious of possessions: transit papers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

From the first paragraph it puts you inside the mind of a man--the narrator--who is fleeing the Nazi advance into France in 1939. He gets to Marseille, where he has to decide whether he wants to try to leave on one of the last ships. Marseille is claustrophobic. It offers only boredom, muted terror, and the frenetic but likely senseless activity of convincing bureaucrats to issue visas and tickets to

leave. We wait with the narrator in one dismal café or other where the mistral blows endlessly outside and you can't get a drink unless it's an "alcohol day." Like Humphrey Bogart's character in Casablanca, the narrator is in love with a woman married to another man, but Marseille is no Hollywood movie set. Thoughts and feelings become unstable, then warp under the strain. The decision to leave Europe behind forever is not easy. A family where all except the grandmother have been granted visas refuse to leave even though the grandmother is certain to die within a few months and then all the others will all be interned. Marie, with whom the narrator has fallen in love, hesitates again and again because she refuses to accept that her husband the novelist Weidel is dead. The narrator too is confused. He says he doesn't want to leave, then puts all his energy and cunning into trying to get a transit visa. We know little about the nameless narrator. He escaped first from a German concentration camp and then from a French work camp, but he does not seem ideological or especially political. He seems to be an ordinary person who just hates Nazis: "their murderous commands and objectionable insistence on obedience, their disgusting boasts."

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