Like the rings of Saturn, the history of the world entire travels in wide, repeating circles and is made up of infinite personal histories, the majority of which are lost and seldom recovered. To this end, the past is simultaneously recordable and impossible to track, the future both predictable and impossible to foresee. Once we realize our own insignificance, how small a fragment of the rings we represent, we can begin to understand the immensity of the world – all it is, has been, and still stands to be – and also the vast inescapable multitude of our ignorance. In W.G. Sebald’s 1995 The Rings of Saturn, the author and narrator both seem concerned, if not obsessed, with the temporal nature of human beings. Both Sebald’s style and content reflect themes of death and decay. The Rings of Saturn — with its curious archive of photographs — records a walking tour along the east coast of England. A few of the things which cross the path and mind of its narrator (who both is and is not Sebald) are lonely eccentrics, Sir Thomas Browne’s skull, a matchstick model of the Temple of Jerusalem, recession-hit seaside towns, wooded hills, Joseph Conrad, Re...