

\$9.95

DALTON TRUMBO **NIGHT of the AUROCHS**

When Dalton Trumbo's *Johnny Got His Gun* was first published, in 1939, it was hailed as one of the greatest antiwar novels ever written. It is the story of a young man hideously and irrevocably maimed in combat. What is unique about Johnny's story, however, is not simply its handling of the age-old "war is hell" theme: *Johnny Got His Gun* is the quintessential exploration of the victim of war, a man destroyed in a struggle not of his own making.

Trumbo was not content to let his concern with the ravages of war end with Johnny's story. In 1960 he began to explore the other side of the issue: What kind of man would allow other men to suffer for his own beliefs? Trumbo had for many years been deeply troubled by the implications of the Holocaust. He found it almost impossible to reconcile within himself the notion that human beings could wantonly, almost casually, destroy millions of other human beings. Trumbo's new venture, therefore, was to be the story of a Nazi named Grieben, whose destiny it would be to become a commandant at Auschwitz. Grieben would be a true believer in the Nazi cause, wholly unrepentant, even in his old age. His story, to be told in the first person, and to be called *Night of the Aurochs*, would be the story of the oppressor.

"The thing I am after here, the devil I am trying to catch, is that dark yearning for power that lurks in all of us, the perversion of love that is the inevitable consequence of power, the exquisite pleasures of perversion when power becomes absolute," wrote Trumbo. He sought that devil

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for sixteen years. When he died, in 1976, with only ten chapters completed, his search had ultimately taken him inside himself. In the end Grieben was almost inseparable from him.

Although the story was barely one-third complete at Trumbo's death, he left behind voluminous notes and drafts. It was left to Robert Kirsch, whose literary acumen had been amply demonstrated in his own writings, to assemble them into a whole. Though the words are all Trumbo's, it is a testament to Mr. Kirsch's herculean labors and finely tuned editorial skills that the pages gathered herein are every bit as compelling as the finished novel would have been.

Night of the Aurochs is in many respects Trumbo's most ambitious and greatest work. It is at once the story of an unreconstructed Nazi and the story of a writer trying to come to grips with his character. It is a story about the power of eroticism and the eroticism of power. And, in the end, it is the mapping out of that corner of the soul that most of us would prefer to leave hidden. *Night of the Aurochs*, like its brother, *Johnny Got His Gun*, will surely stand as a contemporary masterpiece.

ROBERT KIRSCH has written thirteen novels, including the best-selling *In the Wrong Rain*, *Madeleine Austrian*, *The Wars of Pardon*, and *Casino*. He is literary critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, and his reviews have appeared in many newspapers both here and abroad. He also teaches creative writing at the University of California.



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