Introduction

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Thomas Bernhard, one of the most significant post-war European writers, continues to fascinate. Although viewed in Austria as an *enfant terrible* during his own lifetime, increasingly Bernhard seems to have been subjected to what the novelist Alexander Schimmelbusch terms a 'Mozartisierung',[1] as is evident from the compendia of Bernhard quotations suitable to be given as presents, detailing, for example, his most acerbic insults in a collection called *Bernhard für Boshafte* / *Bernhard for the Vicious* (2014), his views on marriage in *Die Ehehölle* / *Marital Hell* (2008), or his vilifications of various European cities in *Städtebeschimpfungen* / *City Insults* (2016).[2] Other ways to sweeten Bernhard's bitter ironies include the glossy photobooks and memoirs which promise to shed light on 'the real Thomas Bernhard'. The thirtieth anniversary of Bernhard's death in 2019, and what would have been his ninetieth birthday in 2021, have led to additional media exposure and renewed attention. Against this background, this volume presents new approaches to Bernhard's works themselves. Arguably, the best way to resist Bernhard's official rehabilitation, embalming and *Musealisierung* (conservation) is to engage once again with the primary texts, and to debate why they are so subversive, troubling and compelling.

Language, history and subjectivity are key elements of Bernhard's creative project. This volume, emerging from an online conference in 2020 co-hosted by the Universities of Glasgow and Aberdeen, offers new readings of Bernhard's works via these three interconnected strands. Bernhard's writings invite unconventional responses on at least three levels, characterized as they are by: an innovative and inimitable (although much imitated) use of *language*, an unrelenting attention to Austrian *history* and contemporary politics, and an intensely psychological depiction of human *subjectivity*. The chapters in this volume address interconnections between these aspects, exploring Bernhard's creative linguistic interventions into Austrian culture; his theatrical and performative verve; and his response to the traumatic historical legacy which continues to shape Austrian subjectivities long after 1945. Bernhard's works are characterized by a tension between pessimism and resilience, arguably recalling

[1] Alexander Schimmelbusch, *Die Murau Identität* (Berlin: Metrolit, 2014), p. 81.
[2] Thomas Bernhard, *Bernhard für Boshafte*, ed. by Raimund Fellinger (Berlin: Insel, 2014); *Die Ehehölle: Acht Szenen*, ed. by Raimund Fellinger (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2008); *Städtebeschimpfungen*, ed. by Raimund Fellinger (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2008).

Antonio Gramsci: 'my mind is pessimistic, but my will is optimistic.'[3] Recent publications have set Bernhard in the context of his life and times, e.g. Manfred Mittermayer's biography of Bernhard (2015)[4] and Bernhard's brother Peter Fabjan's memoir (2021).[5] The *Bernhard-Handbuch* (2018), edited by Martin Huber and Manfred Mittermayer, offers a synthetic overview of Bernhard's texts, situating them in their wider contexts.[6] The collected volume *Bernhard's Afterlives* (2020) situates Bernhard in the context of his global reception.[7] All of these will remain standard works. Bearing these contexts in mind, this volume engages in debate with Bernhard's works themselves and their unique articulations of linguistic subjectivity.

Language and Poetics

Bernhard became renowned during his lifetime for his incomparable use of language. His style is dominated by a performative as well as polemic rhetoric, which could just as readily be directed towards weighty subjects such as Austrian history and politics, as well as ostensibly more frivolous matters, such as – in the case of an infamous diatribe in *Auslöschung* / *Extinction* – lever-arch files. He revelled in the German language and the possibilities for neologisms and creative insults it offered, allowing the narrator of his last novel, for example, to dismiss Thomas Mann as having written 'eine lächerliche Büroliteratur' / 'a ridiculous bureaucratic literature' (*W* 9: 474), and to categorize Goethe as 'den philosophischen Daumenlutscher der Deutschen' / 'the Germans' philosophical thumb-sucker' (*W* 9: 450). However, Bernhard's insults were by no means limited to German-language culture, as Adrien Bessire traces in his chapter. He argues that Bernhard's insults are not gratuitous, and that using self-irony, Bernhard criticizes the Austrians, and himself as an Austrian, a critique that in turn resonates far beyond Austria's borders, as Bessire analyses using the example of France.

In his chapter, Rüdiger Görner discusses the interplay of 'art' and 'artificiality' in Bernhard's works, particularly through the author's use of syntax, which, as Görner highlights, is never simply an aesthetic concern for Bernhard. Susanne Lorenz, meanwhile, examines Thomas

[3] Antonio Gramsci, letter of 19 December 1929, in Gramsci, *Letters from Prison*, selected and translated by Lynn Lawner (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 159.
[4] Manfred Mittermayer, *Thomas Bernhard. Eine Biographie* (Vienna: Residenz, 2015).
[5] Peter Fabjan, *Ein Leben an der Seite von Thomas Bernhard – Ein Rapport* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2021).
[6] Martin Huber and Manfred Mittermayer (eds.), *Bernhard-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2018).
[7] Stephen D. Dowden, Gregor Thuswaldner, Olaf Berwald (eds.), *Thomas Bernhard's Afterlives* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2020).

Bernhard's language critique as it is expressed in his prose writing. Lorenz diagnoses 'a flight from language into language', whereby Bernhard uses linguistic excess to beat language 'at its own game'. Frequently, in Bernhard's works, we find a figure, often the narrator, who is in thrall to the thoughts and ideas of another more dominant character (*Frost* offers one example of such a constellation). In his chapter, Daniel Steuer reads Bernhard's *Gehen* / *Walking* (1971) in debate with the speech act theory of J. L. Austin and Stanley Cavell as a form of writing which puts the accent on the ethical relationship between self and other.

Byron Spring, in his chapter, examines how Bernhard's 'voice of exaggerated malcontent reappears in a reflected form across three examples of his self-writing'. Focusing on *Meine Preise* / *My Prizes* (*posthum*., 2009), *Ein Kind* / *A Child* (1982) and *Wittgensteins Neffe. Eine Freundschaft* / *Wittgensteins Nephew: A Friendship* (1982), Spring argues that, in these works, Bernhard reframes his authorial persona 'to reveal instances of human fallibility and self-awareness'. In her chapter, Anita Tuta similarly focuses on Bernhard's authorial persona, as presented in television interviews *Drei Tage* / *Three Days* (1970) and *Monologe auf Mallorca* / *Monologues on Mallorca* (1981). Tuta shows Bernhard's conscious staging of himself in relation to the media.

Undoubtedly, Bernhard loved to polemicize and to provoke his readership. The predominance of male protagonists in his works, and the misogyny often voiced by his narrators, has meant that Bernhard has remained a troubling figure for female and feminist readers.[8] Frequently, we are presented with the trope of the woman of petty-bourgeois origins, marrying the patriarch of a vast Austrian estate (see *Ungenach* and *Auslöschung*) and proceeding to 'destroy' everything that it stands for. It should be noted that any prelapsarian point of origin in Bernhard's family narratives is unmasked as illusory but, nevertheless, the blame for the familial downfall is often placed with the woman. Ritchie Robertson, in his chapter, recalls Bernhard's indebtedness to Schopenhauer in *Frost* (1963) – Schopenhauer also being known for his misogynistic diatribes. In her contribution, Elizabeth Boa reads Bernhard's 1984 'comedy' *Alte Meister / Old Masters* from the perspective of a woman reader today. Boa presents *Alte Meister* as 'a cartoon depicting male-dominated, elite culture and sentimental male bonding', and shows how the depiction of Reger's wife reveals not marital love but coercive control, which she reads as 'an oblique authorial confession of engrained misogyny'. In her chapter, Beate Sommerfeld reads the same text through the lens of 'subversive mimicry',

[8] Ria Endres' scholarship was pioneering in this respect. See Endres, *Am Ende angekommen: dargestellt am wahnhaften Dunkel der Männerporträts des Thomas Bernhard* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1980).

with regard to the ambivalent relationship that *Alte Meister* unfolds with the medium of language. The first part of her analysis analyses the relationship between language and image, while the second highlights the subversive strategies towards language developed in Bernhard's 'comedy'.

History

History and politics are a central concern in texts by Bernhard, and in productions of Bernhard's plays. Bernhard's texts frequently addressed matters of Austria's insufficient reckoning with its Nazi legacy – most notably, but by no means limited to, the case of *Heldenplatz* / *Heroes Square* (1988). Bernhard's attention to repressed pasts in the Austrian context has also resonated with readers living beyond the borders of Austria, and accounts for the popularity of his works in, especially, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Latin America.[9] In the opening chapter, Manfred Mittermayer traces the reception of Bernhard in Romance countries, by the Hungarian Nobel Prize winner Imre Kertész, and by the US writers Louis Begley, Susan Sontag and Walter Abish. For the latter writer, born into an Austrian-Jewish family, Bernhard represented a better Austria, a 'nicht-nationalsozialistisches Österreich' (an Austria that was not National-Socialist).

While Bernhard did not shy away from insulting the greats of German-language literature, he also allied himself with an Austrian modernist tradition (Kafka, Musil and Broch make it onto the concise reading list that Murau recommends to his pupil Gambetti in *Auslöschung*), as well as with the literature of other nations, which contributes in no small part to Bernhard's transnational appeal. In her chapter, Victoria Boldina refocuses attention on Bernhard's interest in Nikolai Gogol. She argues that one can identify two kinds of allusions to Gogol in Bernhard's texts. Firstly, he is the favoured author of Bernhard's *Geistesmenschen* / intellectuals in *Alte Meister*, *Holzfällen* / *Woodcutters* and *Heldenplatz*. Secondly, motifs and characters from Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, *The Overcoat* and *The Portrait* find their way into *Der Atem* / *Breath* and *Alte Meister*, where they underline key themes: illness, art and the comic.

Bernhard's early life, like that of many of his generation, was blighted by National Socialism, a subject that he repeatedly returns to in his five-volume autobiography (1975-82). In the first volume of his autobiography, *Die Ursache* / *The Cause*, Bernhard infamously describes his

[9] See Manfred Mittermayer, *Thomas Bernhard* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2006), pp. 130-31.

home town of Salzburg as permeated with conservatism and the legacy of its National Socialist past, leading to a 'menschenfeindlichen architektonisch-erzbischöflich-stumpfsinnig-national-sozialistisch-katholischen Todesboden' (*W* 10: 12)/ 'lethal soil with its archiepiscopal architecture and its mindless blend of National Socialism and Catholicism' (*GE* 79). He also describes the traumatic memory of Allied bombing raids on the city. At the same time, however, as Mittermayer shows here, Bernhard's depiction of his home town is not altogether negative. When he recalls refugees arriving in Salzburg after the war, this suddenly prompts a profound affection for the city.

Time and again, Bernhard returned to his country's National Socialist legacy, the lack of confrontation with which he saw as permeating Austrian culture. The Waldheim Affair – the presidential election of the former UN Secretary General with a hidden Nazi past – prompted a belated confrontation with Austria's wartime legacy in the late 1980s. Often, Bernhard is writing against the pervasive climate of the *Opfermythos* / victim myth, the idea that Austria was 'the first free country to fall a victim to Hitlerite aggression',[10] stemming from the 1943 Moscow Declaration, rather than a willing partner and collaborator in the Third Reich. Despite the silence around the Nazi past in post-war Austria, Bernhard saw the Nazi past as all-too-present in the Austrian landscapes he wrote about. In *Frost*'s (1963) presentation of an unpleasant Alpine village and the landscape surrounding it (see Ritchie Robertson's chapter), a walk through the forest may lead to the discovery of skulls and skeletons covered over with just a thin layer of pine needles (*W* 1: 146). While Austria has certainly progressed in its reckoning with its Nazi legacy in the decades since Bernhard's death, for contemporary Austrian writers Bernhard is shorthand for diagnosing the insufficiencies that remain. In her 2018 Heimatroman *Schwedenreiter*, Hanna Sukare underlines the lack of progression, with regard to working through the Nazi past in the (fictional) Austrian village of Stumpf, through a concise allusion to Bernhard: 'das hier ist kein Text von Thomas Bernhard, sondern die Wirklichkeit in Stumpf' / 'this isn't a text by Thomas Bernhard, rather it's the reality in Stumpf.'[11]

Several chapters here focus on Bernhard's thematization of the National Socialist past and its legacy. Nikolaos Koskinas explores identity and memory in Bernhard's play *Vor dem Ruhestand* / *Eve of Retirement* (1979), which tackles the Nazi legacy in West Germany.

[10] N. N., 'The Moscow Declaration; October 1943. Joint Four-Nation Declaration', *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Lillian Goldmann Law Library*: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/moscow.asp (accessed 11 December 2022).
[11] Hanna Sukare, *Schwedenreiter: Ein Heimatroman* (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 2018), p. 55.

Koskinas shows how the play addresses failures to adequately confront the Nazi past, as well as the identity-forming role of distorted and selective images of the past, transmitted across generations. Juliane Werner also discusses *Vor dem Ruhestand* together with *Ritter, Dene, Voss* (1986), plays which, she argues, resonate strongly with Sartre's *No Exit* (1944) and *The Condemned of Altona* (1959). Werner explores how Bernhard and Sartre portray situations of stagnation resulting from interpersonal dependence, communicative failure, and the failure to take responsibility for the past.

In his chapter, Simon Schoch analyses the subject of the fragile inheritance – a recurring motif in Bernhard – which finds its first expression in his short story *Ungenach* (1968). Drawing on Lacanian theory, Schoch examines the inherited *Herkunftskomplex* in *Ungenach*, exploring how, in the condition of negating it, the inherited family estate exerts its fullest impact. In his chapter, Stefan Hajduk also explores the performative negation of inheritance, this time with a focus on *Auslöschung*. In the final chapter, Martin Huber revisits the *Heldenplatzskandal* around Bernhard's last and most impactful play, leading to a dramatic national confrontation – both on and off stage – with the Nazi legacy that Bernhard was diagnosing.

Bernhard the Anti-Nationalist

According to Samuel Johnson, 'patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel'.[12] Like his intellectual predecessor Arthur Schopenhauer, Thomas Bernhard hated nationalism. Schopenhauer writes:

> Die wohlfeilste Art des Stolzes ist der Nationalstolz. Denn er verrät in dem damit Behafteten den Mangel an individuellen Eigenschaften, auf die er stolz sein könnte, indem er sonst nicht zu dem greifen würde, was er mit so vielen Millionen teilt. Wer bedeutende persönliche Vorzüge besitzt, wird vielmehr die Fehler seiner eigenen Nation, da er sie beständig vor Augen hat, am deutlichsten erkennen. Aber jeder erbärmliche Tropf, der nichts in der Welt hat, darauf er stolz sein könnte, ergreift das letzte Mittel, auf die Nation, der er gerade angehört, stolz zu sein.[13]
>
> The cheapest form of pride is national pride. In a person who is full of it, it betrays the lack of individual qualities that he could be proud of, since otherwise he would not hang on to

[12] Samuel Johnson, 7 April 1775. James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (New York: Penguin, 1986), p. 182.
[13] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Aphorismen*. Kapitel IV. Von dem, was einer vorstellt: https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/schopenh/aphorism/chap006.html (accessed 11 December 2022)

> something that he shares with so many millions of others. Whoever has significant personal merits will recognise most clearly the errors of his own nation, since he has them continually before his eyes. But every miserable fool who has nothing in the world that he could be proud of, latches onto his last chance to be proud of something: the nation to which he happens to belong. [Trans. by ES]

Schopenhauer goes on to warn against 'die "deutschen Brüder", die dem Volke schmeicheln, um es zu verführen' / 'the "German brothers" who flatter the people in order to seduce them'.[14] Yet Schopenhauer also thought, incorrectly, that the majority of Germans were unlikely to fall for this ruse. As the long nineteenth century progressed, Heine, Nietzsche and Heinrich Mann warned more insistently about German nationalism, but they were unheeded. The two world wars and mass murders of the twentieth century proved that nationalism is a deadly force. And yet nationalist discourse and iconography pervades everyday life in the early twenty-first century more than ever.

In *Banal Nationalism* (1995), Michael Billig broadened the concept of nationalism 'to cover the ways that established nation states are routinely reproduced.'[15] Billig argues that, 'in the established nations, there is a continual "flagging", or reminding, of nationhood'.[16] In his view, nationalist symbols are so deeply embedded in everyday discourse and cultural products that they are taken for granted, or even perceived as 'natural'. According to Billig, nationalism is an ideological force which entirely pervades and saturates the fabric of our everyday experience. News media, sport, fashion and popular entertainment constantly affirm and legitimize the nation state and its iconography. As Billig puts it:

> A banal mysticism binds 'us' to the homeland – that special place which is more than just a place, more than a mere geophysical area. In all this, the homeland is made to look homely, beyond question and, should the occasion arise, worth the price of sacrifice. And men, in particular, are given their special, pleasure-saturated reminders of the possibility of sacrifice.[17]

Nationalism, in its guise of everyday 'values' and symbols which we take for granted, remains a potent political force which can be mobilized by politicians in order to enforce compliance and shut down critical debate. Billig argues that nationalism is reproduced through 'constant

[14] Schopenhauer, *Aphorismen*.
[15] Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), p. 16.
[16] Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 8.
[17] Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 195.

flaggings of nationhood', badges of belonging, key words, images and cues including 'a deixis of little words' such as 'here', 'us' and 'the'.[18]

Bernhard, like Billig, recognized the power of nationalism as a compelling, controlling mysticism. That is why he constantly chipped away at it, peeling off the veneer. Bernhard resisted the privileging of Austrian nationhood that characterized his experience by defacing nationalist tokens. His moral integrity enabled him to recognize 'the constant flaggings of nationhood' as an imposition, by means of which 'we' are required to affirm 'our' allegiance to the badges of national identity and belonging. Bernhard resists these coercive mechanisms. Instead, his works oppose discourse in service of the state. Much of Bernhard's rhetorical force derives from his 'defacings' of national identity. Bernhard is not only a *Nestbeschmutzer* / 'nest-dirtier' but a committed iconoclast, an active defacer of national icons and shibboleths, most notably in his play *Heldenplatz*, but also in his tirades against Austrian cultural icons such as Anton Bruckner and Adalbert Stifter. His anti-nationalist intensity has few rivals – one could perhaps cite Nietzsche's and Heinrich Mann's anti-German polemics, or Guy Hocquenghem's anti-French polemics.[19] Profaning the pieties of his own country is precisely what makes Bernhard so valuable, not least to his own country. Every country needs its critics. Heiner Müller commented: '[Thomas Bernhard] schreibt so, als ob er vom österreichischen Staat angestellt wäre, um gegen Österreich zu schreiben. Damit hat er sich wirklich eine Pensionsberechtigung erworben'[20] / 'Bernhard writes as if he had been hired by the Austrian government to write against Austria. It should qualify him for a pension' (GH 295). Müller added that 'offending Austria is a public service', and that 'Es gibt keine bessere Österreich-Werbung als Thomas Bernhard' / 'There is no better advertisement for Austria than Thomas Bernhard' (GH 295). Every country needs its critics because they fulfil the crucial function of a safety valve.

Before readers start to feel smug about Bernhard's insults against Austria, we should take a look at ourselves and our own national pieties. For example, those of us who are based in Britain should recall the observation in *Heldenplatz* that '[D]ie Engländer haben auch einen faschistischen Untersatz' / 'The English also have a fascist substructure'.[21] This resonates with Brexit and the rise of nationalist sentiment across Europe more generally. Such developments may well cause concern to readers who prefer critical debate to unreflective flag-waving, and

[18] Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 174.
[19] Guy Hocquenghem, *La beauté du métis. Réflexions d'un francophobe* (Paris: Éditions Ramsay, 1979).
[20] Heiner Müller, quoted in Dramaturgie, Burgtheater Wien (ed.), *Heldenplatz: Eine Dokumentation* (Vienna: Burgtheater, 1989), p. 283.
[21] Bernhard, *Heldenplatz*, p. 90.

who believe that the right to dissent is a basic democratic right. Authors who expose their country's faults fulfil a vital public service; every country needs its exemplary critics. In a British context, one such writer would be the Glasgow-based poet and essayist Tom Leonard (1944-2018). Like Bernhard, Leonard's capacity for polemic is formidable, and his axioms – 'Self-determination in art. Independence of mind. Nationality an irrelevance' – set out a poetic position that has a certain kinship with Bernhard's.[22] Leonard's poem 'Flag' describes a flag as: 'The state gang's signatory graffito on cloth / […] To the infant the sucking blanket / To the adult the flag.'[23] Whenever public debate is infantilized by jingoism, anti-nationalist authors like Bernhard and Leonard can offer a vital corrective.

Subjectivity: Bernhard and Psychoanalysis

Bernhard's works speak to us with a distinctively subjective voice, one which resonates with strong emotions including anger and rage. This embattled, outraged sensibility is central to Bernhard's writings. Many of the essays in this volume (re)affirm the significance of psychoanalytic approaches to Bernhard's œuvre. Psychoanalysis is a means to interrogate the emotion of hate, a favoured register in Bernhard. As Frances Wilson puts it: 'Bernhard's regal subject is hatred […] it is Bernhard's magnificently satirical self-hatred that makes his writing so thrilling.'[24]

Object relations theory offers one approach to the complex knot of disappointed love and intense hatred, including self-hatred, that readers of Bernhard will recognize. Sheila Dickson's contribution explores the theme of *Selbstverachtung* / self-contempt in Bernhard and Elfriede Jelinek, drawing particularly on the 'Kindheitsforscherin' / childhood researcher Alice Miller (1923-2010), who argued that the child's early relationship with the mother is of lifelong importance because it sets a pattern for future relationships. Dickson's essay reads Bernhard and Jelinek in the light of Miller's 'vicious circle of contempt', as described in her book *Das Drama des begabten Kindes / The Drama of the Gifted Child* (1979). According to Miller, if a child's feelings, e.g. anger and rage, are denied, ignored or humiliated by their parents, this can

[22] Tom Leonard, blog entry 1 January 2014: https://www.tomleonard.co.uk/journal/feb2014dec2013.html (accessed 11 December 2022)
[23] Tom Leonard, *Definite Articles: Selected Prose 1973-2012* (Exbourne: Etruscan Books; Edinburgh: Word Power Books, 2013), p. 215.
[24] Frances Wilson, 'Preface', in Thomas Bernhard, *My Prizes: An Accounting*, translated by Carol Brown Janeway (London: Notting Hill Editions, 2011), pp. vii-xiii, here pp. ix-x.

lead to the compulsive, displaced repetition of feelings of contempt in later life.[25] Dickson follows Miller in using the term 'self-contempt' rather than 'self-hatred' to differentiate her interpretation from the debate about 'Jewish self-hatred', which is a different story.[26]

Patrick Siegmann's chapter considers *Der Theatermacher* / *The Theatre Maker* and *Heldenplatz*, in terms of the object relations theory of Otto F. Kernberg (born 1928), who has studied the ego's management of aggressive impulses, in particular the role of aggression in personality disorders.[27] Siegmann reminds us that, for Freud, hate is a response to external threats and pressures; it has a cognitive function that serves to combat 'Unlustsempfindungen' / 'displeasurable sensations'.[28] Bernhard's hatred fascinates us because of its intimacy: on one level, he seems to identify closely with the objects of his rage, suggesting his emotional attachment to his targets. Taken together, Dickson and Siegmann suggest that the outbursts of hatred in Bernhard's texts are potentially both liberating and constricting, as they rehearse the tension between the child's rejection of parental authority and the danger of a compulsive (self-)contempt which repeats childhood humiliations.

In his chapter, Jack Davis considers *Auslöschung* in terms of Jacques Lacan's four discourses. Davis argues that Franz-Josef Murau occupies the structural position of the hysteric, while Gambetti performs the structural role of the 'analyst' who punctuates Murau's speech and forces him to confront his symptomatic enjoyment of his *Herkunftskomplex* / complex of origin. According to Davis, the narrator's conversations with Gambetti resemble Freud's talking cure, enabling Murau to reorganize his subjectivity discursively and redirect it towards new significations. Schoch's chapter, too, draws on Lacan.

These psychoanalytical approaches to Bernhard explore the ambivalent potential of emotion (and its linguistic expression) to both entrap and liberate the subject. Bernhard's figures move back and forth between mental illness and mental health, resisting the enclosure of both of these categories. Like Nietzsche, Bernhard does not regard illness as an exceptional state, but rather as 'the normal and essential condition in virtue of which human life is lived and its

[25] Alice Miller, *Das Drama des begabten Kindes. Eine Um- und Fortschreitung* [1979; new edition 1994] (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1997); English edition: *Alice Miller, The Drama of Being a Child: The Search for the True Self*, translated by Ruth Ward (London: Virago, 1995).

[26] Paul Reitter, *On the Origins of Jewish Self-Hatred* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[27] Otto F. Kernberg, *Aggression in Personality Disorders and Perversions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). German edition: Otto F. Kernberg, *Wut und Hass. Über die Bedeutung von Aggression bei Persönlichkeitsstörungen und sexuellen Perversionen* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997).

[28] Sigmund Freud, 'Triebe und Triebschicksale', in Freud, *Das Ich und das Es. Metapsychologische Schriften* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1994).

possibilities of sense sought'.[29] Suffering bodies and minds are central to Bernhard's œuvre. His denial of facile closure imbues his work with a radical openness. Theodor W. Adorno's description of Alban Berg could also be applied to Bernhard: 'Ihm gelang es, kein Erwachsener zu werden, ohne daß er infantil geblieben wäre' / 'He succeeded in not becoming an adult, without ever remaining infantile.'[30]

The structure of this volume is thematic, with separate sections on Bernhard's poetics, his dramas, prose fiction, and his persona. The thematic strands – language, history, and subjectivity – run concurrently through many of the chapters, allowing for contributions to be productively brought into dialogue with each other. The chapters here allow us to consider new ways of approaching and understanding Bernhard's works. Taken together, they reaffirm the importance of Bernhard's literary texts, and underline their enduring relevance and significance.

[29] Peter R. Sedgwick, 'Nietzsche, Illness and the Body's Quest for Narrative', *Health Care Analysis*, 21 (2013), 306-22, here p. 312.

[30] Theodor W. Adorno, quoted in Hans Mayer, *Zeitgenossen. Erinnerung und Deutung* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), p. 47.