



On Earth and in Hell: Early Poems

By Thomas Bernhard

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On Earth and in Hell: Early Poems By Thomas Bernhard

The first English translation of the earliest poetry of brilliant and disruptive Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard, widely considered one of the most innovative and original authors of the twentieth century and often associated with fellow mavericks Beckett, Kafka and Dostoevsky. A master of language, whose body of work was described in a *New York Times* book review as “the most significant literary achievement since World War II,” Bernhard’s *On Earth and in Hell* offers a distilled perspective on the essence of his artistry and his theme of death as the only reality. A remarkable achievement by highly-respected translator Peter Waugh.

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On Earth and in Hell: Early Poems By Thomas Bernhard Bibliography

- Rank: #1768208 in Books
- Published on: 2015-11-10
- Original language: English, German
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.90" h x .70" w x 6.00" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 256 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"Peter Waugh offers haunting and beautiful renderings of Thomas Bernhard's poetry...A fascinating peek into the genesis of Austria's controversial literary figure" —*New York Journal of Books*

"These hard won-poems, these furious convulsions, by turns savage and tender, mark the beginning of Thomas Bernhard's true work, his first startling blows. It is deeply illuminating to have them so wonderfully translated into English." —Edward Hirsch, poet, *Gabriel: A Poem; How to Read a Poem (and Fall in Love with Poetry)*

"If Thomas Bernhard's poems were paintings, they would be German Expressionist, emphasizing distortions of objective realities to convey subjective feelings (think of The Scream by Edvard Munch, not German but a definite influence on Expressionism). While, in 1957, the free verse of Bernhard's poems is hardly renegade, his distortion of realities is much more so. It provokes." —*Boston Area Small Press and Poetry Scene*

"[In] this full version of ON EARTH AND IN HELL, Thomas Bernhardt's very first publication, in 1957, as a poet and, more importantly, as a writer ... [is] a hypersensitive stranger, leading me through a heart-wrenching journey, circles of hell punctuated with spring beams and unexpected bubbles of tenderness. A soul exposed to the very core, explosive." —from the Foreword by Barbara Hutt, co-author, *Thomas Bernhard*

"In these poems, written in Bernhard's mid-twenties . . . all the matter of the subsequent malicious laughter is there—the self-splitting disgust and nostalgia, the hyperbolic despair, the failed (desired but also scorned) glory, the juxtaposition of village idyll and doom, of scathing superiority and terminal degradation, of sex, and nauseated frailty and exhaustion." —from the introduction by Jaimy Gordon, author, *Lord of Misrule* (National Book Award winner)

"Bernhard was . . . Austria's most important postwar writer, a provocateur who delighted in finding his country and countrymen odious and then making the best of it in his art." *The New York Times*

"Astonishingly original, a composition of strange new beauty."—*The Nation*

"Bernhard (born in 1931) has become one of the most acclaimed writers and playwrights of his generation." —*Library Journal*

"For all their acrid elegance, [these poems] are compelling because Thomas Bernhard wrote them. . . . [T]hey . . . show how deeply Bernhard, the caustic besmircher of the native nest, was rooted in the soil of his homeland. Every line suggests that his love of it was almost equal to his loathing." —*Eric Ormsby, New York Sun*

"As readers we are in the relentless grip of Bernhard. One marvels at the consistency of his austere vision." —*The New York Times Book Review*

"Thomas Bernhard was first and possibly foremost a poet, belonging in the company of Georg Trakl and Paul Celan . . . a major twentieth-century poet." —*Carolyn Forché, author of Blue Hour: Poems*

"Remarkable. . . . Bernhard . . . is lapidary and translucent."

—Times Literary Supplement (London)

"Little by little, with supernatural patience, prodigious cunning and craft—like Joseph Heller in *Catch-22*—Bernhard fashions an original angle of vision that transforms our understanding. We see elephants beside us in a room where no one mentions elephants." —O, *The Oprah Magazine*

"While Thomas Bernhard's early works of poetry are relatively unknown, they show the ingenious beginnings of the author's ironic and morbid vision, influenced by the poetry of Rilke, Celan, and the expressionist Trakl." *Matthias Konzett, Tufts University, author of Rhetoric of The National Dissent in Thomas Bernhard, Peter Handke and Elfriede Jelinek*

About the Author

Thomas Bernhard (1931–1989) was an Austrian playwright, novelist, and poet. His body of work was cited in a *New York Times* book review as "the most significant literary achievement since World War II." He is widely considered one of the most innovative and original authors of the twentieth century and often associated with fellow mavericks Beckett, Kafka and Dostoevsky.

Peter Waugh is a poet, editor and translator, born in Barnet, London in 1956. He is co-editor of *subdream* the Vienna Journal of English Language Poetry, and publisher of Labyrinth poetry books. He studied with Allen Ginsberg, Ann Waldman, Jackson Mac Low, Ed Sanders, Andrew Schelling, Blixa Bargeld, Andrei Bitov, Henri Chopin and others. His poetry has appeared in anthologies and magazines in England, the United States, Austria, Slovakia, Macedonia and Croatia, as well as in the chapbooks *Horizon Firelight* (2000) and *Haiku Butterfly Death Dream* (2002). He is a member of Übersetzungsgemeinschaft literarischer und wissenschaftlicher Werke (Austrian Society of Literary and Academic Translators) and his highly-respected translations include the bilingual German-English volumes *Terminal* by Klara Köttner-Benigni and *Standpoints* by Edith Sommer. He lives in Vienna.

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