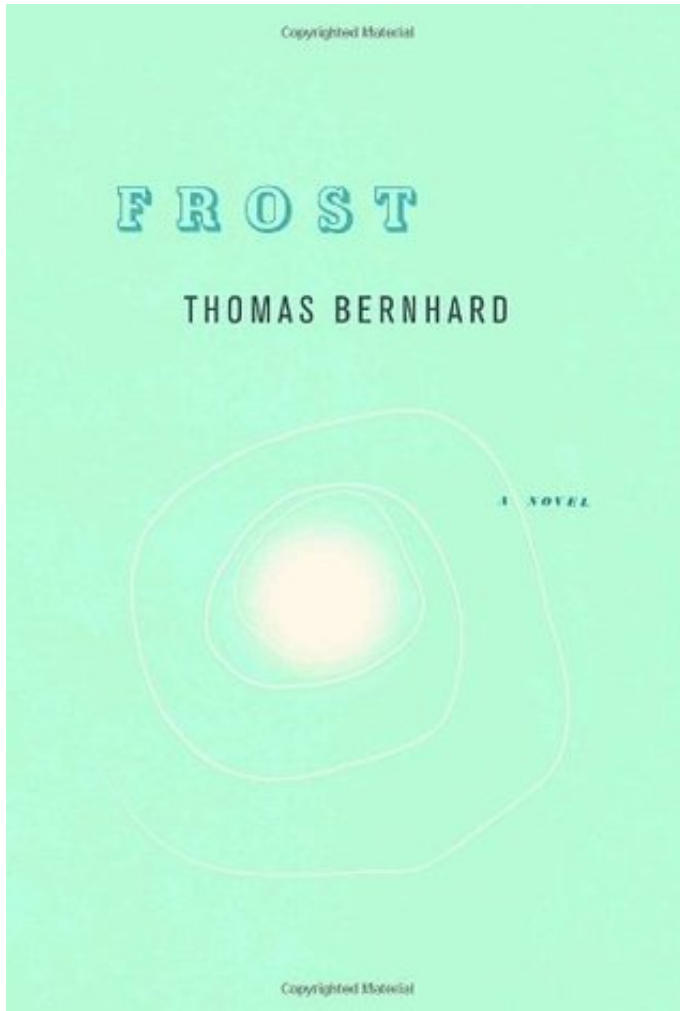

Thomas Bernhard

Frost



Title: Frost

Author: Thomas Bernhard

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Description

Visceral, raw, singular, and distinctive, *Frost* is the story of a friendship between a young man at the beginning of his medical career and a painter who is entering his final days.

A writer of world stature, Thomas Bernhard combined a searing wit and an unwavering gaze into the human condition. *Frost* follows an unnamed young Austrian who accepts an unusual assignment. Rather than continue with his medical studies, he travels to a bleak mining town in the back of beyond, in order to clinically observe the aged painter, Strauch, who happens to be the brother of this young man's surgical mentor. The catch is this: Strauch must not know the young man's true occupation or the reason for his arrival. Posing as a promising law student with a love of Henry James, the young man befriends the mad artist and is caught up among an equally extraordinary cast of local characters, from his resentful landlady to the town's mining engineers.

This debut novel by Thomas Bernhard, which came out in German in 1963 and is now being published in English for the first time, marks the beginning of what was one of the twentieth century's most powerful, provocative literary careers.

Insightful reviews

Saskia: Herrjemine, endlich bin ich durch!!!! Was für ein sagenhaft langweiliges Buch. Und normalerweise bin ich großer Bernhard-Fan... aber das... das war nun wirklich anstrengend und unerträglich. Hat man eine Seite gelesen, kennt man das ganze Buch. Das heißt, aller Rest fühlt sich an wie zähe Zeitverschwendung, in sich Hineinsteigern ins Unerträgliche - worum es ja auch in diesem Buch geht. Also: Man fühlt mit. Für diese Kunst dann auch zwei Punkte und nicht nur einen.

In meinen Augen wartet "Frost" nur mit wenigen dieser herzerfrischenden, klaren, zerstörerischen Aussagen auf wie andere... stattdessen seitenweise sinnlose Aneinanderreihungen von Phrasen und, schlimmer, einzelnen Worten (selbstverständlich vom Maler Strauch). Ohne Sinn und Verstand. Ja, dies ist mein Eindruck. Ja, mag sein, ich habe das Buch nicht so ganz verstanden.

Aber ein paar wenige Stellen gefielen mir eben doch ausnehmend gut diese möchte ich hier explizit hervorheben, sei es S. 206 der Vergleich von Jugend und Alter oder aber S. 256 die Schilderung der Abschachtung des Viehs (ich las die Suhrkamp-Ausgabe); außerdem, sehr schön, S. 208, eine verbesserte Version des Vater Unser:

"Vater unser, der du bist in der Hölle,
geheiligt werde kein Name.
Zukomme uns kein Reich.
Kein Wille geschehe.
Wie in der Hölle, also auch auf Erden.
Unser tägliches Brot verwehre uns.
Und vergib uns keine Schuld,
Wie auch wir vergeben keinen Schuldigern.

Führe uns in Versuchung
und erlöse uns von keinem Übel.
Amen."

Szplug: They say that the great artist is able to take the personal and - through the glammers of their craft - present it as the universal: certainly the torment called life that afflicts the Painter Strauch in Bernhard's first published novel, *Frost*, will resonate with certain readers at certain parts; for myself, there was so much about Strauch's plight that hit home with stunning effect that I felt drained by the time I finished its 342 ragged, caustic and beautiful pages.

The novel is, essentially, the rage poetry of Bernhard put into prose; it slices and bites and gouges at the reader through the medium of the story, narrated by an unnamed young medical intern from the Austrian city of Schwarzach who has been sent to make contact with the disturbed painter Strauch, the estranged brother of the intern's superior at the hospital. Traveling to the bleak village of Weng - an alpine Hell of glacial fridity and sin-shrouding snow that has drawn the artist back - he assumes the role of a law student, takes a room at the same inn where the painter Strauch is boarding, and quickly initiates contact. He then passes twenty-seven days as a walking sounding board for the increasingly unhinged rants, confessions and shadow philosophy of the tortured artist - and discovers that Strauch *may* bear the terminal burden of being mortally ill - while secretly composing letters to his superior detailing the precarious mental state of the doctor's sibling.

Using the bitter cold, the frost-flecked air as a prism, Bernhard refracts a rainbow depicting the afflictions of the artist, from a neglected and abusive childhood through to his struggles as a student, and his banal and hated stints of employment, including as a substitute teacher and laborer, that he endured when his potential as a painter was terminated by a fracturing despair that drove him to destroy all of his paintings. Despair is soaked into the pages of the book: Strauch, pursued by fear and visions, haunted by dream-sight and the shrill shrieks of death that fall upon his ears from the very air he breathes, cannot transfer the *truth* that he grasps with his mind onto the canvas. Everything he paints - in the dark so that the light won't blanch his fever - cannot measure up to the standard he has set for himself, cannot depict the ice-limned clarity that is frozen in his consciousness, and so it must burn. Such raw and ragged souls learn that creativity and inspiration carry the germs of madness within, that the stronger the compulsion to put truth into material form, the more searing the flame of insanity's torch; that, as the truth reveals itself in full to the creator, *honesty* would compel all but the very greatest to recognize the paucity of their interpretations - and that such a recognition would shatter.

In the village of Weng, its sallow citizens are actors portraying the quotidian travails of everyday life - eating, drinking, fucking, cheating, stealing, fighting, laughing - without any time or inclination to pursue anything other than their immediate gratifications and needs; their low pursuits. In contrast, the painter - with the intern the Boswell to his agitated Johnson - is helpless to stopper the madcap torrent of words that flow forth in his effort to try and paint a portrait for his quiet companion of the terror and misery that his untethered mind, his cracked-mirror soul have been endlessly assaulted with, of his unparsable knowledge of the world as it is: a hell where the damned are forced to don a bewildering variety of masks, where the past uses its talons to rend the future to ribbons and its gorgon-gaze to paralyze the present.

Eventually, the young intern begins to show signs of having been infected by Strauch's nausea, his bleak belief in the meaninglessness of everything - and it dawns on him that Strauch, having been born for suicide if he can ever summon the fortitude to scale the barrier of his fear, may have been using his companion as fuel for that resolve.

This novel, obviously, will not appeal to everyone; and though Michael Hofmann's translation is reliably brilliant, Bernhard can be very abstruse and impenetrable, Strauch's outbursts and tirades difficult to understand. Yet the writing sings, it soars, it wrenches your attention to the mordant words of the painter's savage solipsisms - and, for all of its hopelessness, buttresses any who have, in some manner or form, trod the broken paths of the same dark and painful solitudes wherein the ravaged Strauch was imprisoned.

Jim Elkins: 'Frost' is yet another excrescence of Bernhard's imagination. This time it's a student who follows a painter, or rather a man who used to be a painter, in order to see if he is sane. Of course he isn't: that is so immediately obvious that the question becomes--as of the first five pages of the book--what kind of imagination the painter possesses.

The book offers no relief, no pleasure of slowly dawning insight (even if that insight might reveal psychosis, impending suicide, unrelieved pessimism, or bottomless misanthropy).

Reading 'Frost' is like lying in pig slurry, and raising yourself every few minutes to wipe yourself, and then lying back down, then getting up again. It makes Beckett seem prissy and sterile, and it makes nearly every other author look cowardly, because by comparison most authors rush off to nice conclusions.

Alison: Erm, i think a tad awestruck. And a tad traumatized by means of the tedium of the dialog, which used to be evidently the point. Welcome to Bernhard?

Amari: shocking... much less usual of bernhard's later kind than i had expected, even though the beginnings of his hammering vocabulary and word repetition are definitely there. 4 stars do not provide the appropriate notion of the book, specially a number of the really amazing passages close to the start of the book. highly, hugely recommended.

Indi_book: Quedando claro que los angeles puntuación se hace en comparación con las otras novelas de Bernhard. Ésta, los angeles primera del autor, no llega aún a las cimas de expresión de las otras. Quizás podría ser obra maestra con a hundred páginas menos. Sin embargo, Thomas Bernhard.

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