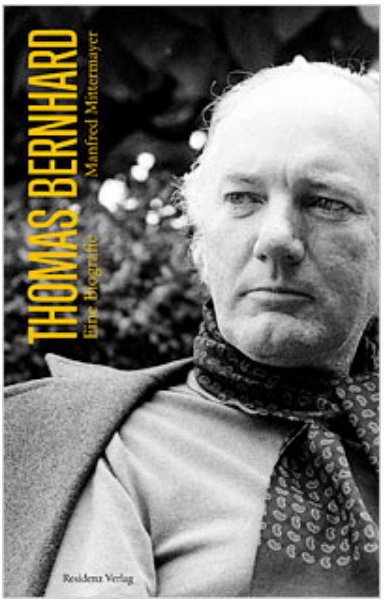

by Manfred Mittermayer
Residenz Verlag
September 2015 / 456pp
Biography and Memoir

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Thomas Bernhard. A Biography

Thomas Bernhard. Eine Biografie

review

Thomas Bernhard ranks alongside Elfriede Jelinek as the most internationally significant Austrian author of the late 20th century. While Manfred Mittermayer's definitive biography serves as a fascinating introduction to Bernhard's life and works, painting a memorable picture of a man whose life was inextricably intertwined with the course of European post-war history, its insightful interpretation of new archival material and extensive testimonies from Bernhard's contemporaries also ensure its place at the forefront of literary scholarship.

Thomas Bernhard's literary work is known for its acrimonious style and such gloomy themes as illness, incest, suicide and the loneliness of the individual. Mittermayer skillfully intersperses the narrative of a mostly unhappy life with quotations taken from Bernhard's fictional and autobiographical texts, statements from friends and enemies, family members, and the views of critics, journalists and publishers in Austria and Germany. The biography incorporates brief accounts of the lives of his great-grandparents, grandparents and mother, as well as references to the contemporary reception of Bernhard's work. The biography has been completed to a high academic standard but it is also decidedly readable and accessible.

Mittermayer succeeds in positioning events in Bernhard's personal life in a wider cultural and political context, thus providing the reader with a vivid picture of the dynamics between various publishers and cultural institutions. The reader also gains a sense of the complex

relationships between autobiographical texts, interviews and fictional re-workings of events in Bernhard's life and works. Mittermayer illuminates issues that have divided critical opinion, such as Bernhard's alleged misogyny, the problem of interpreting his apparent antipathy to contemporary Austria, and the question of whether his writing shows a progression or repeatedly reworks the same themes.

This is the most comprehensive biography of *Thomas Bernhard* to date in either German or English. Given that Bernhard is of interest to readers of German-language literature as well as of world literature and theatre, Mittermayer's enlightening and well-researched account of a literary giant is sure to find an extensive international readership.

about the author

Manfred Mittermayer was born in 1959 and lives near Salzburg, where he studied German and English literature and has lectured since 1984. In 2012 he became head of the Salzburg Literature Archive and co-director of Rauris Literary Festival. He is the author of several books and essays on Thomas Bernhard, has curated an exhibition on him, and is a member of the editorial team for Suhrkamp's twenty-two-volume edition of Bernhard's complete works.

Previous works include:
"Österreich selbst ist nichts als eine Bühne". Thomas Bernhard und das Theater (2009); *"Die Natur ist ein ernster Gegenstand." Stifter. Haushofer. Bernhard* (2011); *Mythos Bachmann. Zwischen Inszenierung und Selbstinszenierung* (2011); *Walter Kappacher. Person und Werk* (2013); *Thomas Bernhard. Persiflage und Subversion* (2013); *Wedekinds Welt. Theater – Eros – Provokation* (2014)

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Serbia (Futura Publikacije)

Translation rights available from:
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publishes fiction and non-fiction books. The non-fiction list includes books on contemporary history, music, theatre and architecture. The fiction programme contains established authors as well as debut authors, German language originals as well as translations from Eastern Europe and the USA. Our list includes Thomas Bernhard, Peter Henisch, Walter Kappacher, Christine Nöstlinger, Alek Popov, Clemens Setz, Anna Weidenholzer and Tanja Maljartschuk.