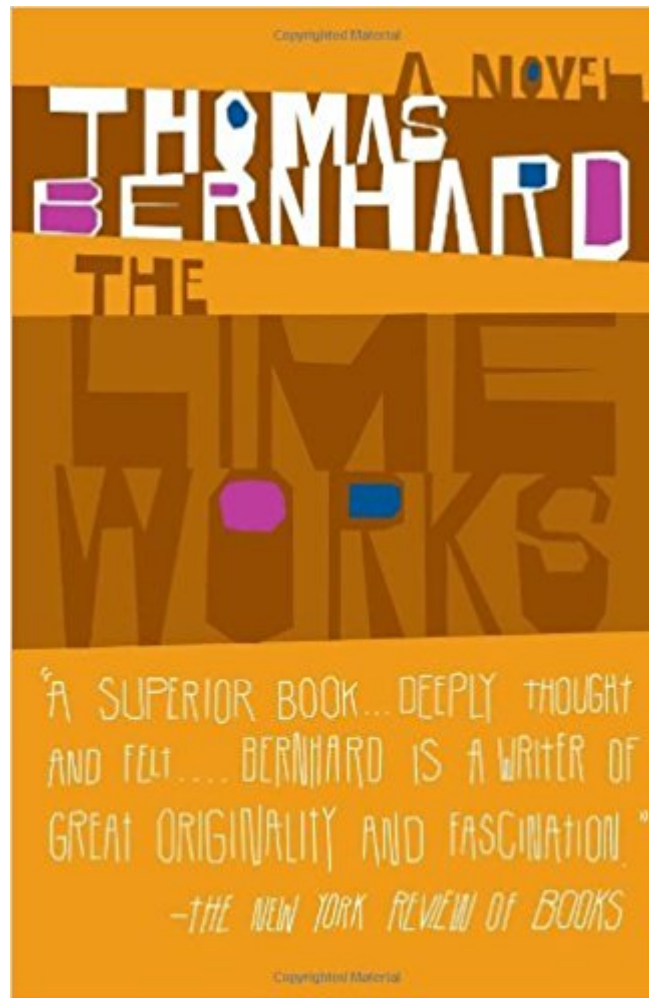




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The Lime Works: A Novel (Vintage International)



Synopsis

For five years, Konrad has imprisoned himself and his crippled wife in an abandoned lime works where he's conducted odd auditory experiments and prepared to write his masterwork, *The Sense of Hearing*. As the story begins, he's just blown the head off his wife with the Mannlicher carbine she kept strapped to her wheelchair. The murder and the bizarre life that led to it are the subject of a mass of hearsay related by an unnamed life-insurance salesman in a narrative as mazy, byzantine, and mysterious as the lime works is Konrad's sanctuary and tomb.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A superior book . . . deeply thought and felt. . . Bernhard is a writer of great originality and fascination." • *The New York Review of Books* "Bernhard's prose is hypnotic, unstoppable, as rapid as thought itself. He makes you think, as all great writers do, that at any moment he can say anything." • *The Washington Post Book World* "A masterfully dense set of esthetic, social and political metaphors about contemporary life, about art, about obsessive commitment to anything. . . . The book is a jungle of meaning, the opposite of simplistic allegory, and a major achievement." • *The New Republic* "A novel that forces you to think, that compels you to measure your life and rituals against those of its strange, though frequently all-too-human,

Text: English, German (translation) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In general: In the awake state the person often does not recognise his creative abilities. If a dream of the time acts, this draws the attention of the dreaming also to the other talents from which he still anticipates nothing. If he looks at painting in his dream, this shows that he devotes himself ideas and images which were not aware to him up to now. If the dreaming lacquers something in his dream, this refers to recognizable changes in his thinking and feeling. Psychologically: To times can register in the positive sense as one develops in the next time and forms the life. If this does not apply, it can point to deceptions and palliation or the inclination to excessive optimism or pessimism, - besides, one must above all still consider the symbolic salary of the colours which are used to the time and that what one paints or what is painted. Because to times deals a lot with self-printout, it can play an important role as the dreaming paints in his dream. If he deals, for example, with miniatures, he must concentrate upon the details. If he devotes himself to big pictures, he must possibly develop a more global perspective.

Or so Konrad, the focus of 'The Lime Works', is supposed to have said, in reference to the results one gets at the moment anyone attempts to place on paper any thought, no matter how portentous (or monstrous, according to Konrad, supposedly). This is as good an example as any of Konrad's worldview, at least as it is reported to the reader by the faceless narrator as he transcribes the gossip and rumor flying around the small town of Sinking after Konrad has murdered his crippled, wheelchair-bound wife. (No spoilers here - the murder is reported on the second page). Slowly, bit by bit, from second, third, and even fourth-hand sources, a picture of the murderer emerges - of his frustrated attempts at writing the definitive textbook on hearing, of his "marital hell", to his bizarre life inside the defunct lime works, all described by what Konrad supposedly said to one or the other of several different townspeople. Surprisingly, the novelty of Bernhard's style doesn't wear thin, despite the fact that he uses the words "Konrad is supposed to have said" or some variation over and over - presumable to reinforce the underlying ambiguity of not only Konrad's assertions, but also of the actual conditions of his and his wife's existence in the lime works itself. In the end, nothing but the murder is for certain, not Konrad's ruthlessness, as some would have it, or his doting attention to his crippled wife's needs, as other might say. But Bernhard's massive prose assault, consisting mainly

of one paragraph that lasts over two hundred pages, approaches the only sort of deconstruction a society can realistically perform on one of its members - which it often does, whether it has any business doing so or not. Ha! and what a character Konrad is supposed to be! Carrying around inside his head for decades his opus on the sense of hearing, he has been waiting for the precise moment, the exactly right moment, to set it all down at once, which he is certain (supposedly) that he can do, if he is ever able to get started, to get the first few sentences down on paper, certain that the rest will nearly write itself, once he turns his head over and empties out the contents. Thus, his fascination with the isolated lime works, a place he remembers from childhood and seizes on as the exact place to write his book. And yet, even when conditions are perfect and there appears to be nothing remaining in his way of setting down his book at one stroke, there is still - always - something to prevent it. Along the way, the reader is treated to Konrad's rather dim view of humanity and life in general, reaching such absurdly dismal dimensions that I laughed out loud in several spots at the sheer magnitude of his conclusions. I somehow doubt laughter was what Bernhard was going for, but Konrad himself rails against the "...despicable vulgarity of all those who insisted upon confusing the writer's person with his work", so perhaps it's best I don't assume too much about the author - even if the quoted passage implies a paradox I'll have to revisit another time. In the end, it isn't that Konrad's assumptions about humanity are so grossly wrong (to my mind they are mostly outlandish by degree, not by kind), it's that each and every one of his festering statements, as well as the life in which he has imprisoned himself, are not only rooted in but blown all out of proportion by the same cause that prevents him from writing his book. Bernhard has brilliantly peeled back layer after layer to expose this final destructive entity, which Konrad himself has nourished over the decades, and which is revealed in the final pages. To reveal it here would be a spoiler indeed.

Do yourself a favor and read a little Bernhard if you haven't already. It's really, really great stuff, and this one is one of my favorites.

Having already been a relatively well-versed Houdini Buff before picking up this book, the author surprised me with much more than just the small, obscure facts I had been hoping for. He gave me a deeper look into the 1920s itself, and more importantly, into the many vibrant and curious personalities who inhabited and were shaped by the period. Using carefully chosen quotes from various news-articles of the time, he showed me not just what Houdini or Mina did, but what they were thinking when they did it. He helped me understand just how the logical writer of Sherlock Holmes could come to spearhead a spiritual crusade. By the end of the book, I felt like I was there

with the characters; I knew each of them not just as legendary historic figures, but as human beings - each with their own desires and flaws.

Essentially a 240 page short story. Very autobiographical i think, Bernhard took care of an older woman for many years and later moved into an isolated farm house. The book is a meditation on writer's block, on pipe dreams, aging, the loss of material resources as we age, the relationship between spouses and friends. There is dark humor. The Urbanchich method in a way resembles the narration, forcing the reader to go on listening/reading to the monotony of the protagonist's life. At the end you find out that the narrator has been trying to sell life insurance to the locals who relay the story to him and us. Very funny in a sly, dark kind of way. It is a dark commentary on modern life and what is left when all we have is the material world around us. Austria as always plays a vital role as does the specific location of the novel's setting. This is always true of Bernhard's place-driven works and which gives them their great atmosphere. His novel Extinction is better crafted but with a poor ending. Bernhard's 5 part autobiography, Gathering Evidence, is his greatest work and one of the great works of literature of the 20th century.

Being a grandson of Mark W. Richardson, one of the main characters, and a son of his daughter Martha who attended many of the Lime Street seances, I can say without hesitation that David Jaher has done a remarkable job in retelling this story in a most clear and fair way. I recommend it to all comers - fans of Houdini or not. Fine work !

Hannah is up to her neck in baked goods and fair activities while trying to find a killer. The men in her life keep saving her. And her cat has his nose plastered to a window staring at nothing!?! Good read and fun as always.

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