

# Gehen

Th. Bernhard

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*Denn tatsächlich ist es nicht möglich längere Zeit zu gehen und zu denken in gleicher Intensität, einmal gehen wir intensiver, aber denken nicht so intensiv, wie wir gehen, dann denken wir intensiv und gehen nicht so intensiv wie wir denken, einmal denken wir mit einer viel höheren Geistesgegenwart, als wie wir gehen und einmal gehen wir mit eine viel größeren Geistesgegenwart, als wie wir denken, wir können aber nicht mit der gleichen Geistesgegenwart denken und gehen, sagt Oehler...*

And so it goes on and on. One sentence hatching on to the other, with not a single break, not a single new paragraph, relentlessly going on and on, with no opportunity to catch your breath. The repetitions are the hallmark of Bernhards style. This obsessive mastication, not unlike your own thought processes, when the same thought is thought anew, if from a different point of view. The thought is turned upside down, on the side, laid out to be dissected, to be reassembled, thrown on the floor, picked up again. On and on. Written thoughts are discrete, proud proclamations, thought thoughts on the other hand form a unstructured mess, tentative, incontestable, ephemeral, eternal. They take control over you, you have no control over your thoughts. You are thought. To think is to exist, to exist is to think. When thoughts are carried to their logical conclusions, you go over the cliff, fall freely into the void of insanity. 'Man wird einfach verrückt'. That happens of course to one of the protagonists who is repeatedly referred to during the walks that give meaning to the title of the book.

*Und wenn wir zusammen gehen und diesen Gedanken denken, denken wir, wir gehen zusammen, wir denken, aber es ist etwas anderes. Wenn ich denke, ich gehe, ist es etwas anderes, als wenn Sie denken, ich gehe, wie es etwas anderes ist, wenn wir beide zugleich (oder beide gleichzeitig) denken, wir gehen, wenn das möglich ist.*

It goes on and on. Is this great literature? Worthy of a Nobel prize? As to the latter, it means very little, something everyone knows, but it is considered naive and unsophisticated, not to pretend not to know. Certainly in its opaqueness and nonsensical approach, tongue in cheek, it shares many of the qualities that characterize a certain type of sophisticated literature - *Nicht für Jedermann*. One may know of the writer, an unhappy individual, feel a certain sympathy for, not to say a certain companionship with. This lends to what purports to be mere ravings, a certain grandiosity, if only of shared pain. What is written is not to be read, only to mark out the empty spaces between the lines, the empty space which is really what is to be read. But this is of course a cop-out. Really the text should not be presented in the conventional way, as lines on a page. It should not be broken off into lines, but only given the shape of one long interminable line, to be read along a narrow ticker-tape, the kind of which telegraphic punches were marked during the infancy of the invention. Maybe this is a text which should not be read, but

be read aloud, in a hurried monotone voice, emitted through a loudspeaker, which cannot be turned off, and at such high a volume, that it becomes inescapable. Not even if you cover your ears, should you be able to shut it out. It shouts, you cannot shut. Just like thoughts that follow you everywhere and can never be shut out, no matter how much you bury your head.

Then of course there is the formal approach. It is not prose, but poetry, disguised as prose. What matters is of course not content per se, but the illusion of content. But what matters most, and for that illusion of content is a useful idiocy, is form. The suggestive rhythm of words. To rave takes no skill, but to rave artfully takes a lot. Skill should always be respected, being the fruit of much labor, wrong roads taken, indefatigable perseverance. To read Bernhard is like taking a pill. It may be bitter to swallow, but it will be beneficial to your writing, working subconsciously. In fact while reading the book one is all the time cheered by the awareness that it will soon be done. Whatever it does, it will at least not drive you insane. The role of literature is to show, not to make.

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