

Report Jacek Dehnel

My stay in Krems or, rather, the particular flavour of my stay in Krems, had emerged about two months before I received an invitation to come here. One winter evening I came across a peculiar story of a man who spent literally a few decades of his life in psychiatric clinics and prisons for destroying eminent works of art by Dürer, Rembrandt, Cranach and others. The more I have been reading into his story, the more I perceived him as an ideal protagonist for Thomas Bernhard: an obsessive, destructive personality, misunderstood by the society and questioning its basic values, having commenced an extravagant project (like Konrad and his study on hearing in „The Lime Works” or Roithamer and his cone in „Correction”), unable to part with the memory of his beloved wife (like Reger in „Old Masters” and, in a way, again Konrad), etc. And, as Bernhard is unfortunately deceased, I have decided to write a pastiche of his novel, but then put it aside to finish more urgent literary project. As soon as I have learned that I will spend this October in Krems, I knew that I am going to write „Krivoklat” there.

On the day of my arrival I learned that I will spend a month in this highly Bernhardesque place: long, greyish building facing the Danube (hardly ever blue) on one side and the prison in a former monastery on the other side. Moreover, a prison that was somehow connected to Bernhard: not only Roithamer is planning to give all the proceedings from the sale Altensam to people who leave the Stein prison, but also Bernhard himself has given to this cause money he had received from Franz Csokor Prize. One surely cannot imagine a better place to write such a book.

Luckily, the weather was beautiful only on the day of my arrival and on a single day a dozen of days later. Inbetween and afterwards the Danube seen from my window was either grey, or screened with fog or rain, so I could unregretfully omit excursions in the neighbouring vineyards, sit behind my desk and beat the hell out of my laptop's keyboard. And, as I have been working on a pastiche of Bernhard's novels, hell was more than appropriate. If it wasn't raining, I would go for short trips either to Stein or to Krems (not mentioning the third place, namely Hofer, to get some food). I would do all the things I imagined one should do when here: I would order Rindssuppe mit Leberknödel, drink Marillenschnaps and Marillenlikör, I would buy speck wrapped in cardboard Lederhosen, which one has to unbutton to get the meat. On my two trips to Vienna I have spent literally hours in Cafe Bräunerhof, Bernhard's favourite, writing there like mad, or in Kunsthistorisches Museum, the scenery of „Old Masters” and also of large part of „Krivoklat”, whose namesake protagonist is planning to destroy one of the masterpieces exhibited there. No wonder, that my stay in Krems was highly productive, I have basically transformed myself into some sort of a tube, channeling Austrian places, books, views, food and drinks through my senses and keyboard into a novel that I hope will be as Bernhardesque as possible. Thanks a lot.