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In the following, I have set out three short extracts from Thomas Bernhard's novel *Alte Meister*, together with a close translation by myself and the published translation by Ewald Osers.

Sources:

Thomas Bernhard, *Alte Meister*. Komödie.suhrkamp taschenbuch 1988, ISBN 3-518-38053-2

Thomas Bernhard, *Old Masters. A Comedy*. Translated from the German by Ewald Osers. The University of Chicago Press 1992, ISBN 0-226-04391-6

Russian interpreter

Suhrkamp ed. pp. 130-131

Ich sah nur die Rücken der russischen Gruppe und hörte, was die ukrainische Dolmetscherin zum besten gab, sie redete, wie alle anderen Führer im Kunsthistorischen Museum Unsinn, es war nichts als das übliche üble Kunstgeschwätz, das sie in die Köpfe ihrer russischen Opfer hineinstopfte. *Da sehen Sie*, sagte sie, *Sehen Sie den Mund*, *da, sehen Sie*, sagte sie, *diese weitausladenden Ohren*, *da, sehen Sie dieses zarte Rosa auf der Engelswange*, *da, sehen Sie im Hintergrund den Horizont*, als ob nicht jeder auch ohne diese stupiden Bemerkungen alles das auf den Tintorettobildern gesehen hätte. Die Führer in den Museen behandeln die ihnen Anvertrauten doch immer nur als Dummköpfe, immer als die größten Dummköpfe, während sie doch niemals solche Dummköpfe sind, sie erklären ihnen vornehmlich immer das, was ja naturgemäß ganz und gar deutlich zu sehen ist und das also gar nicht erklärt zu werden braucht, aber sie erklären und erklären und zeigen und zeigen und reden und reden. Die Führer in den Museen sind nichts anderes als eitle Geschwätzmaschinen, die sie selbst so lange angestellt haben, solange sie eine Gruppe durch das Museum führen, diese Geschwätzmaschine redet immer dasselbe jahraus, jahrein.

Note:

Not much difference here. We interpreted 'eitel' differently. I found 'Geschwätz' difficult – it is a less emphatic word than anything similar in English. There are some words like 'drivel' and 'blather' that I suspect are regionally restricted. I prefer my 'protruding ears' to Osers' 'projecting ears', although it may be nonsense (ears normally protrude).

MM

I saw only the backs of the Russian group and heard what the Ukrainian interpreter was telling them, like all other guides in the Kunsthistorisches Museum she was talking nonsense, it was nothing other than the usual dreadful art drivel that she was stuffing into the heads of her Russian victims. *There you see*, she said, *you see the mouth, look, see*, she said, *these broad, protruding ears, look, see the delicate pink of the angel's cheek, look, see the horizon in the background*, as if every one of them would not have seen all that in the Tintoretto paintings even without these brainless remarks. But museum guides always treat their charges as idiots, always as the greatest idiots, but they are never such idiots, they always prefer to explain to them everything that is quite naturally absolutely plain to see and that therefore has no need whatsoever of being explained, but they explain and explain and show and show and talk and talk. Museum guides are nothing but mere chattering machines that they have switched on themselves for as long as they are showing a group around the museum, this chattering machine always says the same, year in, year out.

EO: U of Chicago ed. p. 64

I only saw the backs of the Russian group and heard what the Ukrainian interpreter had to offer to them, like all other guides in the Kunsthistorisches Museum she was talking nonsense, it was nothing but the usual sickening art twaddle that she stuffed into the heads of her Russian victims. Look at this, she said, look at this mouth, and here, she said, look at these projecting ears, and here, look at this delicate pink of the angel's cheek, and here in the background you can see the horizon, as if everybody could not see all these things in the Tintoretto paintings without those inane remarks. Museum guides invariably treat their charges as dimwits invariably as the worst dimwits, whereas in fact they never are such dimwits, they explain to them chiefly those things which can, of course, be seen perfectly clearly and therefore do not need to be explained, yet they explain and explain and point and point and talk and talk. The museum guides are nothing but conceited twaddling machines, switched on for the duration of a group's tour through the museum, such twaddling machines utter the same words year after year.

The old masters

Suhrkamp edition pp. 208-209

Tatsächlich denke ich, daß das Kunsthistorische Museum der einzige Fluchtpunkt ist, der mir geblieben ist, sagte Reger, *zu den Alten Meistern muß ich gehen, um weiterexistieren zu können, genau zu diesen sogenannten Alten Meistern*, die mir ja längst und schon seit Jahrzehnten verhaßt sind, denn nichts ist mir im Grunde mehr verhaßt, als diese sogenannten Alten Meister hier im Kunsthistorischen Museum und die Alten Meister überhaupt, alle Alten Meister, sie mögen heißen, wie sie wollen, sie mögen gemalt haben, wie sie wollen, sagte Reger, und doch sind sie es, die mich am Leben halten. So gehe ich durch die Stadt und denke, daß ich diese Stadt nicht mehr aushalte und daß ich nicht nur die Stadt nicht mehr aushalte, daß ich die ganze Welt und in der Folge eben die ganze Menschheit nicht mehr aushalte, denn die Welt und die ganze Menschheit sind ja mittlerweile so entsetzlich geworden, daß sie bald nicht mehr auszuhalten sind, wenigstens nicht für einen Menschen wie mich.

Note: There is not much to comment on here, but I have the feeling that a few things in the published translation are not typically English: 'no matter what they have painted' with perfect rather than simple past, 'I cannot bear living' rather than 'to live', 'have meanwhile become so ghastly' instead of 'have now become so ghastly'.

MM

In fact I think that the Kunsthistorisches Museum ist the only refuge left to me, said Reger, *I have to go to the old masters in order to continue my existence, to these very so-called old masters*, who are long since hateful to me and have been so for decades, for basically nothing is more hateful to me than these so-called old masters here in the Kunsthistorisches Museum and all old masters anywhere, all the old masters, whatever they are called, however they painted, said Reger, and yet it is they who keep me alive. And so I walk through the city and think that I can no longer tolerate this city and that it is not only the city I can no longer tolerate, that I can no longer tolerate all the world, and consequently the whole of humanity, for the world and the whole of humanity have now become so terrible that they will soon not be tolerable, at least not for a person like me.

OE, U. of Chicago edition p. 104

I do in fact believe that the Kunsthistorisches Museum is the only refuge left to me, Reger said, *I have to go to the old masters to be able to continue to exist, precisely to these so-called old masters*, who have long, that is for decades, been abhorrent to me, because basically nothing is more abhorrent to me than these so-called old masters here at the Kunsthistorisches Museum and old masters generally, all old masters, no matter what their names are, no matter what they have painted, Reger said, and yet it is they who keep me alive. I walk through the city and I think that I cannot bear living in this city any longer and that I not only cannot bear the city any longer but that I cannot bear the whole world and in consequence the whole of mankind any longer, because the world and all mankind have meanwhile become so ghastly that soon they will no longer be bearable, at least not for a person such as me.

The housekeeper

Suhrkamp edition p. 295

Sie lügt, habe ich gedacht, wie die Haushälterin mich darauf aufmerksam gemacht hat, daß ihr meine Frau verschiedene Gegenstände versprochen habe, die Begräbnisbesucher waren noch gar nicht aus dem Friedhof weggegangen, ist die Haushälterin schon vor mir gestanden und hat gesagt, meine Frau habe ihr das und das versprochen. Wir nehmen die Menschen immer wieder in Schutz, weil wir nicht glauben können und auch gar nicht glauben wollen, daß sie so gemein sein können, bis wir immer wieder die Erfahrung machen, daß sie ebenso gemein sind, wie wir es gar nicht für möglich halten. Mehrere Male hat die Haushälterin, ich bin noch am offenen Grab gestanden, das Wort *Bratpfanne* gesagt, so Reger, stellen Sie sich vor, immer wieder das Wort *Bratpfanne*, während ich noch am offenen Grab gestanden bin. Wochenlang ist mir die Haushälterin in den Ohren gelegen mit der infamen Lüge, meine Frau habe ihr *Vieles* versprochen.

Note: it was wrong of me to call 'frying pan' a word rather than words.

MM

She is lying, I thought, as the housekeeper told me that my wife had promised her various things, the funeral party had not even left the cemetery before the housekeeper stood in front of me and said my wife had promised her this and that. We keep defending people against accusations because we cannot believe and will not believe that they can be so nasty, until again and again we find out that they can be nastier than we ever believed they could be. Several times, when I was still standing by the open grave, the housekeeper uttered the word *frying pan*, said Reger, just imagine, again and again the word *frying pan*, while I was still standing by the open grave. For weeks the housekeeper kept badgering me with the outrageous lie that my wife promised her *a lot*.

U. of Chicago edition pp. 147-148

She is lying, I thought, when the housekeeper drew my attention to the fact that my wife had promised her various articles, the funeral guests had not even left the cemetery when the housekeeper appeared before me to say that my wife had promised her this and that. Time and again we stand up for people because we cannot believe and do not want to believe that they can be so vile, until, over and over again, we discover that they are far more vile than we would credit. Several times, when I was still standing by the open grave, the housekeeper said the words *frying pan*, Reger said, imagine it, again and again the words *frying pan* while I was still standing by the open grave. For weeks the housekeeper kept pestering me with the infamous lie that my wife had promised her *a lot*.