ANTIHUMANISM IN THE WORKS OF E.M. CIORAN AND THOMAS BERNHARD

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Abstract The versions of Nietzschean and Cioranian Antihumanism start from different presuppositions than Foucault's Antihumanism, adding misanthropy to their nihilistic project. The Cioranian term of the not-man, a darker counterpart to Nietzsche's Übermensch, can be "tested" through forays into the Romantic and Post-romantic literature, considering for instance Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), Maupassant's "Horla" (1887), Lorrain's "The Possessed" (1895) or the poems of Lautréamont. In this paper we compare Cioran's Antihumanism with the nihilism of Thomas Bernhard's first novel, Frost (1963).
Keywords Not-man, Übermensch, alterity, suicide, antinatalism, nihilism, psychosis.

1. Cioran's Antihumanism

Long before Foucault alluded to the death of man in his *The Order of Things* (1966) as the downfall of a certain way of conceiving the human being and the advent of a non-humanistic system of reference, poets such as Baudelaire or Lautréamont, and philosophers such as Nietzsche and Cioran developed their peculiar way of Antihumanism. These authors add misanthropy to their project of replacing the humanistic perspective. Moreover, they see themselves as agents of destruction (the active nihilism of Nietzschean philosophy), and, in a Schopenhauerian fashion, would like to rid us of the obsolete saga of humanism.
Cioran's concept of the *not-man*[1], introduced in his first book *On the Heights of Despair* (1934), announces his version of Antihumanism: "If the difference between Man and animal lies in the

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[1] For the first contemporary discussion of this term, see Ștefan Bolea, "The Nihilist as a Not-Man. An Analysis of Psychological Inhumanity", in *Philobiblon. Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities*, XX (1), 2015, 33-44.

fact that the animal can only be an animal whereas man can also be *not-man – that is, something other than himself – then I am not-man*"[2]. The animal cannot transcend its strict biology, being (not unlike divinity) "what it is", whereas man is the only being "who can be who he or she is not." Taken in its proper meaning, the Cioranian metaphor signifies a psychological mutation of a human being, who can no longer understand himself as a "member of the human family:" the not-man becomes something else entirely, being unable to identify with the purposes, desires and interests of the rest of mankind. The not-man is mankind understood as *radical alterity*, and it should occupy a new ontological region between the human being and divinity.

If, from a psychological perspective, the not-man can be described as a being flirting with mental disorder (Nietzsche's and Cioran's writings reveal many symptoms of mental illness, not to mention their particular "sickness unto death"); and from a philosophical perspective only a doctrine as extreme as nihilism, rejected by most, can prove adequate for the not-man. From a sociological perspective, the not-man would identify with the "systemic anomaly" described in *Matrix Reloaded* "that if left unchecked might threaten the system itself"[3]: the personification of resistance and subversion as opposed to the conformism and obedience of the masses. From a religious point of view, the not-man, who is another kind of human being, would be perhaps a "new god," similar to the one fashioned by Ridley Scott in *Alien: Covenant*[4].

The not-man personifies the "spirit of denial"[5] or of revolt against the principle of identity, against the "mediocrity of normalcy." Moreover, the not-man is a fit term for a sociopsychological minority, and I expect few human beings to identify with this borderline ontological category. In this regard, the Cioranian notion resembles Orwell's outlook regarding the "minority of one"[6] which brings us to some interesting questions: am I entitled to live according to my personal truth, if the whole world is lying? Won't the lie of the majority dictate my automatic submission to it? Won't most of us accept the benefits of hypocritical conformism over the disadvantages of isolation and "lunacy"? Apparently, not all of us.

Cioran's concept is an alternative to Nietzsche's controversial notion of the *Übermensch.* For Nietzsche, humanity has only two options: either, it strives through "self-overcoming" towards *Übermenschlichkeit*, or, being unable to fulfil its potentialities, it will stagnate and degenerate

[2] E. M. Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair,* trans. Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 68-69.

[3] Andy Wachowski, Larry Wachowski (directors), *The Matrix Reloaded*, 2003.

[4] See also Ștefan Bolea, "Alien Covenant"*,* in *Philosophy Now*, Issue 124, 2018, 52-3.

[5] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust,* trans. Bayard Taylor, (Hazelton: Pennsylvania State University, 2005), 47: "Mephistopheles: I am the Spirit that Denies!/ And justly so: for all things, from the Void/ Called forth, deserve to be destroyed:/ 'Twere better, then, were naught created./ Thus, all which you as Sin have rated,—/ Destruction,—aught with Evil blent,—/ That is my proper element."

[6] George Orwell, *1984,* (Orlando: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008), 182.

just like the "last men." The last men personify a sort of complacent hedonism[7] ("'we have invented happiness' say the last men, and they blink"[8]), living in an undisturbed ontological sleep: one could say that the last men have not been born yet as responsible, self-aware and free human subjects, preferring to dwell in the somnambulism of ignorance and conformism. So, according to Nietzsche, we either evolve towards *Übermenschlichkeit*, or we devolve towards the *letzte Menschen* who can be thought as the "apes" of the *Übermensch*: "You have made your way from worm to man, and much in you is still worm. Once you were apes, and even now, too, man is more ape than any ape.[9]"

Moreover, Nietzsche argues that the *Übermensch* is not analogous to some kind of deity, transcending the human subject to the "heavens" of Platonism and Christianity: the *Übermensch* is "faithful to the earth", immanent to this world. "The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman *shall be* the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth*, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! Poison-mixers are they, whether they know it or not."[10] The prospect of otherworldly hopes is not only naïve in a world reshaped by the death of God; it is also "poisonous" because it favors the sepulchral taste of transcendence against the "here and now" of this existence. If finitude urges us to strive towards excellence, immortality offers an excuse to live our cosmic instant as dead.

Both the *Übermensch* and the *not-man* can be seen as possible versions of mankind's evolution. Moreover, they show in a striking manner the nowadays impasse of humanism: the shared feeling that humanity is on its "death bed," and that the biotechnological transformations of the near future will alter its very soul. The not-man is a subtler and more complicated term than the *Übermensch*: if Nietzsche's notion refers to a vertical and an almost utopian overcoming, Cioran's conception alludes to a more horizontal and perhaps dystopian transgression. The not-man might be the "shadow" of the *Übermensch*, and he or she could be rejected by the rest of the mankind and even treated as a *sub-man* (as we can see in the writings of Osamu Dazai). Besides, he or she has an ambiguous status: the *not-man* ceases to be human ("I was man and I no longer am now"[11]), but he or she is unable aspire to the heroic status of the *Übermensch*.

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[7] See also Robert C. Solomon, Kathleen M. Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said,* (New York: Schocken Books, 2000), 47.

[8] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Viking Press, 1983), 130.

[9] Ibid., 124.

[10] Ibid., 125.

[11] Emil Cioran, *Amurgul gîndurilor [Twilight of Thoughts],* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1996), p. 126, trans. mine.

2. The Not-Man in 19th Century Literature

I would like to proceed to four examples of *not-men* from Romantic and Post-romantic literature. Antihumanism is deeply connected with romantic loneliness (the feeling of being disjointed from the *In-der-Welt-Sein*), as we can see in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818): "I had never yet seen a being resembling me, or who claimed any intercourse with me … I am alone, and miserable; man will not associate with me"[12]. Like Edgar Allan Poe's lyrical subject in the poem "Alone", the "monster" from *Frankenstein* could affirm: "I could not bring/ my passions from a common spring"[13]. Mary Shelley describes the omnipotence of separation: the inability to see the same essence in the *other* human being and the pains of being cut from an altogether different cloth. The "creature" identifies with Milton's Lucifer and observes that he is even more lonesome than the one who declared that "Myself am Hell"[14]: "The fallen angel becomes a malignant devil. Yet even that enemy of God and man had friends and associates in his desolation; I am alone"[15]. Therefore, I argue that the first symptom of *inhumanity* is the *feeling of separateness, and isolation* or the sense of being cut off from the human species.
The second instance of *inhumanity* can be perceived in Jean Lorrain's short story, "The Possessed" (1895)[16]. One has the feeling that Lorrain's narrator cannot discern between reality and fantasy and his impression of inhumanity is closer to the dimension of animalism, as if evolution could be reversible[17], and we could all degenerate to the level of beasts. But, we can also ask ourselves, whether fantasy does not contain a higher aesthetical value than dull and prosaic reality, which means that its truth is much superior to the distortions and distractions of everyday common sense. Lorrain, and other Post-romantic authors, such as Rollinat, Sá-Carneiro and Swinburne, lure us with the splendor of the nightmare.

> I'd taken the tram from the Louvre to Sèvres, and the distressing effect of the suburban landscape... brought me to such a pitch of anguish while I watched all those ugly faces, that I had to get off near the Pont-du-Jour. I couldn't bear it any longer; I was possessed, so sharply that I could have cried out for merciful relief, by the conviction that all the people facing and sitting to either side of me were beings of some alien race, half-beast and half-man: the disgusting products of I

[12] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus,* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 117, 139.
[13] Edgar Allan Poe, *Poetry and Tales*, ed. Patrick F. Quinn, (New York: Library of America, 1984), 60.
[14] John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* ed. Philip Pullman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 107.
[15] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 96, 213.
[16] For a comparison between Lorrain and Maupassant, see Ștefan Bolea, "Maupassant's Empty Mirror: From the Phenomenology of Anxiety to the Constitution of the Not-Man", in *Hermeneia: Journal of Hermenutics, Theory and Criticism,* XVIII, 2017, 85-92.
[17] Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 78.

> don't know what monstrous copulations, anthropoid creatures far closer to the animal than to the human, with every foul instinct and all the viciousness of wolves, snakes and rats incarnate in their filthy flesh.[18]

Lorrain's narrator cannot identify himself with the bestial nature of his tram companions, because they are perceived as completely degraded. They have the "viciousness" of wolves, snakes and rats, signifying the mark of a fallen creation, both sub-human and devilish. Lorrain's metaphor of the bestiality of humanity indicates not only the narrator's propensity to psychosis (that is only the first layer of meaning), but also the inability of most mankind to transcend its animal nature. We are "more apes than apes," as Nietzsche alluded, when we choose the sleep of stagnation over the fulfillment of our potentialities. In a similar fashion, we are "more rats than rats," when our animal nature overpowers our intellect. Moreover, we sometimes operate as "wolves" disguised under the umbrella of humanitarianism. In Lorrain's vision, inhumanity is linked with both *psychosis* and *the otherness of bestiality*.

In Maupassant's horror story "Horla" (1886), the narrator is confronted with an invisible monster that tortures and seeks to enslave him. The evolutionary cautionary tale conceived by the French writer prefigures Cioran: The Horla as a not-man is the extreme alterity of mankind conceives as *alienus* (ontological stranger), who intends to put end to the hegemony of man. According to Maupassant, the Horla is a sort of "new god" (a devil from the opposing perspective: but defeated gods become devils once they are substituted with the gods of the victorious religion), who will use man as man uses "horse and ox". Of course, there is an obvious ecological layer (that is also visible in the short stories of Villiers de L'Isle-Adam), that claims that our mastery over animals (for instance our carnivorism) can be taken for granted only at our peril. After all, Horla's dominion over man echoes our unquestioned and probably unjustified dominion over animals based on the authority of the Bible[19]. Moreover, Maupassant seems to infer that humanity has reached a dead end, a *terminus*: "After man, the *not-man*". Therefore, the feeling that humanity is on the *"death bed" and that the succession* of another ontological category is imperative is also symptomatic for inhumanity.

A final instance of 19th century inhumanity can be observed in Lautréamont's *Chants of Maldoror* (1869). The French poet derives his misanthropy from an "absolute misotheism"[20], an attitude more radical and extreme than the one assumed by his forerunners (Byron, P. B. Shelley or Blake). Therefore, he breaks without hesitation from the pattern of likeness[21], insulting both the creature and his creator: "Stupid, idiotic race! You will regret having acted

[18] Jean Lorrain, "The Possessed" in Brian M. Stableford (Ed.), *The Daedalus Book of Decadence*, (Sawtry: Dedalus Limited, 2001), 128-9.
[19] *Gen.*, 1, 16.
[20] Bernard Schweizer, *Hating God. The Untold Story of Misotheism,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2011, 18-9.
[21] *Gen,* 1, 27.

thus! It is I who tell you. You will regret it! My poetry will consist exclusively of attacks on man, that wild beast, and the Creator, who ought never to have bred such vermin"[22]. The French symbolist anticipates not only the avant-garde but also Cioran[23] with his surreal apocalypse of lice, which are meant to destroy and replace an obsolete species: "If the face of the earth were covered with lice as the sea-shore is covered with grains of sand, the human race would be destroyed, a prey to dreadful pain. What a sight! With me, motionless on my angel wings in the air to contemplate it!"[24] Maldoror, Lautréamont's lyrical subject, becomes an agent of destruction, not unlike Nietzsche or Bakunin. Accordingly, the fourth symptom of inhumanity consists in the *inherent violence* which would probably distinguish the transition towards the not-man.

3. Thomas Bernhard's Version of the Not-Man

Thomas Bernhard's debut novel, *Frost* (1963) consists of a long monologue of the painter Strauch, who retreated to the remote, unfriendly, and icy mountain hamlet of Weng to escape from the responsibilities and anguish of everyday existence. The narrator of the book is a young medical student, who is assigned by Strauch's brother to keep an eye and report on the painter's condition. The student is at first startled by Strauch's peculiar nihilism and slow descent into mental illness but, in time, becomes sympathetic with the painter's disturbing existential crisis.

The first theme of the novel circles around suicide and antinatalism. "Is it permissible for suicide to be a sort of secret pleasure to a man?"[25], asks himself the student, observing the painter's obsession (a passion shared with Cioran). "By committing suicide, I am destroying something for which I am not to blame,"[26] notes the afflicted painter, reminding of Cioran's conception which claims that birth is "fortuitous" and "a laughable accident"[27]. Both Strauch and Cioran would agree that fatherhood is a "crime"[28]. Bernhard prefigures the antinatalism of Jim Crawford, Thomas Ligotti or Nic Pizzolatto, a doctrine based on Cioran's Schopenhauerian world view:

[22] Comte de Lautréamont, *Maldoror and Poems,* trans. Paul Knight, (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 73-4.

[23] E.M. Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*, trans. Richard Howard, (New York: Arcade Books, 1972), 36.

[24] Ibid., 92.

[25] Thomas Bernhard, *Frost,* trans. Michael Hoffmann, (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 16-7.

[26] Ibid., 17.

[27] Emil Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born,* trans. Richard Howard, (New York: Seaver Books, 1976), 6.

[28] Ibid. See also Nic Pizzolatto (creator), *True Detective,* I, 2, 2014: "Think of the hubris it must take to yank a soul out of nonexistence into this … meat, to force a life into this … thresher. That's … so my daughter, she spared me the sin of being a father."

> It's a great crime to create a person, when you know he'll be unhappy, certainly if there's any unhappiness about. The unhappiness that exists momentarily is the whole of unhappiness. To produce solitude just because you don't want to be alone anymore yourself is a crime … The drive of nature is criminal, and to appeal to it is a pretext, just as everything people do is a pretext.[29]

Especially the phrase "the happiness that exists momentarily is the whole of unhappiness" bears Schopenhauerian connotations, reminding that existence is basically suffering. That could seem far removed from common sense, because life can easily be described also as a pleasurable and enjoyable experience. However, both Schopenhauer and Bernhard argue that the intensity of suffering brands the human being with hot iron, setting the tone for our individual existence: starting from Aeschylus's principle of πάθει μάθος[30] (often translated as "learning through suffering"), one can claim that knowledge and even self awareness are by-products of suffering. Even on a more general level, once our eyes are open, we discern that suffering is "the rule of mankind,"[31] and that the moments of evasion from the "nightmare of existence" are rare.

According to the great forerunner of 20th century nihilism – Arthur Schopenhauer – "[n]o one is to be greatly *envied,* countless are to be greatly *lamented*"[32]. Moreover, "the world and therefore also mankind is something that actually should not be"[33].

> If one imagines the sum of distress, pain and suffering of every kind, as far as approximately possible, which the sun shines upon in its course, then one will have to grant that it would be much better if the sun had not been able to produce the phenomenon of life any better on earth than on the moon, but instead the surface of the former still found itself in a crystalline state, as on the moon. – // One can also conceive of our life as a uselessly disturbing episode in the blissful calm of nothingness.[34]

Or, if you prefer a postmodern version of Schopenhauerism: "I wish I were never born. I wish my children had never been born. I wish the sun would explode and crisp us all as we

[29] Bernhard, *Frost,* 28-9.

[30] *Agamemnon* 177.

[31] See Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena,* vol. 2, ed. Christopher Janaway, Adrian del Caro, trans. Adrian del Caro, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 262: "Each individual misfortune appears to be an exception, to be sure, but misfortune generally is the rule".

[32] Ibid., 270.

[33] Ibid., 273.

[34] Ibid., 269.

sleep, leaving the Earth a charred, barren, lifeless ball of nothing…"[35] Antinatalists affirm that non-existence is preferable to an existence devoured by pain and suffering, that basically death (as lack of suffering) is more desirable than life. Nietzsche attacks this Schopenhauerian *Weltanschaaung* in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "'Life is only suffering,' others say, and do not lie: see to it, then, that *you* cease! See to it, then, that the life which is only suffering ceases!"[36] According to Nietzsche, the essential characteristic of life is not suffering, but mainly will to power (and this understanding leads to the ulterior anti-nihilistic doctrine of eternal recurrence).

Coming back to Bernhard, the Austrian writer describes the human condition using three powerful symbols. The first one is the *death mask*.

> Then, in front of the trunk that looms out of the middle of the pond, he said: "We all live the lives of death masks. Everyone who is really alive has taken his off at one time or another, but as I say, people don't live, it's just, as I say, the life of death masks." There were no real humans anymore, just death masks of real humans. And the whole thing was so grotesque precisely because it amounted to a vast "crippling by reason," spreading from our brains to those of friends and neighbors. "A seeming life, no longer capable of real life. Cities that are long since dead, mountains too, long dead, livestock, poultry, even water and the creatures that used to live in the water. Reflections of our death masks. A death-mask ball," he said.[37]

The death mask, not unlike the Jungian persona (which disguises the fact that underneath the mask we are more or less real and authentic persons) disguises the fact that we are living existential subjects. Death becomes our interpersonal currency, our means of communication: "Are you dead? So am I." The death mask is a necessary interpersonal lie, and if you tell the truth, you are discarded as a "minority of one." Being alive is a crime in the society of sleepwalkers just as authenticity is a punishable offense in the society of *das Man*.
The second symbol used by Bernhard is the *frozen scream* from the abattoir.

> He says, staring through the open abattoir doors: "There it is clearly in front of you, broken open, sliced apart. And there's the scream as well, of course! If you listen, you'll catch the scream as well. You will still hear the scream, even though the facility for the production of the scream is dead, is severed, chopped up, ripped open. The vocal cords have been rendered, but the scream is still there! It's a grotesque realization that the vocal cords have been smashed, chopped up, sliced apart, and the scream is *still there* … Schoolchildren should not be brought to heated classrooms, they should be made to attend abattoirs; it is only from abattoirs that I expect

[35] Jim Crawford, *Confessions of an Anti-Natalist,* Charleston: Nine-Banded Books, 2010), 48.
[36] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 157.
[37] Bernhard, *Frost*, 269.

> understanding of the world and of the world's bloody life. Our teachers should do their work in abattoirs. Not read from books, but swing hammers, wield saws, and apply knives …"[38]

The scream of the sacrificed animal in the absence of the severed vocal chords is ghostly in a disturbing fashion. In the manner of Maupassant, Bernhard compares the destiny of the human being with the trajectory of a slaughtered beast. The mute scream of the existential subject facing execution is the "only constant" and "infinite" thing. Again, Bernhard alludes to Schopenhauer: "We resemble lambs playing in the meadow while the butcher already makes his selection of one or the other of them with his eyes"[39]. The abattoir is seen as the genuine classroom, where we learn that life is a bloody affair, that suffering and violence are the main features of existence. We can ask ourselves if this lesson does not encourage submission and a feeling of powerlessness (and an enormous amount of fear), distinct traits of passivity and conformism. One might observe that even Maupassant, imagining the horrifying scenario of the dominion of the Horla, argued for resistance and rebellion (in Max Stirner's fashion): "After all, dogs sometimes bite their masters; don't they go for the throat?[40]" Resistance might be futile but that is no reason to lay down the arms.

The third symbol is that of *ontological frost*.

> "The Föhn, you know. Inside, I was freezing. That's where it gets you, inside" … Sometimes cold air entered the house when someone forgot to shut the windows, and everything in it perished. "Even dreams die. Everything turns into cold. The imagination, everything" … "Let's go on," he said, "it's cold. The cold is eating into the center of my brain. If only you knew how far the cold had already advanced into my brain. The insatiable cold, the cold that insists on its bloody nourishment of cells, that insists on my brain, on everything that could make anything, could become anything … There is," he said, "no longer the category of 'secret,' it doesn't exist, everything is just *frigor mortis*. I see the cold, I can write it down, I can dictate it, it's killing me …" In the village, he popped into the abattoir. He said: "Cold is one of the great A-truths, the greatest of all the A-truths, and therefore it is all truths rolled into one … "I confront myself with the keenest frost, which to the thought is true and acute, and pitifully ridiculous … I am undergoing a 'chilling of my memory' …"[41]

Similar to Frankenstein's monster, Strauch advances to a certain "North Pole of Being," where *frigor mortis* cuts him off from alterity (the medical student cannot be

[38] Ibid., 275-6.

[39] Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena,* 263.

[40] Guy de Maupassant, "Horla", in *A Day in the Country and Other Stories*, trans. David Coward, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 295.

[41] Bernhard, *Frost,* 22, 26, 275, 314.

considered a genuine alterity for the painter, because one feels that Strauch does not really acknowledge him, that the "other" is only a splintered mirror of a dissociated self). Frost can be seen as a metaphor of both madness and death. Death is the painter's main obsession (the student writes of the painter's "passion" for suicide): as we have seen with the symbolism of the death mask and the "frozen" scream. The "chilling" of the self ("the cold is eating into the center of my brain") reminds us not only of affective coldness of schizophrenia and its lack of empathy but also of the detachment of pure intellectual activity. Strauch lives inside his brain: both in a remote castle of Platonic ideas and in a spiritual asylum, where no one really perceives his frozen scream.

The fact that the main character is probably mentally ill (like Jean Lorrain's narrator) cannot obscure (just as "dark" fantasy discloses the nature of everyday reality) the certainty that the presupposed deception of madness hides a truth which is superior to the fabrications of normalcy: that we indeed operate under the guise of a death mask, which means we feel more comfortable interacting within a social framework that rewards death-in-life and punishes authentic existence; and that the frozen scream from the abattoir is our inner howl: no one answers because no one really listens. We scream for mainly two reasons: because we are going to die and because we never really lived, being afraid of both dying and living. According to Bernhard, at the death-mask ball we are just puppets repressing a frozen scream:
our birth – a crime,
our life – death,
our death – a self-adjustment of nothingness.

4. By Way of Conclusion

Remembering the four characteristics of psychological inhumanity (the feeling of isolation and separateness, a "veer" towards psychosis and a perception of bestiality, a sense of succession towards a new ontological category, and the violent conflict between man and not-man) described in the brief presentation of the 19th century literature, we could see that all these traits are present in Bernhard's first novel. The painter Strauch is just as disconnected (if not more) from the otherness of humanity as M. Shelley's famous character. *Frost* signifies metaphorically this separation, and also his descent into mental illness. In the manner of Jean Lorrain's "possessed man", terrorized by the "voraciousness" of wolves, Strauch perceives the inner bestiality of the other people: "Those dogs will kill everything … This is a dog's world"[42]. Moreover, Bernhard's character can be understood as a "being of succession" towards the category of the *not-man* (being a radical nihilist and a near-psychotic). Violence is also present in the grim presentation of life as death (the symbolic metaphor of the death mask) or as bloody sacrifice (the metaphor of the frozen scream from the abattoir): not unlike in Cioran's work, suicide becomes a centerpiece of the existential puzzle, because it provides an automatic

[42] Ibid., 39.

escape from the tortures of this infernal universe. One could see why we have described the *not-man* as a shadow of the *Übermensch* and the extreme pessimism (if not nihilism) of this post-human scenario: between (death as) *madness* and (death as) *suicide*, there is really no choice. Can we escape from inferno if “myself am Hell”? Perhaps we have to find a new route to humanity, or, more likely, we have to drift further and try to conquer a another ontological category.