

Title: Quotes from “Concrete” of Thomas Bernhard Author: Thomas Bernhard  
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These are my highlights from the book. I read this in March-April 2016. In general I like the book and feel connection with the *protagonist*. I updated my index page with one of these as of May 2017. – E.

We must be alone and free from all human contact if we wish to embark upon an intellectual task!

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Doctors don’t get much below the surface. They always neglect everything, and that’s what they constantly reproach their patients with — negligence. Doctors have no conscience: they simply answer the medical call of nature. But we repeatedly run to them because we can’t believe that this is so. If I carry these suitcases for even the shortest distance it may finish me off, I told myself.

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Everyone wants to be alive, nobody wants to be dead. Everything else is a lie. In the end they sit in an armchair or in some wing-chair and dream dreams of the past which bear not the slightest relation to reality. There ought to be only happy people — all the necessary conditions are present - but there are only unhappy people.

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While we are young and without pain we not only believe in eternal life, but have it.

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We say notes to avoid embarrassment, although we secretly believe that these sentences which we blushing call notes are really more than that. But we believe the same of everything to do with ourselves. This is how we swing ourselves over the abyss, not knowing how deep it is. And in fact the depth does not matter if everybody falls to his death, which we know to be the case.

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Everyone is a virtuoso on his own instrument, but together they add up to an intolerable caco-phany.

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[H]ear nothing about this or that person whom I once thought I couldn’t be without. Most of them have founded a family, as they say, made a living and built themselves a house; they’ve tried to secure themselves on all sides and in the course of time they’ve become uninteresting. I no longer see them, or if I do we’ve nothing to say to each other.

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But do ten years of preparation — for I really had been preparing for it for so long — justify one in embarking on a task like this when one is totally worn out, as I am now? I said alternately nothing justifies it and everything justifies it. It was best to give up questioning the wisdom or unwisdom of such a task, and so I gave it up and pretended that I was in fact determined to embark upon the task as soon as possible.

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You sit here in your house, which is nothing but a morgue, and cultivate the society of the dead, of mother and father and our unfortunate sister and all your so-called great minds.

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You only love Mendelssohn Bartholdy because he's a Jew, she said scornfully. She came out with this remark for the first time on her last visit, quite out of the blue, and perhaps it was true. She had turned up, ruined my work, and in the end almost ruined me. Women turn up, get you in their toils and ruin you.

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We can't stand male company, which bores us to death, or female company either. I gave up male company for years because it's totally unprofitable, and female company gets on my nerves in no time.

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There's no question of having a woman friend and intellectual ambitions! Either I have the one or I have the other; to have both is impossible.

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One telling difference between West Germany and Austria as successor states to the Nazi-Reich was that Austria refused to regard itself as such. West Germany, of course, had no choice. Gerhard Roth, another Austrian writer, has suggested that the Austrians discovered that when they had been committing criminal acts they had been Germans. So, by becoming Austrians again after 1945, their consciences, Kurt Waldheim's included, were clear.

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Had I published my essay on Schönberg I shouldn't dare to be seen in the street any longer; the same would be true if I'd published my work on Nietzsche, although that was not a complete failure. To publish anything is folly and evidence of a certain defect of character. To publish the intellect is the most heinous of all crimes, and on a number of occasions I have not recoiled from committing this most heinous of crimes. It wasn't even done out of a crude urge to communicate, because I've never wanted to communicate my ideas to

anybody. That has never attracted me. It was a craving for fame pure and simple.

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Husbands who have been deceived and lied to and made to look fools have for centuries fled to South America, never to return. It's a tradition that goes back a long way.

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Naturally she knows a lot, more than most of the people she associates with, but her knowledge is of the most superficial kind, and yet nobody notices this. Where others constantly have to convince you in order not to be defeated and collapse and make themselves ridiculous, she remains silent and invariably scores a triumph, or else she makes some perfectly timed remark, from which it follows that she is in control of the whole scene.

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[N]othing bores me more, there's nothing I find drearier than walking, nothing is a greater torment to my heart and lungs. I'm not a nature-lover, I never was, and I never let myself be forced into being one.

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People keep a dog and are ruled by this dog, and even Schopenhauer was ruled in the end not by his head, but by his dog. This fact is more depressing than any other. Fundamentally it was not Schopenhauer's head that determined his thought, but Schopenhauer's dog. It was not the head that hated Schopenhauer's world, but Schopenhauer's dog. I don't have to be demented to assert that Schopenhauer had a dog on his shoulders and not a head.

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People love animals because they are incapable even of loving themselves. Those with the very basest of souls keep dogs, allowing themselves to be tyrannized and finally ruined by their dogs. They give the dog pride of place in their hypocrisy, which in the end becomes a public menace.

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It is said that the tallest, most expensive and most precious tombstone ever set up in the history of the world is one to the memory of a dog. No, not in America, as one inevitably assumes, but in London.

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The narrator in Concrete describes himself as 'tiresome, unbearable, sick, in the truest sense of the word, impossible', and that is how Bernhard himself has been seen. Yet, one perceptive critic concluded his obituary with the remark that Bernhard was 'probably ... the most loved author of our time'.