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Part One: Bachmann and History,  
Chapter 2. Bachmann's Feminist  
Reception

Sara Lennox

## CHAPTER 2

# *Bachmann's Feminist Reception*

*One must in general be able  
to read a book in different  
ways and to read it  
differently today than  
tomorrow.*

(Ingeborg Bachmann,  
Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden)

*Every reader, when he reads,  
is in reality a reader of  
himself.*

—Ingeborg Bachmann,  
Werke, quoting Proust

Since the late 1970s, the enthusiastic response of feminist readers, critics, and scholars to the writing of Ingeborg Bachmann has produced a radical reassessment of her work. As I explained in chapter 1, she owed her reputation during her lifetime to the two highly accomplished volumes of lyric poetry she published in the 1950s, *Die gestundete Zeit* and *Anrufung des Großen Bären*. Her critics responded more negatively to her subsequent attempts at prose fiction, *The Thirtieth Year* (1961) and the first finished volumes of her “Ways of Death” cycle, *Malina* (1971) and *Three Paths to the Lake* (1972). But after her death in 1973, feminist readers rediscovered her fiction, now focusing their attention on representations of femininity in the “Ways of Death,” augmented in 1978 by the posthumous publication of two novel fragments, *The Franza Case* (now called *The Book of Franza*) and *Requiem for Fanny Goldmann*. By the 1980s “the other Ingeborg Bachmann,” as Sigrid Weigel termed her (“Andere” 5), had achieved the status of cult figure within German feminism; feminist literary scholars’ spirited and subtle reinterpretations of her writing had produced a renaissance in Bachmann scholarship; and Bachmann’s texts had become central to the German feminist literary canon.

In a study of Bachmann’s reception before 1973, Constance Hotz argues that 1950s journalists constructed an image of her that met the political needs of their era, turning Bachmann into an “exemplum for [Germany’s] reconstruction, its reattainment of international standards, its achievement of recognition in the world” (72). Here I want to advance a similar thesis about Bachmann’s recep-

tion by German (and some American) feminists. The feminist reading that produced “the other Ingeborg Bachmann” is, I maintain, also a product of its time, emerging from the cultural climate out of which the German feminist movement grew to advance an interpretation of Bachmann consistent with the movement’s theoretical assumptions. This chapter is thus intended to illustrate two of my central theses about the historicity of literary production and reception: that readings of a text, as well as the text itself, are responses to the discursive and other pressures of the historical period from which they emerge; and that since different kinds of readings serve different political ends, disagreements about interpretations in fact are very often the consequence of the different political “positionalities” of those who advance them. After sketching out the political landscape that produced German feminism, I trace the steps by which a particular feminist reading of Bachmann, with affinities to American radical feminism and allegiances to its own version of French feminist poststructuralism, came into being. As I demonstrate, by the mid-1980s that feminist approach had produced an outpouring of Bachmann studies and gained an almost hegemonic control over Bachmann scholarship.

By the end of the 1980s, however, some uncertainty had become apparent in approaches to Bachmann’s writing, deriving from a more general confusion about what now counted as a feminist perspective. The course henceforth pursued by feminist Bachmann scholars corresponded generally to the different directions taken by feminist literary scholarship in Germany and Austria, on the one hand, and in English-speaking countries, on the other. Especially in German-speaking countries a number of mostly younger, mostly women scholars continued to apply a feminist-poststructuralist method mainly to Bachmann’s prose works. But at least an equal number of both younger and more established scholars in Germany and Austria, even those who had previously identified as feminists, now pursued other aspects of Bachmann’s works without making gender a central category of their analysis, even in cases where questions about gender might easily have been posed. Particularly in Britain and North America, in contrast, both younger and more established scholars responded to the critiques of early 1980s feminism to advance more differentiated, historically and culturally specific notions of femininity and gender. They elaborated feminist versions of the many new methods (cultural studies, new historicism, minority studies, postcolonial studies, queer theory) now employed in English-speaking German Studies and also advanced new and creative approaches to Bachmann’s writing. At the end of this chapter I argue that feminist Bachmann scholars today confront the challenge of continuing to assert the necessity of

gender-based approaches to Bachmann's works while also pursuing new feminist approaches that are adequate to the scholarly and political demands of the new millennium.

When *Malina* and *Three Paths to the Lake* appeared in the early 1970s, they were scarcely acknowledged by the West German women who would soon become feminists, for within the charged political climate of that time, reading novels was a sign of complicity with the bourgeois establishment. The West German student movement had emerged full blown after the June 1967 demonstration against the Shah of Iran, during which a Berlin student was killed. Many New Left activists of that period were convinced that students could become the vanguard of worldwide revolution, joining their efforts to those of their comrades in Third World countries such as Cuba, the Congo, and Vietnam. "A specter is haunting Europe, the specter of revolution," German author Hans Magnus Enzensberger proclaimed in *Kursbuch* in January 1968, and ten months later he declared, again in *Kursbuch*, that bourgeois literature was quite irrelevant to the tasks German revolutionaries then confronted: "In our situation, it is not possible to determine a significant social function for literary works of art" (7, 51). For, as Hazel E. Hazel has explained, that exuberant period around 1968 was "the time when literature was deemed superfluous and even in part was, since we no longer expected literature, but rather reality, to fulfill our desires" (129–30). Or as Michael Schneider put it, "Everyday life itself was to become a work of art within which the human instinct to play, freed from interior and exterior necessity, from fear, exploitation, and alienated labor, could finally realize itself" (147). But as the student movement waned, the New Left abandoned its earlier antiauthoritarianism, maintaining that the proper form of revolutionary self-organization was the highly disciplined cadre group organized along the Leninist model, and enjoined its adherents to go into the factories to organize the real revolutionary subject, the German proletariat. By subordinating individual needs to the purposes of the collective, the "K-Groups," which "around 1969/70 sprang up like mushrooms," as Schneider (151) later recalled, put an end to earlier New Left attempts to combine the personal and the political. The dogmatic and economistic appropriation of Marxism by the K-Groups throttled hopes for the development of an analysis and a form of political activism that would have demanded the transformation of both personal life and of the larger worldwide structures of domination that had originally called the New Left into being.

Objective and subjective factors combined to produce West Germany's much-heralded *Tendenzwende* (change of political direction) in the mid-1970s. An

economic downturn, the *Radikalerlaß* (decree against radicals) of 1972, and the subsequent *Berufsverbot* (ban on careers) later in the decade caused many erstwhile revolutionaries to have second thoughts about the wisdom of their commitment to revolution. The self-denial demanded by their commitment to a doctrinaire Marxism now turned into its opposite, as Schneider has explained: "If for five years they hadn't acknowledged anything else but the rigorous logic of *Capital*, now they projected their loathing of their own rigorousness onto the theorist of *Capital*, that is, onto Marxism. And of course in the same moment they rediscovered their old love for beauty, for art, and for sensuality. . . . And if for five years happiness consisted solely of socking it to the class enemy, now happiness again consisted solely of the happiness of the individual" (155).

This is the moment at which West German feminism emerged, simultaneously a critique of the male left's theoretical and practical subordination of women and personal needs to its own purposes *and* an expression of the larger cultural move away from politics to a new sensibility and new subjectivity. West German women from the left determined that the study of Marx did not allow them to address their own condition, as one woman from the socialist women's group in Frankfurt, the Weiberrat (Dames' Council) recalled in the first *Frauenjahrbuch* (Women's yearbook): "So it came about that the longer we dealt with Marxist theory, the less attention we paid to the fact of women's oppression" (*Frauenjahrbuch* 21). Instead, West German women of the early 1970s increasingly organized in autonomous groups around issues of immediate relevance to their lives: they joined the campaign against paragraph 218 (the antiabortion clause of the Federal Republic's Basic Law), addressed issues of sexual preference, motherhood, and contraception, founded women's centers and *Selbsterfahrungsgruppen* ("self-experiencing groups," the German term for consciousness-raising groups); organized *Frauenfeste* (large women-only parties); and celebrated sisterhood. The striking political shift that the new politics of self-affirmation and self-discovery represented was captured by a cartoon from the *Frauenjahrbuch* in which a female figure proclaimed: "The most wonderful day of my life was the day I discovered my clitoris" (*Frauenjahrbuch* 77).

For a variety of reasons West German feminists thus focused their political analysis primarily on women's oppression in the private sphere and engaged in political activities mainly in cultural areas. At its best, feminism made connections between gender issues, private life, subjectivity, sexuality, and every other area of social life, a deepening and broadening of conceptions of the political, visions of social change, and forms of political struggle. But when those connections were not made, some kinds of feminism, particularly those focused

only on improving individual women's personal lives, represented a retreat from politics, not an expansion of them. West German feminists' general suspicion of Marxism and other "male" theories hindered the development of an analysis that could have located their private sufferings in the context of its specific determinants within a larger social framework. Some 1970s feminists retained a commitment to left analysis and left practice, and the one major exception to feminist hostility to Marxism was the wages-for-housework debate of the late 1970s. But many other feminists (often those who came to politics after the decline of the left) now elaborated new forms of feminist theory, arguing that since the world-historical defeat of matriarchy, an undifferentiated patriarchy had been responsible for the oppression of women everywhere. Socialist feminism played an even smaller role in the West German women's movement than in the United States and in other West European countries, and the political stance of the early West German feminist movement as a whole resembled that of American radical feminism (Kulawik 77). Those politics dominated West German feminism into the 1980s, as Myra Marx Ferree explains: "The concept "feminist" generally means a radical feminist analysis, which takes oppression by patriarchy as its starting point, manifested in male control of the female body—in marriage, motherhood, sexuality, and the workplace. . . . Gender is viewed as the primary, fundamental difference; class and ethnicity are in contrast secondary qualities and competing forms of political identity. Even though class occasionally is used as an analogy and metaphor for gender, gender counts as the more fundamental criterion" ("Gleichheit" 289–90).

From the mid-1980s onward, however, West German feminist consensus about a radical feminist analysis and an autonomous political strategy was drawn partially into question both by the changes attendant upon the Christian Democrat accession to power in 1982 and by the activities of large numbers of women in the Greens and other political parties. The emergence of Afro-German women and other women of color as a constituency within West German feminism raised significant questions about the purported unity of interests of all women—questions only compounded after unification by the discovery of the extraordinary differences, manifesting themselves very swiftly as anger and hostility, between West German and East German women in life experience, self-definition, political priorities, and forms of organization. Nor were feminists immune to the larger shift in political atmosphere occasioned by the collapse of communism and the Federal Republic's absorption of the GDR. As Konrad Jarausch observed: "The defeat of communism has fundamentally transformed the conditions for the old ideological confrontation between Left

and Right by discrediting the former and bolstering the latter. Newly confident due to their triumph over the East, various economic, moral, and national conservatives are trying to reclaim the ground they had largely lost to the new social movements after the cultural revolution of 1968" (10). In part because they lacked any supra-regional forms of organization that could defend women's interests on the national level, German feminists found themselves incapable of responding politically to conservative assaults on women's rights, assaults including the elimination of "socialist achievements" that had benefited GDR women and the decision of the Constitutional Court to overturn the Bundestag compromise on abortion legislation and declare that abortion in Germany was henceforth "illegal"—if also "free from punishment." A decade after unification the perception still prevailed that "women were the losers of German unification." Despite hopes to the contrary, the Social Democratic (SPD)/Green coalition government's accession to power in fall 1998 did not in fact represent an enormous lurch to the left. (An example of the coalition's break with what might earlier have been regarded as traditional Social Democratic politics can be seen in the comment of Peter Struck, then leader of the SPD parliamentary faction: "The old motto of a workers' party, taking from the rich to give to the poor, doesn't suit a modern society" [Germnews 10 August 1999]). Why the new coalition government did not bring about a sudden upturn in feminist fortunes is perhaps also suggested by remarks made by Doris Schroeder, the chancellor's wife, in a *Stern* interview of Summer 1999: "I like to be in the background," and "If you're good and reach people's hearts, it doesn't matter what your sex is" ("Frau Doris").

The analysis developed by feminist intellectuals (including writers and literary critics) in the late 1970s to justify and advance the politics of the autonomous women's movement in West Germany elaborated upon its basic principles. Gender was the most fundamental form of oppression; as Verena Stefan put it in *Häutungen* (Shedding) in 1975; "Sexism goes deeper than racism than class struggle" (34). Women everywhere and always were victims of men's violence, as Alice Schwarzer declared in *Der "kleine Unterschied" und seine großen Folgen* (The "little difference" and its big consequences, 1975): "Nothing, neither race nor class, determines a human life as much as gender. And in that regard women and men are victims of their roles—but women are victims of the victims" (178). (That portrayal of women as victims, Angelika Bammer has argued, was particularly attractive to German feminists, since it relieved them of the necessity of pondering women's complicity in National Socialism.) Women and men were fundamentally different from each other, and those differences should be

preserved, not eradicated. Men's domination over women took the form of the oppression, suppression, and/or repression of femininity, a monolithic and all-encompassing patriarchy expressing itself most perniciously through its "colonization" of female consciousness and culture. Feminists believed they discerned preexisting alternatives to patriarchy in the past either of the human species (in prehistoric matriarchal societies or other preserves of women's culture) or of the individual (in preoedipal psychic organization or the prediscursive drives of the female body). Culture and consciousness thus became the main arenas of feminist social transformation. The task of feminism was to disrupt, deconstruct, and destroy patriarchal culture and to retrieve and elaborate alternative female forms for the future so as to create a new feminist culture that could promote the emergence of a new female subjectivity. After an initial flirtation with theories of matriarchy, many West German feminist literary scholars turned enthusiastically to a direction of feminist literary analysis that had begun to seep into Germany from France: French poststructuralist feminism. Drawing on that French theory, literary scholars looked for works by women that could disrupt the all-embracing phallogocentric symbolic order, recover a hitherto repressed femininity (sometimes defined as a dispersed, destabilized identity or that which eludes definition [Fraser, Introduction 7]), and create new forms for female subjectivity that would finally permit female otherness to speak.

By the end of the 1980s, a number of feminist academics (perhaps more frequently in the United States than in Germany) had raised some troubling questions about a radical feminist analysis. Economic and political changes over the course of the decade led feminists to question whether domination was really exercised mainly in the symbolic realm of culture, consciousness, or discourse. More complex ideas of how power functioned suggested that it was wrong to argue for the existence of only one single system of domination or to elide patriarchy with other structural forms of oppression (such as fascism, capitalism, colonialism, enlightenment). Some feminists questioned the utility of the term "patriarchy" (or "phallogocentrism") altogether, since it suggested that a single form of male domination was responsible for the oppression of all women. Similarly, they questioned the invocation of a female identity, female subjectivity, or femininity repressed by a dominant order, since it seemed premised on a belief in a transhistorical female essence, as if only one sort of woman had existed throughout all time and culture. Feminists increasingly rejected the argument that women were always victims of the dominant order and never agents of oppression themselves. Among other U.S. feminist theorists, Judith Butler, whose works enjoyed a surprising success in Germany in the early 1990s, ques-

tioned the stability and even the political utility of categories such as “woman,” suggesting that “performance,” “masquerade,” or even at times “parody” better described manifestations of femininity. Such fundamental challenges to a paradigm that had predominated in feminist analysis for over a decade now left feminist literary scholars in some confusion about how to proceed—not the least in the area of Bachmann scholarship.

The analysis that would make Bachmann’s prose accessible to German women had not yet emerged, of course, in the years before Bachmann’s death when her last prose works were published. In the polarized political context of the early 1970s, *Malina* and *Three Paths to the Lake* could not help but disappoint (or even enrage) engaged readers, and, as Elke Atzler showed in a review of *Malina*’s reception, even mainstream reviewers lamented its “turning a blind eye to social constraints” (157). A review by Michael Springer in *konkret* was typical of the New Left response to *Malina*. Springer is quite willing to acknowledge the accuracy of Bachmann’s portrait of her protagonist: “Doubtless the kind of private hell in which the main figure of *Malina* lives is reality for most good bourgeois housewives.” But he protests the absence of two elements that really are missing from *Malina*: explicit social criticism and resistance. By failing explicitly to show how (or even that) her figure’s suffering was embedded in and derived from the bourgeois society to which she belongs, Springer argues, Bachmann permits readings of her novel that do not draw that society into question: “Anyone who doesn’t question the bourgeois lifestyle and the manners and manias with which it cages in women makes himself complicit in it.” And Bachmann’s portrayal of a woman utterly unable to defend herself against her tormentors suggests that her fate is inevitable: “Who is helped when it’s shown that it’s impossible that way [*daß es so nicht geht*], and when it’s shown in such a way that dying in dubious beauty is the unavoidable consequence of these complications—as a tragedy?” (60).

Springer’s was not the only left response possible in that period; Hans Mayer, indebted to a different kind of Marxist criticism (and a far better critic), wrote a sympathetic review of *Malina* that defended it against leftist misreadings: “In reviews people accused this ‘heroine’ and her author of being someone who, in the midst of bourgeois prosperity, is only striving for individual happiness. . . . Those who read that way have misunderstood the novel. The self-realization of the ‘I’ is prevented by the social conditions that always stand in the way of such fulfilled moments” (164). But there is no reason to believe that women of the New Left responded differently from Springer, and Sigrid Weigel has commented on “politically engaged women’s lack of attention to Bachmann’s novel *Malina* when it appeared in 1971” (*Stimme* 27).

But if politicized women of the early 1970s were uninterested in *Malina*, that was not at all the case for a more general female readership. Springer's review had suggested that the interests served by books like *Malina* were those of the *Kulturbetrieb* (culture industry): "By means of clever packaging this anti-Love Story was turned into a bestseller; the 'better circles' enjoyed the bitter taste, which by contrast sweetened their shallow lives" (60). Perhaps for that reason, *Malina* enjoyed an immediate, if surprising, popularity among readers who evidently did not measure it by New Left standards. As *Die Zeit* reported, its publisher, Suhrkamp Verlag, launched an exceptionally cynical public relations campaign that targeted women readers: "A mail-in campaign was begun last week to gain readers, not just buyers, for this book, which Suhrkamp's director Siegfried Unseld hopes will outsell Hildegard Knef's *Gift Horse*. The question posed on the dust cover, 'Murder or Suicide,' is to be answered on a mail-in coupon, with a one-sentence justification—and only women are allowed to participate. First, second, and third prizes consist of a skiing weekend with Unseld at St. Moritz" (P n.p.). Released in April, *Malina* reached third place on the *Spiegel's* best-seller list by mid-May and, Vienna's *Wochenpresse* reported, on May 24 moved up to second place, just behind the American tearjerker *Love Story* ("Gut" n.p.).

It may be possible to regard the enthusiastic reaction to *Malina* as an indication of prescient readers' awareness of the impending sea change in German literary production that was soon to produce the "New Subjectivity" of the 1970s. Wolfgang Kraus, for instance, attributes some portion of the novel's success to the "rise of the 'soft wave,' a kind of new romanticism, which also pushes a different literary genre to the fore. If *Malina* had appeared two years ago, perhaps even a year ago, it's doubtful that it would have enjoyed the same resonance with readers as now" (n.p.). Perhaps, too, one could recognize in women readers' enthusiasm for *Malina* a response not so different from the feminist excitement several years later about Verena Stefan's *Shedding* and other semiautobiographical women's narratives of the 1970s: they believed they recognized their own lives in the story of *Malina's* "I." (Weigel suggested something of that sort a decade later when she deplored "the proliferation of a way of female reading that consists of identifying with the female figures of texts, understanding them as empirical subjects, and reducing these novels to the stories of women victims' love and suffering" ["Ingeborg Bachmann: Was folgt" 3].) If that is the case, *Malina* represents one of the bridges that links prefeminist to feminist consciousness in Germany. Yet that popular reading of *Malina* was not an altogether unproblematic one for feminism. On the one hand, *Malina* helped

women readers to acknowledge the existence of male power over women and the central role it plays in women's lives—a gain over the response of *Malina*'s mostly male reviewers and an important step in the direction of feminism. But in other ways the popular reading of *Malina* did not challenge the prevailing understanding of gender relations. The woman as victim is, after all, a central figure of many genres of bourgeois literature, and it was quite possible for women to read *Malina* as confirming traditional gender expectations: in that novel men and women are polar opposites; women's concern is the private realm and emotional life; women are consumed by their love for men, men mistreat and abandon women, and women suffer. Perhaps *Malina* allowed early women readers the pleasure of having it both ways: they could experience a feminist indignation at the power men hold over women and satisfaction that the full extent of women's degradation had been revealed without having to consider how their own lives might have to change to transform those unequal arrangements. In some ways, I am inclined to believe, Bachmann's early readers found and enjoyed in the novel exactly what Bachmann's critics accused her of writing, the story of an unhappy love affair, so that to them there really did not seem to be such a long distance from *Malina* to *Love Story*. This reading of Bachmann's novel as a narrative of male power and female victimization would continue to influence feminists' reception of *Malina* (and, later, of other "Ways of Death" novels) far into the 1980s.

In the earliest responses to Bachmann by feminist critics, however, the woman-as-victim model of feminism had not yet made its appearance. The first clearly feminist essay appears to have been written by Ursula Püschel, a GDR critic, and was first published in the West German journal *Kürbiskern* in 1978. Püschel is critical of both the mainstream and New Left reception of Bachmann and particularly indignant about critics' insistence on using Bachmann's biography as a criterion of their literary evaluation: "Who would dare to mention a male writer's friends or lovers in assessments of his literary potency?" (121) Probably under the influence of Christa Wolf, whose 1966 essay, "Truth That Can Be Faced—Ingeborg Bachmann's Prose," was reprinted as the afterword to a 1976 GDR edition of Bachmann's stories, Püschel attempts to counter criticism of Bachmann's work as politically *unverbindlich* (noncommittal) by arguing that Bachmann's writing was instead a response to the human deformations produced by her postwar society. In "The Good God of Manhattan," "Undine Goes," and *Malina*, those deformations are represented via "the constitutive human relationship, the relationship of man and a woman, one of the great themes of Ingeborg Bachmann," relationships that bear "the

stigma of patriarchy" (113). And though Püschel concedes that *Malina* might give rise to the impression that men are responsible for all social ills—"as if their causes in this male society were the men themselves and not social circumstances" (117)—reading the novel the way Bachmann intended it, as the entrée to the entire "Ways of Death" cycle, shows that the author is concerned with "investigating social conditions, of which the daily murder of humanity, the 'ways of death,' forms part." Bachmann's treatment of gender, Püschel maintains, precisely illustrates the charge she gives to literature in her Frankfurt lectures, to represent what exists and to present that for which the time had not yet come: "The limits of the possible and the reactions to transgressions of those limits become visible in the sphere of male-female relations" (116). Püschel is able to acknowledge the centrality of Bachmann's concern with gender and patriarchy while simultaneously embedding it in a specific social setting that is responsible for the particular forms these male-female relations assume. Püschel's essay represents a direction in which feminist scholarship on Bachmann could have developed but did not choose to go, and the essay has been virtually ignored in subsequent treatments of Bachmann.

Writing at about the same time as Püschel, the first West German critic to connect Bachmann to feminism in print was a man. In accounts of the astonishing transformation that Bachmann's reputation underwent in the decade after her death, an exchange between Peter Horst Neumann, writing in *Merkur* in 1978, and Gisela Lindemann, who answered Neumann in the *Neue Rundschau* a year later, occupies a central position. Neumann reads "Undine Goes" as an anticipation of "the essential motifs of the later women's movement, . . . one of the most far-reaching of the intellectual and political movements of this period." But though he can accept Bachmann's "hatred of men" in that story, he rejects *Malina*, whose "whole message" had already been presented in "Undine goes." Yet he is confused, Neumann continues, by the fact that only men share his objections to *Malina*, its "garrulousness, lack of precision, triviality"—while women defend Bachmann's novel vehemently. Neumann concludes that *Weiblichkeit* (femininity) is the key variable: "I know that I may make a fool of myself using this word. But in my aesthetic judgments of this novel I am incapable of ignoring its constant appeal to a gender-specific sensibility. . . . I can't get over the feeling that, as a male reader, I have failed this book" (1134–1135).

In her response to Neumann, Lindemann assumes a position that places her between the social engagement of the early 1970s and later feminists' blanket condemnations of patriarchy (a position Neumann already equates with femi-

nism *tout court*). She is not prepared to claim Bachmann uncritically for feminism. Instead, comparing her with Doris Lessing's Anna Wulf in *The Golden Notebook*, Lindemann proposes that the flaws in Bachmann's writing may have socially occasioned, gender-specific causes: "Perhaps Bachmann's prose was indeed not capable of all her millennial theme demanded, so that the reviewers who were dissatisfied with her prose were right, but for the wrong reasons" (271). Yet she aligns herself with later feminists' universalizing tendencies when she extrapolates from Bachmann's and Lessing's novels and her own experience to conclude that women's sense of individual grievance is their most powerful emotional response to their oppression: "For reasons that are obvious and in the meantime have gradually become well known, for reasons that derive from the centuries-long subordination of women in patriarchal society, it's obvious—more's the pity—that the deepest feeling of which women are capable is not at all love or devotion or whatever else that nice stuff is called, but rather the feeling of being injured [*Kränkung*]" (273). What both disturbs and fascinates Lindemann is Bachmann's inability to move beyond "pure lamentation," her "tone of being betrayed" (274)—the aspect of Bachmann's writing that would engage ever more feminists in the subsequent decade.

In the early 1980s, a third West German feminist, also with some allegiance to the left, expressed dissatisfaction with the adequacy of Bachmann's formulations for feminism. Marlis Gerhardt discerns in many women writers of the 1970s an inability to disengage themselves from the gender polarities that had shaped literature and life in the nineteenth century: "Precisely in new literature by women, thus in that very literature that has something to do with the label 'feminism,' it's stereotypically a matter of the suffering of women and the actions of men, of female introspection and male room to maneuver" (128). The "I" of Bachmann's *Malina* cannot even hope that Ivan will love her as she desires, yet she continues helplessly to subjugate herself to him, while regarding the aspects of herself she projects onto Malina—rationality, autonomy, competence—as irreconcilable with her femininity. Gerhardt proposes that Bachmann's works demonstrate a "refusal . . . to step out of the poetic image that, in its own interest, a male culture has declared to be the 'nature' of woman" (140). To Bachmann's writing Gerhardt contrasts texts of other writers of the 1970s—Christa Wolf, Irmtraud Morgner, Sarah Kirsch, Barbara Frischmuth—who could imagine possibilities for women apart from those to which men had consigned them. Their works confront the same conflicts as Bachmann's but think beyond them to envision other alternatives—self-experiments—for women which will not include their self-destruction.

Bachmann's earliest U.S. feminist critics also sought female figures who were defiant, not victimized, and advanced a variety of interpretations to make Bachmann's texts correspond to their own needs: some were not prepared to read Bachmann's works as narratives of female subjugation at all; others criticized her for her failure to imagine more positive feminist solutions. Ellen Summerfield, who had written the first monograph devoted entirely to *Malina* before feminism reached German Studies in the United States, also presented at the 1977 Amherst Colloquium what was probably the first feminist address of Bachmann scholarship. There she argued that *Three Paths to the Lake* portrayed five modern women who had successfully achieved their independence from men—a conclusion with which subsequent feminist scholarship would soon take issue (“Verzicht”). Dinah Dodds and Ritta Jo Horsley presented papers on “A Step towards Gomorrah” at a session titled “Lesbian Themes in German Literature” at the Women in German conference, October 1979. Both praised Bachmann's daring choice of topic but criticized her for failing to create characters who could abandon hierarchical male models and envision an equal partnership of women. Margret Eifler, writing in German but for an American journal, *Modern Austrian Literature*, concludes that *Malina* is about women's unwillingness to remain subjugated to men: “The fundamental statement of this novel aims at saying no once and for all to the possibility of a relationship between man and woman” (379). The absorption of the “I” into Malina is for Eifler a willed act, “self-extinction of femininity for the sake of a doubtful self-preservation,” with Malina's masculinity as “the least of all possible evils” (388). Eifler regards the disappearance of the “I” into the wall as the renunciation of “slavish love” (380) and as “militant self-assertion” (382) (a gesture also figured in Undine's return to the water). If the novel itself ends in solipsism, silence, and resignation, Eifler nonetheless hopes that the “expression of this epochal violence and mayhem can influence the course of human history” (390).

Most 1970s feminists in Germany and the United States treated Bachmann's prose texts as more or less realistic representations of female experience, measured Bachmann's figures according to feminist criteria, and assumed that a relationship existed between feminist scholarship and the task of feminist social transformation. But by the 1980s feminists were less inclined to insist upon an immediate connection between feminist literary analysis and feminist political practice (possibly because the new conservative governments in both West Germany and the United States made swift changes in feminists' interest much less likely). In that context, new feminist approaches could arise that asked quite different kinds of questions about Bachmann's work. Those approaches drew upon

the assumptions of the new directions in feminism that had gained prominence in the late 1970s. Feminist Bachmann scholars now tried to read her work as an expression of repressed femininity, regarded previous negative responses to her writing as an unwillingness to engage with female otherness, and banished ideology criticism altogether from the repertoire of critical tools they applied to her writing. *The Book of Franza*, first published in 1978 in the four-volume edition of the *Works*, replaced *Malina* at the center of the feminist Bachmann canon and was often regarded as the Rosetta stone that provided the key to the feminist translation of Bachmann's other works. Following her cue in the preface to *Franza* that "the real settings" were "laboriously covered over by the exterior ones" (*W* 3: 342), many Bachmann scholars also shifted their attention from the content to the form of her work, now particularly interested in how she drew what they regarded as patriarchal structures and language into question. In its acceptance of essential differences between men and women, the new feminist response to Bachmann in some ways harked back to popular readings of *Malina* that likewise did not challenge gender dichotomies. But in its emphasis on the relationship of symbolic or discursive structures to questions of femininity and masculinity, the new approach also prepared the way for feminist poststructuralist analyses of Bachmann.

A widely read essay that Elisabeth Lenk published in 1981 in the feminist journal *Courage*, "Pariabewußtsein schreibender Frauen" (The pariah consciousness of writing women), featured Bachmann prominently in showing how the new approach could be applied to women writers. Lenk does not yet call upon French feminists as her authorities, yet many other elements of the new approach are already present in her essay. Women, Lenk maintains, are the outcasts, pariahs of all societies, like Jews, Indians, and gypsies—like Franza, who considers herself "of inferior race," "a Papua." Qualitatively different from and not subsumable into a dominant homogeneous order, women belong to another order altogether, "to the heterogeneous" (27): "The bloody or bloodless annihilation of woman, her exclusion from society, her reduction to a beast of burden, on which, as on its foundations, the society rests, was the precondition for the classical ideal, the equilibrium of the homogeneous" (34). Women face two choices: to participate in the dominant order at all, they must deny their heterogeneity and hate themselves; alternatively, they are compelled to embrace their heterogeneity—that is, develop a "pariah consciousness." Only those who stand outside society—like women writers—can give adequate expression to it. That, Lenk declares in conclusion, is Bachmann's accomplishment:

What else could the novel cycle "Ways of Death" have been but a description of the imperceptible, bloodless annihilation of the other within the human being, of the female "I," which isn't even allowed to say "I" any more: of an It over which men negotiate.

In the opinion of the champions of culture, this It should learn to disappear without remainder into a new homogeneous "I." Then the eternal source of disorder would be out of the way. At the end of Ingeborg Bachmann's novel *Malina* the female "I" has disappeared: a normal process, the process of female socialization. But what from the perspective of society looks like successful normalization becomes in Bachmann's hands, in the sense of pariah consciousness, an accusation against the whole society. "I don't have any sex, not any longer, they ripped it out of me." Female socialization is depicted as a crime against women, as a process of annihilation. "It was murder," reads the last sentence of the novel *Malina*. (34)

In Lenk's essay most of the components of the new feminism are present. She extracts the oppression of women from its historical determinants and projects it back into the beginnings of history, when all women became social outcasts for the same (biological) reason, all subject to the same kind of male power in the same way. Women are by definition outside of and victimized by the male order, hence without relationship to or responsibility for its actions. The dominant order has become so all-encompassing that it is impossible (hence not necessary) to imagine any concrete political steps that can be taken against it. Simply to change one's consciousness and articulate otherness in writing is already a mighty feminist act.

In the Federal Republic the first feminist analysis informed by the new approach which was devoted entirely to Bachmann was published by Ria Endres in 1981 in two somewhat different forms in *Die Zeit* and the *Neue Rundschau*. Endres draws on a different philosophical model to make arguments similar to Lenk's. Launching a frontal attack on efforts to connect literature and politics in the late 1960s and the 1970s, "a time of fetishized concentration on social phenomena," Endres also relies upon an understanding of patriarchy that encompasses (while extracting away from) all of human history, folding fascism into the grander structure of patriarchy by equating the Heideggerian *Angst* that derived from the "knowledge about the beginning of a new way of Being (patriarchy)" ("Erklär" 51) with the *Todesangst* (deathly fear) that Bachmann experienced when Hitler's troops invaded Klagenfurt. She too assumes the existence of diametrically opposed principles of masculinity and femininity, masculinity exercising its control via the "way of Being" of patriarchy, which had conquered

an earlier matriarchy: “‘Primary’ Being ends at the latest at the time of the old Greeks; it is like the paradise of a lost world, in which there exists the possibility of matriarchy and thereby another way of Being” (“Erklär” 51). Under patriarchy, language as well has been brought under male control, obscuring expressions of femininity: “Seen from the perspective of its origins, language is magical and bisexual. But in the history of patriarchy a secondary force field emerged. It is allocated to the father and saw to it that the female-matriarchal diminished or was so fully concealed that it could scarcely be discerned any more” (“Wahrheit” 82). Both “Undine Goes” and *Malina* show that “this contest over life and death was waged in the world of language.” *Malina*’s absorption of the “I” at the end of Bachmann’s novel is a dramatization of the “loss of female identity,” and the Ungargasse is “the site of the defeat of femininity.” Bachmann’s accomplishment lies in her ability to convey “the essence of male cruelty and female martyrdom” (“Erklär” 51).

An essay of my own was (as I later regretted) the first to make an explicit connection between Bachmann, psychoanalysis, and French theory, and at least one of the first to treat Bachmann’s writing as an anticipation of French theory. (It is reprinted as chapter 3 of this volume). In that essay, I read *Malina* through the theoretical lens of feminist poststructuralism, maintaining in the first sentence that the novel is concerned with the discursive status of female subjectivity: “Ingeborg Bachmann’s *Malina* is about the absence of a female voice; in some respects it reads like an illustration of the feminist theory which has evolved since its publication to explain why, within Western discourse, women are permitted no voice and subjectivity of their own” (“In the Cemetery” 75). I situate Bachmann’s concern in *Malina* with gender and language in the context of her statements about language, the dominant order, and challenges to the order in her essays and earlier works. Through a close reading of the text I try to show how the textual practices of the novel undermine its realism and thematize the relationship of femininity to representation. Despite my analysis of the text’s symbolic structures, my essay still displays my very strong inclination to identify with Bachmann’s protagonist (one of the reasons, I recall, that I had some trouble writing the article: in what voice does a female scholar write about the absence of a female voice?). My analysis of *Malina* places me squarely in the woman-as-victim camp. But I also understand Bachmann’s project and my own to be both a deconstructive and constructive one in the service of feminism. Bachmann “found a language to write the story of women without language,” I maintain, and I argue that feminists too “can read her novel as part of our struggle to challenge those categories within which we have no right to speak

as women and to construct some other, more authentic female voice" ("In the Cemetery" 102, 76).

Christa Gürtler was the first German-language feminists to apply French theory to Bachmann. In her 1982 dissertation, *Schreiben Frauen anders?* (Do women write differently?), she investigated various feminist theoretical models of the early 1980s, including Cixous and Irigaray, at some length but had difficulty applying the theory because her analyses examined the themes rather than the structures of Bachmann's and the Austrian author Barbara Frischmuth's works: marriage, sexuality, female identity, patriarchy, female liberation. One of the dissertation's best chapters applies French theory to *The Book of Franza* (the first example of what would in the course of the decade become a small industry devoted to connecting French theory to *Franza*). Gürtler's interpretation of *Franza* brought French feminist theory into the mainstream of Bachmann criticism when it was published in revised form as the lead essay in Hans Höller's pathbreaking anthology *Der dunkle Schatten, dem ich schon seit Anfang folge* (The dark shadow that I've followed from the beginning—a collection that also included another feminist contribution by Karen Achberger, an examination of subtexts in Bachmann's writing that challenged patriarchal discourse, and an essay more skeptical of feminist approaches by Sigrid Schmid-Bortenschlager).

Gürtler was the first to read *Franza* as a novel about the encounter of two systems of thought: on the one side, Franza's husband's (male) "fascist thinking"; on the other, Franza's (female) *ver-rückter Diskurs* (dis-placed/crazy discourse, a fashionable pun of the period)—"the different image of a different woman, who speaks differently than we all learned to do and which we are used to" (82 citing Hassauer 56). Jordan, also portrayed as a colonizer who wishes to destroy all otherness, drives Franza into madness that expresses itself via the body, in hysterical symptoms of the sort French feminists had described as a substitute for the female voice. As Gürtler views it, "Franza's magical way of being (for Ingeborg Bachmann the female way) removes itself from rational (male) analysis and is threatening for the man. Ingeborg Bachmann insists on the difference of the sexes; for her woman is the other/second sex, for whom it isn't possible within patriarchy to be a human being, because here to be a human being means to be a man. But she also insists that the female way of life is the more human" (72). Gürtler also argues that Bachmann overcomes female speechlessness in her writing through the articulation of an alternative female voice and claims Bachmann for feminism by maintaining that in the "Ways of Death" she attempts "to describe the female experience of the world . . . in a very partisan way" (82). Gürtler's analysis is not a very systematic one, but her essay nonethe-

less shows the ease with which *The Book of Franza* accommodated and could be made to illustrate the prevailing feminist paradigms of the decade—doubtless one reason that in the next years *Franza* would move to the center of the feminist Bachmann canon. Her essay also illustrates the elision of a variety of systems of domination into one undifferentiated and all-encompassing system, of which the protagonists of the “Ways of Death” are victims. That elision would characterize feminist Bachmann interpretations for most of the rest of the decade.

Christa Wolf’s enthusiasm about Bachmann’s works in the early 1980s helped bring that new feminist reading of Bachmann to the attention of a wider German reading public. In 1966, Wolf had written a response to the Frankfurt lectures and *The Thirtieth Year* which in my view (see chapter 5) still counts as one of the finest essays on Bachmann’s early prose. There Wolf maintains that Bachmann’s prose texts address the state of human subjectivity under particular historical conditions (Ursula Püschel’s position a decade later). She argues that Bachmann’s concern with language in the early texts served a goal that was deeply and directly political, an effort to provide her readers with new categories of perception that would help them understand and change the world. Bachmann’s influence on Wolf’s writing has been apparent since the 1960s, and in the 1970s she began explicitly to acknowledge Bachmann as her mentor. Most significant for the purposes of this discussion is the evidence in Wolf’s writing, beginning in the mid-1970s, of her growing allegiance to a model of feminist analysis that dominated Western feminist thought of the same period. The story “Self-Experiment” (1974) had already shown Wolf to be a quite early proponent of women’s difference from and superiority to men. In her essays on the women Romantics she appeals to those women’s experience to provide a still-compelling alternative to an instrumental rationality that had increasingly assumed control of bourgeois society. In her Büchner Prize speech, Wolf portrays woman as being outside the “citadel of reason” throughout human history, becoming subject to its laws only in the twentieth century, when she entered men’s world and engaged in men’s activities. Wolf begins the fourth of her Frankfurt lectures (held in spring 1982 at the University of Frankfurt and published a year later as *Voraussetzung einer Erzählung-Kassandra* [Conditions of a narrative: Cassandra]) with an explicit listing of some of the most popular Western feminist texts of the decade—including studies of matriarchy and patriarchy, goddesses and Amazons, femininity and writing, and Irigaray—texts, Wolf declares, whose influence over her she could compare only with her discovery of Marx. Wolf’s reading of Bachmann in the fourth lecture is advanced under the influence of—perhaps even in the name of—that kind of feminism.

In that lecture, Wolf, like many contemporary Western feminists, also premises her analysis on the presumption of a matriarchal society organized along principles preferable to those of the present—that was overthrown in Greek antiquity by a system of male dominance that still continues without fundamental changes. Women do not fit into that society; they can sometimes articulate alternatives to it but mostly are its victims. That is the context within which Wolf locates Bachmann:

I claim that every woman in this century and in our culture sphere who has ventured into male-dominated institutions—"literature" and "aesthetics" are such institutions—must have experienced the desire for self-destruction. In her novel *Malina*, Ingeborg Bachmann has the woman disappear inside the wall at the end, and the man, Malina, who is a part of her, serenely states the case: "There is no woman here."

The last sentence reads: "It was murder."

It was also suicide. (*Cassandra* 299)

Bachmann's "Ways of Death" cannot be pressed into conventional male aesthetic forms because (unlike, say, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*) it derives its different morphology from Bachmann's female experience: "But Ingeborg Bachmann *is* that nameless woman in *Malina*, she is the woman Franza in the novel fragment *The Franza Case* who simply cannot get a grip on her life, cannot give it a form; who simply cannot manage to make her experience into a presentable story, cannot produce it out of herself as an aesthetic product" (*Cassandra* 301). Wolf's lecture culminates in a discussion of *Franza*, which she regards as evidence for her argument. Franza stands for those "who live magically (a description true, says Wolf, of every woman—"seeress, poetess, priestess, idol, subject of artworks" [*Cassandra* 304]—about whom her lecture speaks), and who are so great a threat to that representative of evil masculine, white, Western science that he must eradicate them. Wolf concludes with the novel's description of the power of white men to conquer with their spirit what they can not otherwise possess: "They will come in spirit if they can no longer come in any other way. And they will be resurrected in a brown and a black brain; it will always be the whites, even then. They will continue to own the world in this roundabout way" (*Cassandra* 305). That, she tells her readers, would be Cassandra's prophecy today. The consequence of Wolf's arguments on behalf of women, against the power that men have exercised over them and others, was, in some contrast to her project in *Patterns of Childhood*, to extract women from their own culture and exempt them from responsibility for it. Those are also the arguments that

underlie Wolf's own novel *Cassandra* and are, in my view, responsible for some of its weaknesses.

Sigrid Weigel is the West German feminist literary scholar whose work most strongly influenced Bachmann criticism of the 1980s—and whose scholarly method Bachmann seems strongly to have influenced. Beginning with her widely read “Der schielende Blick: Thesen zur Geschichte weiblicher Schreibpraxis” (Double Focus: Theses on the history of women's writing), published in 1983, Weigel laid the theoretical foundations for a German feminist-poststructuralist criticism, a method that she often elaborated with reference to Bachmann's writing. In 1984, Weigel edited a special issue of *text + kritik* that featured her own essay “‘Ein Ende mit der Schrift. Ein anderer Anfang’: Zur Entwicklung von Ingeborg Bachmanns Schreibweise” (‘An end to writing. Another beginning’: On the development of Ingeborg Bachmann's writing style) as its longest contribution. Bachmann's writing and responses to it then helped to constitute the structure around which she built her book-length study of contemporary West German women's writing, *Die Stimme der Medusa* (The voice of the Medusa). Finally, the last chapter of her 1990 book, *Topographien der Geschlechter: Kulturgeschichtliche Studien zur Literatur* (Topographies of gender: Cultural-historical studies of literature) used *The Book of Franza* to define “the work of deciphering” (*Topographien* 252) as the task of feminist cultural critics.

“Double Focus,” Weigel's earliest essay dealing with Bachmann, is much more historically and politically grounded than other essays on Bachmann of the early 1980s and uses Bachmann's work to support Weigel's own theses on the possibilities of women's writing. She praises *Malina* for its profound critique of women's condition at a particular historical point and understands its portrait of a diametrically opposed masculinity and femininity as illustrative of women's present difficulty in finding a place for themselves: “The incompatibility of the male and female principle is not thematized as an eternal inner conflict that obtains for men and women in the same way; rather, it is the expression of the experience of a woman living ‘today’” (“Schielende” 123). The disappearance of the “I” at the novel's end is a mark not just of that irreconcilability but also of that figure's female resistance: “The disappearance of the ‘I’ should not just be understood as a homicide, but also as a separation from Malina, as a refusal to live a Malina-life” (“Schielende” 125). Weigel similarly reads “Undine Goes” as a “refusal of a fairy-tale role” (“Schielende” 129), a rejection of the projection of male needs onto female figures, a move that helps to anticipate women's freedom from male projections altogether. In “Eyes to Wonder” shortsighted Miranda represents for Weigel a different kind of resistance: willing to see only

a world that meets her needs, Miranda cannot survive because she lacks the “double focus” (Weigel’s guiding metaphor here) that would allow her to find her way in the real world.

In her *text + kritik* article, “An End to Writing,” Weigel moves substantially closer to French theory, though the French thinkers on whom she draws for feminist writing strategies are Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida rather than Irigaray or Cixous. Weigel now formulates Bachmann’s concerns in less historically specific terms, maintaining, for instance, that “the gender motif” is “from the beginning integrated into the structure of occidental thought; it is a moment of history that can be described as an assault on nature and on humankind” (“Ende” 72). Following Barthes, on whose *Writing Degree Zero* Bachmann seems to have drawn to write her Frankfurt lectures, Weigel defines as a central project of Bachmann’s prose texts the creation of a new *Schreibweise* (writing style, *écriture*) simultaneously destructive and productive. She traces through *The Thirtieth Year* the steps that in her view brought Bachmann to a conception of the relationship of language and the symbolic order to gender and argues that only in *Franza* was Bachmann able to devise a writing style that was “a deconstruction of the cultural order” (“Ende” 76), *Malina* functioning as a less radical, more realistic introduction to the problems that inform the “Ways of Death.” The deconstruction or “decomposition” of *Franza* demands “the destruction of the symbolic father or of the conception of God which as an inscription within Franza corresponds to the real crimes outside” (“Ende” 83–84). The “composition” Bachmann accomplished in *Franza* derives from her ability to formulate “a third thing” that operates outside of binary oppositions and constitutes a female utopia within literature that would be, says Weigel in Bachmann’s words, “an empire with unknown borders open towards the future” (“Ende” 91).

In *Die Stimme der Medusa*, Weigel’s admiration for Bachmann’s accomplishment leads her to lend a certain teleology to her account of the previous three decades of women’s writing and reading. Although Bachmann anticipated concerns of feminism in works that Weigel calls “concealed women’s writing” (*Stimme* 32), early feminists, she maintains, had not yet learned to read Bachmann in ways that enabled them to appreciate her. Conversely, Bachmann’s writing functioned as a kind of critique of earlier writers and readers, who sought socially critical, realistic texts or authentic articulations of female identity or subjectivity. Here, too, Weigel views Bachmann’s “Ways of Death” through a poststructuralist lens, seeing *Malina*’s “I” not as a woman but as “that form of existence that is sacrificed to the entry of woman into the symbolic order”

(*Stimme* 37–38). But, perhaps because of the subject of her book, Weigel’s treatment of Bachmann here slides away from the formal concerns of the *text + kritik* essay back to Bachmann’s status within a body of women’s writing and her relevance to German feminists. She uses Bachmann’s writing approvingly to exemplify a variety of possibilities for women’s writing. Again Weigel praises Bachmann’s ability to draw conventional narrative into question, both to convey in *Malina* the history of the “I” and to show why it is impossible to represent it. Weigel also praises Bachmann’s treatment of the “paradox of love,” a topic that reengaged feminist attention from the mid-1980s onward, “a fundamental motif of Bachmann’s literature . . . that she explored in ever new variations” (*Stimme* 217). In *Malina*, Bachmann portrays love as destructive of but necessary for women situated within a dialectic of *Leben und Überleben* (life and survival) (*Stimme* 226). Like the feminists of the 1970s, “Three Paths to the Lake” suggests that women should keep their distance from men but also preserves the idea of love as utopian possibility. Portraying this aporia, “the affirmation of love as the negation of its social possibilities or, to put it the other way around, the impossibility in the real as the salvation of possibility” (*Stimme* 230), Weigel shows Bachmann able both thematically and formally to present both sides of an opposition that seems irreconcilable.

By the time of her 1990 book, Weigel’s treatment of Bachmann, though still shaped by poststructuralism, has moved significantly in the direction of cultural studies. Here Franza is treated as a figure able to undertake the project of “deciphering,” the task of a female cultural critic. Weigel’s analytical model has become discernibly more complex, and she understands and uses Franza’s journey to the desert as an illustration of the central metaphor of Weigel’s own study, “as a *topography* of signifying, textual, and intellectual orders” (*Topographien* 254). Franza’s story is now not just about femininity, Bachmann’s text representing “the exterior traces of the destruction of (not just) female history” (*Topographien* 252). Weigel now acknowledges “the ambivalent location of the white woman, who often finds herself in a simultaneity of victim and perpetrator positions” (*Topographien* 263): Franza is not just a victim of “the whites,” but white herself. And Weigel explicitly draws attention to “the psychic and linguistic involvement of women in the dominant order and thus their own interest in existing relationships” (*Topographien* 255).

In this book, two “burning problems” (*Topographien* 260) emerge for Weigel that are of great relevance for the Bachmann criticism of the 1980s. First, she points out the limitations of attempts to find alternative discourses and forms of representation for women outside the dominant order: “In general, the question

of the otherness of woman has revealed itself to be a trap, since up to now it has just led to an extension of the gender polarity in which woman is fixed as the other/second sex" (*Topographien* 261). In this context, her criticism of efforts to place women writers outside of or embracing binary oppositions might be read as an effort to distance herself from her own portrait of Bachmann's writing style six years before. Second, Weigel radically draws into question a prior model of feminist analysis that had starkly divided the world into the opposition of men and women, masculinity and femininity. Now Weigel calls for an intensified concern with the relationship of sexual *and* cultural difference, "since every subject moves within a meshwork of social, cultural, ethnic, and gender-specific differences" (*Topographien* 264). Such an investigation would demand revision of much of the feminist Bachmann criticism that dominated the 1980s.

By the mid-1980s, variants of radical feminist and feminist poststructuralist approaches had conquered the field of Bachmann scholarship, as most clearly evidenced in two special journal issues devoted to Bachmann—Weigel's *text + kritik* volume of 1984 and a special Bachmann number of *Modern Austrian Literature* in 1985—as well as several MLA special sessions ably organized by Karen Achberger and Beth Bjorklund. Weigel's introduction to the *text + kritik* collection outlines the principles of that paradigm as they were applied to Bachmann and explains that now Bachmann's works are often regarded as "anticipatory concretization of poststructuralist theses," her "Ways of Death" revealing "a structural relationship between fascism, patriarchy, ethno- and logocentrism and the central role of language/writing for this context, within which the 'feminine' as the embodiment of the repressed other is subjected to a wide variety of ways of death" ("Andere" 5). But as many feminists now read them, Bachmann's texts also represent her effort to combat (often: to destroy or deconstruct) the dominant order; her works, Weigel argues, depict the structures "to which individuals are subjected and against which they—led by the author—mobilize their desperate longing for their own subjectivity, their own history, and a not yet occupied location of their own" ("Andere" 6). What Weigel maintains is not altogether true of her own collection: only her own, Christa Bürger's, Birgit Vanderbeke's, and one of Marianne Schuller's essays are significantly influenced by poststructuralism; several others do not thematize gender at all; and Helga Meise, Irmela von der Lühe, and I (in the essay published here as chapter 5) try to advance various other kinds of feminist approaches to Bachmann.

But the hegemony of a certain kind of French feminist theory is very striking in the *Modern Austrian Literature* volume, where more than half of the essays make at least an obligatory nod in its direction. To Angelika Rauch, for instance,

“femininity” in Bachmann is a “counter model to the reified mode of experience and perception that was a consequence of a culture and society defined by rationality and patriarchy” (21); especially the dream chapter of *Malina* pushes in the direction of a “textual practice” that might produce “new models for female images” such as “deconstruction, *écriture féminine*, hysterical discourse, displaced/crazy discourse” (“Sprache” 48). Peter Brinkemper views *The Book of Franza* as a “paradigm of female aesthetics” that both thematically and formally addresses “the female experience of oppression as well as the destruction of personal, sexual, and social identity via the power of a symbolic order” (170). Renate Delphendahl sees “Undine Goes” as a “critique of patriarchal language” (199), and Karen Achberger speaks of a female subjectivity “incompatible with patriarchal culture” (“Beyond” 219). Ritta Jo Horsley argues that “Undine Goes” “anticipates French feminism and poststructuralism in its presentation and partial deconstruction of the fundamental cultural forms that shape our consciousness” (“Re-reading” 224). In this volume, even some dissenters from the dominant trend find it necessary to recognize the power of the paradigm, Leo Lensing pointing out that the “recent provocative feminist scholarship” neglected the Austrian literary tradition (53), while Sigrid Schmid-Bortenschlager tries to distinguish Bachmann’s writing from the German *Frauenliteratur* of the 1970s and 1980s but nonetheless acknowledges the “surprising new orientation . . . particularly marked in the studies of the prose and of the ‘feminist’ Bachmann” (“Spiegelszenen” 39).

What probably demonstrates most clearly how feminism had moved to the mainstream of Bachmann criticism by the 1980s is the sympathetic treatment it has received from male Bachmann scholars from that point onward. As early as 1980, Bernd Witte, in two essays that still remain extremely useful, identifies gender as the central concern of Bachmann’s work. Surveying “Ingeborg Bachmann Today” in 1983, Kurt Bartsch is prepared to give credit for what he terms “something like a Bachmann boom”—evidenced in the four Bachmann symposia held that year—to “the change in the expectations of literary criticism and scholarship in the second half of the 1970s, which among other things is due to the influence of the recent women’s movement” (“Ingeborg” 281). Bartsch’s Sammlung Metzler monograph, published in 1988, makes proper and generous use of feminist approaches to Bachmann’s late prose while also attempting to illuminate other aspects of her work. The final “Ways of Death” chapter of Hans Höller’s 1987 study of Bachmann is also indebted to a French feminist approach, while Peter Beicken’s more chatty and less rigorous 1988 Beck series monograph takes the legitimacy of a feminist approach for granted. By the time

that *Kein objektives Urteil—Nur ein lebendiges* (No objective judgment—just a living one), a retrospective collection of thirty-five years of Bachmann criticism, was published in 1989 by Christine Koschel and Inge von Weidenbaum, the editors of Bachmann's *Werke*, feminist approaches had become so important to the evolving body of Bachmann scholarship that essays by many of the feminist critics I have discussed here occupied a central and uncontroversial place. Even in the 1990s, at a time when some erstwhile feminists abandoned a gender perspective (as I show below), male scholars (with a few exceptions) continued to acknowledge, even insist upon, the importance of gender issues in Bachmann's writing.

From the high point of feminist Bachmann criticism at mid-decade, interest in Bachmann ebbed in the late 1980s, studies for a time mostly limited to dissertations written by younger women and frequently published by Peter Lang, a press very hospitable to doctoral theses. But in the 1990s three developments directed attention to Bachmann again. First, in 1990 Werner Schroeter released a controversial film version of *Malina*, based on a script by Elfriede Jelinek. Though Jelinek's adaptation followed Bachmann's novel quite closely, Schroeter had other ideas. As the *Vienna Standard* reported, Schroeter was more interested in the problems of *Malina*'s "I" than in her difficulties with individual or generic men: "Schroeter would have preferred to cut the sequence with the father; for him it was a matter of self-destruction" (Cerha Hozwath 10). But that reading of Bachmann's novel produced an outraged response from some feminist Bachmann fans (detailed below). The second development was the number of conferences organized around various aspects of Bachmann's works to which many established Bachmann scholars (the "usual suspects," in effect) were invited. These meetings drew those scholars back into Bachmann research, allowing (and compelling) them to address aspects of Bachmann's work different from those they had previously considered. Many of major conferences also produced volumes of their proceedings, including Saranac Lake, New York, 1991 (*Ingeborg Bachmann: Neue Richtungen in der Forschung?*); Münster, 1991 (*Ingeborg Bachmann—Neue Beiträge zu ihrem Werk*); Vienna, 1993 (*Die Schwarzkunst der Worte*); London, 1993 (*Kritische Wege der Landnahme*); Bern, 1993 (*Schriftwechsel*); Debrecen, 1993 (*Nicht [aus, in, über, von] Österreich*); Vienna, 1994 (*Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan*); Brussels, 1996 (*Text-Tollhaus für Bachmann-Süchtige*); Saarland, 1996 (*Klangfarben*); and Binghamton, 1996 (*If We Had the Word*). Third, 1995 saw the publication of the mammoth four-volume critical edition of the "*Todesarten*"-Projekt, meticulously edited by Monika Albrecht and Dirk Göttsche, which made available for scholarly use and quotation large portions of the previously unpublished

material that had resided in the manuscript collection of the Vienna Nationalbibliothek. Because the critical edition confirmed some scholarly speculations and challenged others, it was immediately at the center of a storm of controversy which again brought Bachmann's name back into print in the German-language press.

Within this context, it is possible to discern three more or less separate developments in Bachmann scholarship that have continued from the late 1980s to the present. Despite the fact that it had fallen out of favor in many sectors of academic feminism, a number of studies written as dissertations by younger women (among them, Bärbel Thau, Eva Christina Zeller, Ingeborg Duser, and Mireille Tabah) or as books and articles by more senior scholars such as Karen Achberger and Manfred Jürgensen continued to pursue some variant of the radical or poststructuralist feminist approach to Bachmann that had claimed the field in the mid-1980s. Feminist studies by Ortrud Gutjahr, Inge Röhnelt, Saskia Schottelius, and Bettina Stuber pursued another connection influential in French-influenced scholarship: the utility of psychoanalysis for understanding the construction of female identity, language, and culture. Gudrun Kohn-Waechter's ambitious 1992 study *Das Verschwinden in der Wand* (Disappearing into the wall) continued and deepened the direction of analysis begun in the early 1980s and also initiated a controversy in Bachmann scholarship that rages to the present day. In *Malina*, Kohn-Waechter maintains, Bachmann had elaborated a "new language" that might have pointed the way beyond a Western rationality that suppresses femininity, yet the position from which that writing style could be undertaken is eradicated when the "I" is murdered at the end of the novel. Since the novel fully discredits Malina's narrative position, Kohn-Waechter alleges that it would have been impossible for Bachmann to continue to write after the end of her only published novel, so that, even had she lived, there could have been no further "Ways of Death" narratives. Such arguments for *Malina* as the single novel Bachmann could have written (further elaborated by German feminist scholars such as Franziska Frei Gerlach and Edith Bauer but contradicted by statements Bachmann herself made after *Malina* was published) seem to me to rest on the feminist postulation of an essential femininity, eternally antagonistic to masculinist domination, whose problems might be solved if a writing style adequate to its expression could be devised. Assertions like those of Kohn-Waechter, Gerlach, and Bauer also underwrite many of the attacks on the critical edition of the "*Todesarten*"-Projekt. Yet if the edition's editors are correct to argue that at the time of her death Bachmann was engaged in an ongoing literary project, Kohn-Waechter, Gerlach, Bauer, and others must concede that their own analyses of Bachmann's writing strategy are quite wrong.

Werner Schroeter's film of *Malina* provided one final opportunity for radical feminists to vent their anger against men who treated women and their cultural productions badly. Schroeter's adaptation produced, for example, an outraged response from Alice Schwarzer in the journal *Emma*, demonstrating that at least in her circles radical feminism was alive and well. Bachmann's great theme, Schwarzer maintained, had been men's brutality to women, and a close reading of *Malina* now revealed that the suffering of Bachmann's protagonist was a consequence of incestuous sexual abuse, the great radical feminist issue of the late 1980s. Schwarzer outflanked German feminist scholars by accusing them of diminishing the brutal crimes of men via arguments that made women complicit in their own subjugation: "Feminist, postfeminist, antifeminist, or whatever-else criticism dissects the novel with aesthetic and psychoanalytic methods. . . . Fashionably, it blames the victim, even insinuates that the victim enjoys suffering, even worse, some of the critics relegate what happens to the realm of a masochist's fantasies" ("Schwarzer" 19). She protested the violence done to Bachmann both by Schroeter's film and by her "feminist" critics, who failed to recognize that a majority of women will endure sexual assault during their lifetime and that incest survivors suffer lifelong symptoms like Bachmann's own. To support her position, Schwarzer reprinted an updated version of Jelinek's 1984 essay, "Der Krieg mit anderen Mitteln" (War By Other Means), which proclaimed men's treatment of women a continuation of the Nazi extermination of the Jews, viewing women as exiles from a culture in which they had no part and no voice and which was determined to destroy them.

A number of other feminist critics and scholars followed Schwarzer's lead—Iris Radisch, Dorothee Römhild, Kathleen Komar, Regula Venske—in denouncing the film (and at least one male scholar, Gerhard Austin, denounced the feminists' denunciations). But later in the decade, possibly as a radical feminist analysis loosed its hold, opinions moderated to the point that Ingeborg Gleichauf could maintain: "The film opens new interpretive possibilities for reading the novel" (222), and Margret Eifler, writing from a more historically conscious U.S. feminist perspective in 1997, even declares that the changes Schroeter made to Bachmann's text were necessary: "The progress of time dictated alternate forms of the same problem: feminism had moved into another generational perception, and the change to another medium demanded an alternate encoding" ("Bachmann" 223).

But even though feminist approaches with roots in the early 1980s continued to shape some analyses of Bachmann work up to the present, some discomfort with those sorts of feminist arguments also seemed apparent by the end of the

1980s. Thus a countertendency to feminist approaches emerged increasingly in the second half of the decade: often investigations of Bachmann by younger women scholars did not address the question of gender at all. In the *Women in German Yearbook* in 1992 ("Feminist"), I opined that gender was missing in those studies because Bachmann scholars wanted to pursue a range of aspects of her work other than those addressed by 1980s feminists and did not know how to do so in a way that also took gender into account. Now, I would not be so certain that there is a single answer to the absence of attention to gender in Bachmann scholarship. It may really be the case that some feminist scholars have not been able to elaborate a gender-based approach adequate to the questions they want to pose. (As my commentary to chapter 6 shows, for instance, it still is not clear to me how to explore whether the question of gender influenced Bachmann's reading of Wittgenstein.) On the other hand, the Bachmann criticism of the 1990s sometimes manifests the abandonment of gender as an analytic category even when its utility seems obvious and even in writing by scholars for whom gender formerly seemed to be a central concern. Thus the question arises whether the retreat from gender (particularly in Germany) might be read within the context of a larger move away from oppositional politics after German unification. The poststructuralist feminist model of the 1980s made it possible to examine femininity and writing in the rather ethereal context of high theory alone. But since many of the newer approaches to gender demanded that scholars simultaneously consider class, race, sexuality, and other social categories, 1990s feminists found it much harder to avoid more controversial social issues. The retreat from gender might thus be viewed both as a welcome repudiation of an earlier feminist model that seemed inadequate to address the new concerns of Bachmann scholarship and as a means to avoid topics that seemed quite out of fashion in the new and more conservative unified Germany.

A 1994 special issue of the Zurich monthly *Du* devoted to Bachmann displays both these tendencies. The issue's editor, Dieter Bachmann (no relation to the author), understands his project to be saving Bachmann from feminist and other extremists: "The one extreme: many (men) . . . constructed a myth out of the elements Undine and death drive. The other extreme: many (women) . . . transfigured her into their feminist ancestress and installed her as their principle of hope" (13). Similarly, Corinna Caduff, Sigrid Weigel's research assistant at the University of Zurich, protests that Bachmann has been "co-opted by the women's movement and elevated to their cult figure" (86), while Maria Gazzetti, reporting on Bachmann's Italian reception, warns that "the scholarly and artistic undertakings of a new women's movement could stand in the way of a

deeper comprehension" of Bachmann, though, she happily notes, such misunderstandings scarcely ever occur in Italy (92-93). On the other hand, the issue of *Du* also evidences some of the problems that arise when discussions of gender are omitted in accounts of Bachmann's life and work. The magazine contains much new information including unpublished photographs, material from the Vienna archive, and reminiscences by friends. Yet except for a somewhat sexist recollection by Hermann Burger of an evening with Bachmann ("A woman of boundless openness for everything terrible, hard as a man in her tragic consistency, and yet helpless as a woman towards an overwhelming life" ([69]) and a commentary by Sigrid Weigel on Bachmann's "effort to combine work on the (im)possible location of a female position within the dialectic of enlightenment with the problem of representation in the aftermath of National Socialism" ([“Urszene” 23]), gender is not discussed at all—though precisely an examination of the condition of being a woman intellectual in the aftermath of National Socialism in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s might help to explain some of the problems that Bachmann confronted and on which her friends and acquaintances comment.

Similar problems are evident in a later *text + kritik* issue devoted to Bachmann, published in November 1995 and obviously meant to replace the famous 1984 number that had first proclaimed “the other Ingeborg Bachmann.” To be sure, in her article Ursula Krechel notes that earlier feminist paradigms have been abandoned for good reason: “The dichotomy exploiter-exploited, like that of perpetrator and victim, derived from the general political discourse of the 1960s and used by the new women’s movements for gender difference, was replaced in the 1980s by differentiated analyses of the accountability and complicity of women in the patriarchal system, complicity which looks not at individual responsibility or guilt but rather at the social networks of gender dependencies” (15). With the exception, however, of an article by Susanne Baackmann, a young Berkeley-trained Germanist, none of the other essays—even those by such scholars as Sigrid Weigel (“Sie sagten”) and Irmela von der Lühe (“Abschied”), who were represented in the 1984 issue—can be termed feminist in any sense or consistently employ a gender analysis, even when their topics cry out for an investigation of gender’s relevance: responses to Bachmann’s writing by younger women poets; Bachmann’s literary and actual relationships to Max Frisch, Paul Celan, and Jean Améry; the degree to which Maria Callas and Bachmann are phenomena of the 1950s. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that some Bachmann scholars find gender issues to be no longer opportune.

Indeed, in the popular media the rollback to a prefeminist era seems even more emphatic than a mere obliviousness to gender issues. In the 13 November

1995 issue of *Der Spiegel*, Sigrid Löffler—then a member of the ZDF’s Literarisches Quartett, the former editor of the *Feuilleton* of *Die Zeit*, and herself an Austrian woman—purported to review the new four-volume critical edition of the “Ways of Death” but in fact reduced Bachmann’s writing to a mostly biographical account of her successes and failures with men. “At thirty she was a myth,” writes Löffler. “A myth for men. Fellow writers, readers, and critics all succumbed to her morbid charm which combined girlish timidity and lyrical power, shyness and poetic boldness. Half accursed princess, half wild, prophetic conjureess, Bachmann [*die Bachmann*] moved as if transported from prize ceremony to prize ceremony, from poetic honor to poetic honor” (244). The less positive reception of her prose Löffler attributes to the criticism of masculinity in *The Thirtieth Year*: “Undine goes’—and curses men. Her community of male adorers never forgave her that” (244). The main impetus behind the “Ways of Death,” Löffler intimates, was Bachmann’s personal resentment resulting from her “experience of a catastrophic and crisis-ridden love affair with Max Frisch” (245), though her portrait of society “as the execution site of patriarchal violence” won her a new readership: “As a myth for men she’d long been cast aside; as a myth for women she made her posthumous career” (247). Pursuing her trope with a vengeance, Löffler also metamorphoses Bachmann into a range of mythological figures, portraying her as a spurned woman obsessed with revenge against the men who have wronged her: “The poetic seeress and songstress turned into the herald of prosaic violence, the beautiful Melusine turned into the male-hating virago. A transformation from ondine to banshee. The lyrical water nymph, driven from her magic element, exploits the devastated land of annihilated femininity. Undine goes. Undine has gone. She comes back as a Fury” (247). Löffler’s review signals a 1990s backlash against feminism as she attempts both to trivialize feminist concern with women’s treatment by men in the private sphere and also, turning radical feminism on its head, to reduce Bachmann’s writing to that single issue.

Surprisingly, even Sigrid Weigel, the scholar probably most responsible for directing feminist attention to Bachmann, seems to have moved significantly away from feminist approaches in the comprehensive 600-page study of Bachmann she published in 1999. In many ways, the book represents a breakthrough for Bachmann scholarship. Assuming that letters *from* Bachmann would be found not among her own private papers—closed to the public until 2025—but in the papers of her correspondents, Weigel consulted archives in Germany, Austria, Israel, and the United States to discover letters to and from Gerschom Scholem, Theodor W. Adorno, Hannah Arendt, Paul Celan, Peter

Szondi, Uwe Johnson, Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Alfred Andersch, Hans Werner Richter, and Hermann Kesten, among others. Weigel can particularly document Bachmann's very grave concern with the aftermath of National Socialism in Germany and Austria and her connections to major Jewish figures of the period, and that indeed will change the way Bachmann scholars address her work. The conception structuring her book, Weigel explains in her prologue, is that of Bachmann as intellectual and participant in the debates and discussions of her day. "Resistance to a female intellectual" is what explains the negative response to her prose: "Literary critics never forgave her for breaking from a terrain that was defined with the help of the equivalence lyric = intuitive = female" (*Ingeborg* 16). Yet Weigel's book almost entirely fails to pursue that topic. In her prologue she is very critical of feminist scholarship, apparently not entertaining the possibility that feminist investigations can be carried out in varieties of ways: "To be sure, often only in the light of feminist and deconstructive literary theory were the more radical philosophical dimensions of [Bachmann's] thought and writing discovered; but at the same time in an abundance of seminar papers and theses her work has been misunderstood as the legacy of 'women's literature' and in presenting her so that she represents 'female identity,' they have once more obscured the profile of the author as an engaged literary politician, as a philosophically and historically informed thinker" (*Ingeborg* 16). But when the book addresses questions of femininity at all, Weigel falls back into the model of the 1980s (an approach that to me does not seem compatible with her historical emphasis): "Franza is figured as a woman who has no stable place of her own in the symbolic order"; the dreams of *Malina* "refer to the drama of the 'feminine' in the symbolic order under a 'law in the name of the father'" (*Ingeborg* 516, 538). Weigel rightly observes critically that "Germanists' interpretations quite frequently ignore the historical situations in which [Bachmann's] literature was located" (*Ingeborg* 17). We can hope that in subsequent studies Weigel will explore the possibility of elaborating a method that is both historical *and* feminist and add gender to the analytical categories she uses to understand the historical situations she so usefully explores.

Happily, not all Bachmann scholars either remain wedded to a radical or poststructuralist feminist method or decide not to address gender at all. Many studies of Bachmann's work include gender among the various issues they investigate, an approach that would be called feminist in the United States if not in Germany, and a number of younger feminist scholars—particularly though not only in English-speaking countries—have also begun to investigate the application of new kinds of feminist methods to Bachmann's texts.

Several essays in Andrea Stoll's very useful 1992 Suhrkamp volume of materials pertaining to *Malina* (Ingeborg) consider gender-related aspects, and Stoll's own overview of *Malina's* reception ("Bruch") treats feminist approaches very evenhandedly. From earlier feminist studies, Maria Behre's essay very sensibly extracts three historically specific points for analysis—a description of contemporary expectations of femininity, a historical investigation of their genesis and variability, and an examination of the utopian functions of descriptions of the other—proposing that the feminist question "Do women write differently?" (*Schreiben Frauen anders?* is the title of Christa Gürtler's 1983 study) be transmuted into "Why did Bachmann write differently than her male contemporaries?" (212). Almut Dippel's fine 1995 monograph situates the volume *Three Paths to the Lake* very precisely at the time of its production, notes that Bachmann criticizes not only capitalist consumer society but also the "partial blindness of left circles in the 1960s and 1970s, who like Philippe [in "Three Paths to the Lake"] fight exploitation in the Third World, but don't see or don't want to see that they're exploiters themselves in their private lives. . . . Remarkably," Dippel notes with some irony, "it was exactly this contradiction in the behavior of many comrades of 1968 that was the catalyzing moment for the constitution of a solid women's movement. The women in the *Three Paths to the Lake* cycle don't of course rebel or do so only inaudibly. Thus it remains for male and female readers to recognize the contradictions and draw conclusions from them" (127). In another excellent book on *Three Paths to the Lake*, Bettina Bannasch argues that even though Bachmann tried to distance herself from feminism (maintaining, for instance, "This is not a book for women, and also not one for men, it's a book for human beings" [*TP* 4: 11]), she was not successful, since, in contrast to the male perpetrators of crimes against women, none of her women figures becomes a persecutor of men (53). These books show that it is possible to consider gender relations as a central concern of Bachmann's writing without making gender the central and overriding emphasis to which all other issues in the texts are subordinated.

The editors of the critical edition of the "*Todesarten*"-Projekt, Monika Albrecht and Dirk Götsche, also take for granted in their textual commentaries that gender is a significant, though far from the only, issue addressed in the novel cycle (in my view one of the virtues of the edition). In their own scholarship, Götsche and Albrecht emphasize gender themes and add a dimension frequently missing in Bachmann scholarship by assuming a critical stance toward her writing. Albrecht observes, for instance:

Just as Horkheimer and Adorno equate the beginning of enlightenment with that of world history, Bachmann seems to locate the origins of today's gender problematic in prehistoric times when myth developed. It seems, therefore, doubtful that Bachmann, as it has been claimed, does bring up for discussion the "incompatibility of the male and female principle . . . as an 'eternal' conflict that equally concerns man and woman." After all, in *Malina* she even goes one step further; in the last dialogue with Malina, just before the disappearance of the "I" in the wall, it is noted, in reference to Malina and the "I": "Something must have gone astray with the primates and later with the hominoids. A man, a woman . . . strange words, strange mania." ("A man" 133–34)

That critical perspective continues to inform their selection of scholarly essays in the three volumes titled *Über die Zeit schreiben* that Albrecht and Göttsche published as a kind of Bachmann yearbook in 1998, 2000, and 2004 and in their *Bachmann-Handbuch* of 2002. (In the interest of full disclosure, I should reveal that chapters from this book appear in German translation in all three volumes, and I also contributed several sections to the handbook.) In their call for papers for the second volume, Albrecht and Göttsche stress that Bachmann scholarship is changing and urge contributors to pay special attention to situating her works within history: "Contributors are welcome to choose their topics but should take into consideration that in the last few years a changing view of the historical period in which Bachmann wrote has been evolving. In the light of the emerging reassessment of the 1940's to early 1970's Bachmann scholars will have to pay even more attention than so far to the historical context of her writing, to her involvement with contemporary history and the critical (scientific, philosophical, social, literary) discourse of her time, and to the cultural implications of her works" (E-mail 18 May 1998). Interestingly, the three volumes feature a preponderance of U.S.-based scholars, and, as perhaps is appropriate for studies that have come into being "with the consciousness that Bachmann research is going through a time of upheaval" (Albrecht/Göttsche *Über* 8), many of the essays treating gender do so in ways critical both of Bachmann and/or of previous varieties of feminist scholarship. The scholarly revisions necessitated by the appearance of the critical edition also include, it appears, a reconsideration of Bachmann's own treatment of gender relations.

Finally, some of the most original and exciting feminist work on Bachmann to appear since the late 1980s has begun to apply to texts a range of new methods that foreground gender concerns and maintain gender as a central category of their analysis. In a subtle 1989 essay in *New German Critique*, Sabine Gölz adapts and revises Harold Bloom's theory of literary influence in order to under-

stand Bachmann's own female theory of writing as rereading, advanced from her perspective as a woman poet positioned in opposition to the poetic Father Precursor. Though gender appears not to be an explicit concern of the poems Gözl discusses, she shows that gender is nonetheless inscribed in the poem in the way Bachmann distances herself from a male tradition that assured the coherence of the poem and "a reading that presumes it can 'know' its object" ("Reading" 31). Gözl's interpretive model opens up Bachmann's poetry, which had seemed to baffle feminists, to feminist analysis, allowing discussion about gender there without resorting to essentialist notions of what counts as female or feminist. Her book, *The Split Scene of Reading* (1998), expands on these insights by contrasting the relationship of Bachmann's stance—a "readerly" one that refuses closure and allows readers the freedom to make their own meanings—to the posture of other writers (Derrida, Apollinaire, Nietzsche, Kafka) who appear to undermine the reliability of signifying structures but finally retreat from their own daring critique to insist that they themselves can proclaim what meaning is.

From quite another standpoint, Constance Hotz's lively and very innovative "*Die Bachmann*" (1990), an examination of Bachmann's reception by journalists during her lifetime, uses reception theory, structuralism, and semiotics to examine the production of a journalistic discourse about Bachmann in which gender (among other issues) played a central role. Thus, for instance, she argues that the *Spiegel* cover that brought Bachmann her early fame derived some portion of its effect through its *contrast* with the usual portraits of women: "Erotic stylization is *de rigueur* for the *Spiegel* covers of the fifties that feature women; the attributes of makeup, jewelry, a neat hairdo, mouth opened to a smile, often décolleté, consistently present a femininity that directs attention to itself. Ingeborg Bachmann's face, however, is characterized by a significant lack of these attributes or by their negative presentation: short hair, an evasive glance, a covered neckline, a firmly closed mouth. The eroticism of this face is infused with a gesture of refusal" (46). Even the identification of female authors through the use of the definite article prescribed by Duden, the authoritative dictionary of the German language, Hotz argues, affected the way Bachmann would be read: "With the addition of the definite article in the case of female authors (cf. in contrast without articles: Goethe, Grass etc.) the neutral use of the name as a metonymic representation of the work is abandoned, and the personal aspect is emphasized before the work; and according to gender-specific usage demanded by grammar the personal aspect is always characterized by and as femininity. The category of gender (but only the female, not the male) is thus always connected to the reference to the work." (130). Via these and many other examples, Hotz contributes

to an understanding of how and why the image of Bachmann as “the poetess” [die Dichterin] and “First Lady of the Gruppe 47” was generated and simultaneously establishes a new paradigm for feminist Bachmann scholarship.

Susanne Ruta's 1991 review of *Malina* in the *Village Voice*, written from outside the German feminist hothouse, brought a breath of fresh air to the entire feminist debate on Bachmann. “Bachmann's feminism,” Ruta declares, “is always full of unresolved paradoxes,” particularly as “she buys into the ancient misogynist division of humankind that equates the male with reason, logic, order, light, and the female with passion, chaos, confusion, and darkness.” What interests Ruta as much as gender issues in Bachmann's novel are its politics: she views *Malina* as “a political novel about postwar capitalist society on the remake, and about cold war tensions and their hidden psychic toll. It's a cold war novel the way *le temps retrouvé*—as Bachmann demonstrates in her lovely essay on Proust—is a novel about World War I. In both cases polite society, with its furtive nastiness, concealed vices, and paraded vanities, is presented as a microcosm of the larger political scene” (66). Ruta's iconoclastic reading of *Malina* points in the direction of the approach to Bachmann's “Ways of Death” that is grounded in politics and social history that scholars writing since her review now increasingly pursue.

Most recently, feminist scholars often based outside Germany have pursued a variety of innovative approaches to Bachmann. Friederike Eigler, for instance, uses a Bakhtinian model to examine the “heteroglossia,” the various voices within the figures of *Simultan*, in order to investigate the split relationship of women to dominant discursive forms. Helgard Mahrtdt views Bachmann's writing through the lens of the Frankfurt School, emphasizing the deformations of subjectivity and sensuality that result from the penetration of instrumental rationality into the private sphere. Karen Remmler explores the affinities between Walter Benjamin's concept of remembrance (*Eingedenken*) and Bachmann's own treatment of history and memory. Gisela Brinker-Gabler proposes that Franza's identification (“I am a Papua”) with the victims of colonization represents a renewed colonization of the colonized, since her assumption of their perspective does not leave room for a perspective of their own. And Monika Albrecht (“Sire”; “Postkolonialismus”) and I (“White” and this book's chapter 10) pursue further the question of Bachmann's relationship to postcolonialism and critical exoticism. Ingeborg Majer-O'Sickey criticizes “post-structuralist theoretical paradigms” that “tend to ignore Bachmann's understanding of women's situation as a social phenomenon in historical contexts” (55), and she also raises the possibility that the split subject and multiple voices of *Malina* force

readers to avoid totalizing readings and offer “an altogether new possibility for feminism” that simultaneously rejects ‘representivity’ at once as it retains a feminism of articulation” (68). Gudrun Brokoph-Mauch considers Bachmann’s treatment of Austria a reason to allocate her writing to the Austrian tradition of “critical Heimat-literature.” Rhonda Duffaut reads *Malina* through the perspective of nationality, arguing that in her ecstatic love for Ivan the “I” of *Malina* conceives of an alternative form of community beyond national boundaries but, when that love ends, “becomes reinscribed by gender roles that confine her to the kitchen, to the home, that function together with nationalism” (39). Reading “Undine Goes” through a Lacanian lens, Veronica Scrol maintains that “her oscillation between the imaginary and the symbolic” subverts dichotomies (24), while Margaret McCarthy, criticizing poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theory for its denial of female agency, maintains that the “I” typifies the alienated Lacanian subject but expresses her resistance via her performance of “excess.” Also critical of French poststructuralist theory for its too easy acceptance of gender dichotomies, Stephanie Bird instead shows how different modes of responding to historical experience are central to definitions of the female subject. Karin Bauer applies categories of queer theory, as elaborated by Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler, to argue that the love relationship of two women in “A Step towards Gomorrah” fails because even Charlotte’s fantasies are “censored images always already relegated to the realm of the reproduction and reiteration of the norm” (232). Finally, two essays by Elizabeth Boa from 1990 and 1997 display the transformation of feminist approaches to Bachmann in the 1990s. In the first, Boa still draws upon French theory, arguing that *Malina’s* “I” gives expression to the Kristevan semiotic, an expression of female desire that can be conceived of as simultaneously regressive and, in its challenge to the symbolic ruled by the law of the father, subversive. By 1997, in contrast, she discusses *Malina* “as expressing less the dilemmas of all women under universal patriarchy than of an intellectual woman in twentieth-century Austria” (“Reading” 271); she also addresses ethnocentrism in *Franza*, though she concludes that the novel can be defended against that charge “precisely because the Other is left largely blank” (“Reading” 286).

All these essays reveal both the proliferation of feminist approaches during the fifteen years 1990–2005 and the more general feminist move towards a more historically and culturally specific conception of gender inflected by a range of other social categories. And recent Bachmann conferences since the thirtieth anniversary of her death (Rome 2003, the papers published in a special issue of *Cultura tedesca*; Dublin 2004; Nottingham 2005; Vienna 2006; Ljubljana 2006)

with the ensuing essay collections are producing yet more new and innovative feminist readings of Bachmann's texts.

A 1995 dispute in *German Quarterly* reveals what is at stake in this transformation of feminist methods over two decades and why, for academic feminists, such methods are of more than academic interest. In the fall number of *German Quarterly*, Albrecht Holschuh published an indignant response to an article by Susanne Baackmann on "Undine Goes" takes extreme issue with what he considers her misreading of Bachmann's text. To Holschuh, Baackmann is guilty of pressing the text into a predetermined interpretive schema, associating textual passages with random extratextual phenomena, appealing to the obligatory authorities to substantiate her shaky points, and looking for political relevance instead of literary understanding. Moreover, Holschuh claims, Baackmann's essay exemplifies a more widespread practice deriving from a new conception of the discipline that has become *German Quarterly's* virtual program. "But the prevailing practice has disadvantages," Holschuh warns ominously, "and it's high time to get its effects under control" (430).

So what has Baackmann done to incite such wrath? In her *GQ* article, as in her essay in the 1995 Bachmann issue of *text + kritik* and in her book *Erklär mir Liebe* (1995), Baackmann employs an approach that is quite representative of Bachmann scholarship in transition (and also probably manifests the influence of her two most important teachers, Sigrid Weigel and Anton Kaes). On the one hand, she continues to draw on the French thinkers most influential for 1980s feminist theory—Irigaray, Cixous, Kristeva—and also still speaks of the place of femininity *tout court* in discourse or the symbolic order, as if this system and its definitions of femininity were not historically variable. But to the feminist poststructuralist method she adds a new historicist examination of other cultural materials illustrating "the representation of femininity and the presence of women in the 1950s and 1960s" in order to show, as she puts it, "that Bachmann thematically and via her writing style intervenes into the contemporary discussion of femininity and love and in what terms [*unter welchem Bedeutungshorizont*] this discourse circulated in the public sphere during the years in which Bachmann was working on *The Thirtieth Year*" ("Reply" 433). Baackmann's approach is premised on many of the assumptions that inform feminist investigations of the late 1990s: that literary texts are not beyond or exterior to the social order of a particular period, but are rather both products and producers of that society's discourses, toward which the text may take any variety of stances; that texts—and various readings of those texts—are thus in no sense politically neutral but can support, subvert, oppose, and so on, various

aspects of that social order; that feminist readings (like all others) are partisan in specific ways and thus will necessarily stress those aspects that correspond to their particular feminist needs.

Holschuh regards all those methodological principles as illegitimate, but, as Baackmann's dignified "reply" underlines, his objections to her reading of "Undine Goes" are also founded upon unacknowledged ideological premises. By alleging that a literary text can be understood immanently, without reference to the society from which it emerges, and by maintaining that concepts such as "the absolute," "spirit," and "humanity" can have a meaning independent of the society that gave them rise, scholars blindly perpetuate the dominant values of the reigning order; by insisting that there is a single meaning of the text (perhaps guaranteed by the author's intentions) to which he alone has access, Holschuh seems to situate himself as the authoritative purveyor of a single truth and denies the polysemy and multivalence of the text and the multiplicity of subject positions assumed by the readers who appropriate it. Finally (and here I am assuming a more polemical position than Baackmann's own), Holschuh's military imagery—"I'm sorry that so to speak as a front soldier [Baackmann] has entered the line of fire" (430)—and his rhetoric in accusing Baackmann of "political correctness [*das politisch Korrekte*]" (432) suggest that his intervention should be understood as another volley in what, since the late 1980s, has been termed the "culture wars" or the "P.C. debates": the efforts of conservatives to roll back the methodological and curricular changes that were the academic consequences of the struggles for social justice on the part of the social movements of the 1960s. And certainly Holschuh does nothing to dispel that suspicion when he sarcastically claims of Baackmann's approach: "So with a good conscience and not too much effort the social sins of all times can be exposed and the scholar's existence at least virtually obtains that political-moral relevance that has glimmered on as a fantasy since 1968" (430). This apparently innocuous scholarly exchange thus reveals itself to be a small skirmish in a much larger struggle over what kind of social order will prevail.

Evidently, I understand my own work, and this book, to form part of that struggle. Since, as this chapter must have shown, feminism itself is far from monolithic, smaller disputes over strategy and tactics take place among feminists themselves, in places (among others) such as the displaced form of disagreements over readings of texts. Although over the past several decades I have myself advanced a number of different interpretations of Bachmann which were clearly not always consistent with one another, I have continued to plead for a historically grounded understanding of her work. I would argue now that the

German feminist appropriation of Bachmann in the 1980s did damage both to the understanding of her that is of most utility to feminism and to feminism itself. Bachmann's writing as feminists received it then encouraged them to ask certain questions about women's lives and ignore others, supported what was in effect a withdrawal from political contestation in the public arena by portraying issues of the private sphere as most crucial to women, and allowed feminists to advance a monocausal analysis of women's situation: all women always only victims of all men. Her work thus supported political tendencies which had by the late 1970s moved to the fore in many Western feminisms: a concentration on the private realm, culture, psychic structures, and interiority to the relative neglect of social structures and the public arena. In my view, those developments produced a depoliticization of feminism from which we may still have not completely recovered.

But as this chapter has shown, the 1980s feminist appropriation of Bachmann is not the only feminist reading of Bachmann possible. It appears to me that feminist readings of Bachmann from the 1990s onward (like my own) begin by making several assumptions about how to think about Bachmann in her historical context. First, feminist Bachmann scholars return to questions asked in the 1960s, exploring how the deformations of private life portrayed in Bachmann's writings are related to larger social structures—and this time not to an abstract, generalized, monolithic, and all-embracing patriarchy or phallogocentrism but to particular historical and social determinants of which gender is only one—and how those issues find representation in Bachmann's texts. That is, we attempt to return Bachmann to history and history to Bachmann. Second, we may view Bachmann's relationship to poststructuralism, for which indeed a good deal of evidence exists, as itself a historical phenomenon; we might even concede that Bachmann's affinities to French poststructuralist thought (or any other intellectual or literary tradition) may well tell us nothing at all about the "truth" of women but is evidence only of the fact that some (women) intellectuals wrote at approximately the same time, turned to the same intellectual precursors, and used them to arrive at similar conclusions. And finally, we have begun to abandon what Leslie Morris in conversation called our "wishful thinking" about Bachmann's politics, our attempt to make her conform to our ideas about what the proper form of feminist (or other) theory and practice should be. For as Hans Werner Henze told Morris in an interview conducted on 2 August 1988, though Bachmann was a committed antifascist, she was in fact—especially vis-à-vis the possibilities for political action the 1960s offered—not otherwise very politically engaged. Instead, we can now regard Bachmann's writing with a

more dispassionate eye, consider her limitations as well as her virtues, and investigate her and her texts as products of a particular historical moment which is no longer our own. With this grounding in history as their starting point, feminist scholars can begin to appropriate and elaborate new methods of feminist analysis, ask new questions about aspects and areas of Bachmann's work other than those that 1980s feminists considered, and perhaps advance readings of Bachmann's works that could be of increased utility to feminist thought and practice in the first and subsequent decades of the new millennium.

The questions I myself ask about Bachmann's work and the assumptions I make about it derive, of course, from my own social and historical location and are generated by my own intellectual interests—among other things, my desire to elaborate a method for feminist scholarship that is adequate to the investigation of the relationship of historical situatedness, gender, and textuality; my commitment to a feminism that acknowledges and respects women's difference; and my continued allegiance to an anticapitalist politics. My present reading of Bachmann, like all others (including the quite different interpretations of her work that I myself have advanced over the past several decades), is one that grows out of my particular needs and accords with my own political agenda. That positionality produces, I hope, new kinds of insights into Bachmann's texts but is also, I am sure, responsible for other sorts of blindnesses. After twenty years of poststructuralism, I would not want to argue for a single truth of the text, nor would I wish to maintain that any reading (except perhaps one that willfully flies in the face of the evidence of the text), is false, wrong, or a misreading (though I might want to oppose it for other, political reasons). As Bachmann herself maintained in the passage that I have chosen as the first epigraph for this chapter, literary texts deserve and can accommodate many different readings, and we should be prepared to grant their legitimacy while recognizing that different interpretive postures will serve different and contending interests, including those that are non- or even antifeminist. Our feminist reading remains merely one among others; we as feminists have no special advantage that allows us to transcend our own historical situation or gives us special insight into the meanings of Bachmann's works. To vary my second epigraph, women readers, too, when they read, are readers of themselves. What we, like Bachmann's other readers, find in her texts will also inevitably be at least in part a mirror of our own concerns.