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Part Two: A History of Reading Bachmann, 1987, Chapter 7. Bachmann Reading/Reading Bachmann, with essay titled, Reading Bachmann in 1987

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1987

Reagan's popularity continued unabated into his second term, and the Democratic Party seemed incapable of mounting any substantial opposition to Republican policies. One commentator observed: "By 1986, the White House and Senate were in Republican hands, and the Supreme Court was gradually shifting rightward. The House of Representatives, though controlled by Democrats, agreed with the administration's agenda more than half the time" (Kazin 115). Without significant outcry in response, Reagan successfully bombed Libya in April 1986, continued to lobby for financial support for the Nicaraguan contras, and sought billions of dollars for his "Star Wars" or Strategic Defense Initiative, a laser system intended to destroy incoming Soviet missiles in space which no one, including the military, was convinced would ever work. Increasing numbers of homeless people appeared on the streets of U.S. cities, a response to Reagan's shifts in national priorities: cuts in social services, the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, and the growth of unemployment and poverty (Peter Marcuse). A new discourse on race emerged that focused on "reverse discrimination" against white men. As David Wellman commented: "The new political language certainly resonates with the tenor of the times. . . . Resentment is high and all-white bars and living rooms are thick with tales of 'qualified' Euro-American males losing jobs to 'the special interest' of 'affirmative-action candidates.' There is good reason to believe that attacks on inequality are not politically feasible during periods of belt-tightening" (58). Reagan's reputation was tarnished only by the Iran-contra scandal—a system of covert operations begun in the first days of the Reagan regime but revealed only in late 1986—which involved an elaborate National Security Council scheme to sell arms to Iran in order to obtain funding for the contras. The congressional committees investigating the scandal were, however, never able to determine what the president himself knew and when he knew it.

On the other hand, left-wing activism was not entirely dead during the period. The academic year 1985–1986 marked a high point in the national campaign urging universities to divest themselves of their stock in companies doing business with South Africa, and in 1986–1987 students began to organize against CIA recruiting on campus. In April 1986 the founding convention of the National Rainbow Coalition was attended by nearly eight hundred delegates amid speculation about whether Jesse Jackson would again mount a campaign for the presidency. A number of large demonstrations took place in Washington,

DC: a rally supported reproductive rights in spring 1986; in April 1987 demonstrators marched there and in San Francisco to oppose U.S. policy in southern Africa and Central America; and in October 1987 a huge National March for Lesbian and Gay Rights was addressed by speakers Eleanor Smeal of the National Organization for Women (NOW), Cesar Chavez of the United Farm Workers, and Jesse Jackson. A similar coalition of women's groups, minority organizations, and labor united in fall 1987 to defeat the nomination of Judge Robert Bork to the Supreme Court. In an article called "A New New Left on Campus," Maria Margaronis wrote: "The Reagan era isn't over yet, and the children of the 1980s have a great deal to work out before they can build a national movement, for themselves and with what's left of the left. But as the times begin to lean toward changing, such efforts deserve all the support they can get" (757).

Meanwhile, feminists were beset by external and internal political problems of their own. The far right exacerbated the Reagan regime's assaults on a range of social programs benefiting women by intensifying their opposition to women's access to abortion: in May 1987 a nationwide campaign called "Operation Rescue" was launched to picket, blockade, and ultimately shut down abortion clinics, while other right-wing groups were responsible for clinic bombings and arson. Conservative trends could also be discerned within the women's movement itself: cultural feminists Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon made common cause with conservatives in order to pass ordinances banning pornography in Minneapolis and Indianapolis, arguing that "pornography reveals that male pleasure is inextricably tied to victimizing, hurting, exploiting" (Pally 795 citing Dworkin, *Pornography*). In a notorious sex discrimination case against Sears, Roebuck, one woman historian enraged many other feminist scholars by declaring that it was not necessarily Sears's discriminatory policies but women's commitment to traditional female values that explained why so few women held the higher-paying sales commission jobs: "Working women who are married are likely to put family and children first," she argued, "and therefore, as the survey evidence of the Sears work force shows, are less willing to work evenings and weekends than men—evenings and weekends which are required of commission salespeople" (Wiener 178). Feminists were also increasingly forced to wrestle with a phenomenon that journalists had christened "post-feminism." "Most frequently," Deborah Rosenfelt and Judith Stacey explained, "journalists use this term to describe views expressed by relatively affluent and ambitious women in their late twenties and early thirties about the difficulties they face in attempting to combine satisfying careers and family life under present social and economic conditions. More broadly, postfeminism demarcates an emerging culture and ideology that simultaneously incorporates, revises, and depoliticizes many of the fundamental issues advanced by Second Wave feminism" (341). Rosenfelt and Stacey viewed postfeminism as, among other things,

indicative of a crisis in feminism occasioned by its inability to find adequate solutions to the changed political and personal situation of feminists and other women in the Reagan era: “Defeats in the political arena coincide with significant shifts in the personal needs and priorities of many who were in the vanguard of Second Wave feminism, and together the public defeats and the personal changes have taken their toll on the confidence, vision, and solidarity of the left feminist community in the United States” (342).

For academics, the second Reagan administration also marked the beginning of what would later be termed the “culture wars” or the “p.c. debates,” the right-wing assault on the changes in canons, curricula, methods, and topics of research that had been instituted by participants in the social movements of the 1960s as they took on positions of responsibility in universities and colleges. The offensive was launched in 1984 in *To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education*, written by William Bennett, the Reagan-appointed chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities and later secretary of education. Bennett “argued that the classic texts of Western civilization were being replaced by works of lesser value in an attempt to produce a more inclusive curriculum and that as a result, American students were being deprived of their ‘legacy’” (Ginsberg/Lennox 178). “Accuracy in Academe”—founded in 1985 as a spin-off of Reed Irvine’s self-proclaimed media watchdog organization “Accuracy in Media”—recruited classroom spies and began to compile a database on professors the organization considered “left-wing propagandists” (Diamond 91–92).

The year 1987 seemed to initiate a more intensified phase in the conservative campaign against changes in the academy. For example, it saw the founding of the first nationwide organization of right-wing faculty, the National Association of Scholars (NAS), which proclaimed that policies such as affirmative action and curricular focus on categories of “race, gender, and class . . . involve either the application of a double standard or the repudiation of appropriate intellectual criteria” (National Association of Scholars 8) and called for their abolition. The analysis advanced by the NAS was also promoted by two widely read conservative texts published in 1987, E. D. Hirsch’s *Cultural Literacy* and Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind*, which attacked the recent “trendy relativism” in higher education as being responsible for the abandonment of what they regarded as enduring cultural values. Though multiculturalists are the main target of Bloom’s invective, feminists, the “latest enemy of the vitality of the classic texts” (Bloom 65), also figure prominently on his list of major villains, and he observed in a 1988 *Time* magazine interview: “Radical feminism tends to be present in the universities more than within the general society. . . . This is an agenda, and it has entered the university as a huge theoretical network. It is overwhelming in its power and its very angry passions” (“Most” 74, cited in Ginsberg/Lennox 180).

Of course such claims were quite absurd: Marxists, feminists, and multiculturalists were very far from assuming control of any campuses whatsoever, nor had universities jettisoned classical and canonical texts for those deemed more “politically correct”—though a range of previously neglected perspectives and works had indeed been *added* to the curriculum since the late 1960s. Clearly, the NAS and its friends were not wrong to discern that far-reaching (and to them deplorable) changes had taken place in the academy, nor in choosing 1987 as the year in which they began their major assault on their antagonists. By 1987, even scholars less hostile to the social changes initiated in the 1960s had noticed that, at least in the humanities, a sea change had taken place as a consequence of the encounter of a rather attenuated British Marxism with French poststructuralism (especially Foucault). Describing the genealogy of new historicism, Louis Montrose, for instance, observed: “In various combinations and with varying degrees of consistency and effectiveness, the intellectual forces identifiable as new historicism or cultural poetics, cultural materialism, feminism, and revisionist forms of Marxism have been engaged in redrawing the boundaries and restructuring the content of English and American literary studies during the past decade” (“New Historicism” 392). Hillis Miller, a leading Yale deconstructionist and then MLA president, devoted his presidential address (published in the May 1987 issue of *PMLA*) to decrying what he called “the resistance to theory” in the new directions he discerned in literary scholarship: “As everyone knows, literary study in the past few years has undergone a sudden, almost universal turn away from theory in the sense of an orientation toward languages as such and has made a corresponding turn toward history, culture, society, politics, institutions, class and gender conditions, the social context, the material base in the sense of institutionalization, conditions of production, technology, distribution, and consumption of ‘cultural products,’ among other products” (283).

With even more alarm, in the lead article of the same issue of *PMLA*, Edward Pechter declared (echoing, of course, the *Communist Manifesto*), “A specter is haunting criticism—the specter of a new historicism.” Moreover, Pechter observed, “The new historicization of literary studies is equally a new politicization, with interpretation judged as an expression of the political interests of the audience.” And though he conceded that many different and even contradictory critical practices were represented in new historicism, he maintained that “it is at its core—or, better, at its cutting edge—a kind of ‘Marxist criticism’” that is, moreover, “instrumental to social change, part of the project of making the world a better place” (292, 299). One might view the emergence of this new historical, Marxist-influenced methodology (committed, as Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield put it, “to the transformation of a social order which exploits people on the grounds of race, gender, and class” [viii]) as a somewhat displaced response on the part of a particular generation of academics to the depredations of the Reagan regime. Montrose notes that “the reorientation in the field under

way since at least the beginning of the 1980s is largely the work of critics whose values were formed while they were students during the culturally experimental and politically turbulent 1960s,” and he goes on to observe, “In general, these critics responded to the radically altered sociopolitical climate of the 1980s—and, perhaps, for some of them, to the uneasy comfort they had now achieved within its academic establishment—with work that confronted ideologies and cultural politics of other times and places but resisted the articulation of its own assumptions and commitments” (“New Historicism” 393).

The feminist scholarship of this period still mostly held these new historical methodologies at arm’s length, as male neo-Marxists also continued to pay rather little attention to gender. In an article first published in *Cultural Critique* in July 1988 and widely reprinted, Judith Lowder Newton even denounced new historicism’s failure to acknowledge properly its real genealogy: “Barely alluded to in most of the histories of ‘new historicism’ so far are what were in fact the mother roots—the women’s movement and the feminist theory and feminist scholarship which grew from it” (153). Certainly, feminism played a central role in the challenge to universalist founding assumptions which culminated in the new methodologies of the 1990s. But I think Newton overstates feminism’s contribution to the emergence of this specific approach, which was more attentive to historical context and reading strategies than much feminist literary analysis of this period and was in the early 1990s itself appropriated for feminist purposes. During Reagan’s second term, however, feminist scholars themselves were also embarked on the search for new methodologies. In *Signs*, Linda Alcoff explored the conflict between cultural feminism and poststructuralism and showed how major feminist thinkers such as Teresa de Lauretis and Denise Riley had been able to reconceptualize femininity so as to avoid essentialism while preserving the political utility of the category “woman.” Alcoff’s article also advances the important concept of “positionality,” which, as she elaborates it, has two dimensions: first, “that the concept of woman is a relational term, identifiable only within a (constantly moving) context; but, second, that the position that women find themselves in can be actively utilized (rather than transcended) as a location for the construction of meaning, a place from where meaning is constructed rather than simply the place where meaning can be discovered (the meaning of femaleness)” (434). (As the introduction to this book shows, “positionality” was to become a concept very important for my own thinking.)

In a paper first presented at the American Historical Association convention and later published in the association’s journal, Joan Scott similarly elaborated the ways in which the concept of “gender” could be “a useful category of historical analysis”:

“Gender” as a substitute for “women” is also used to suggest that information about women is necessarily information about men, that one implies the study of the other. This usage insists that the world of women is part of the world of men,

created in and by it. . . . In addition, gender is also used to designate social relations between the sexes. Its use explicitly rejects biological explanations, such as those that find a common denominator for diverse forms of female subordination in the facts that women have the capacity to give birth and men have greater muscular strength. Instead, gender becomes a way of denoting “cultural constructions”—the entirely social creation of ideas about appropriate roles for women and men. It is a way of referring to the exclusively social origins of the subjective identities of men and women. (32)

One consequence of such advances was a more emphatic feminist insistence in empirical work that the received categories of male dominance and female victimhood did not match up with historical or contemporary reality, Niara Sudarkasa observing, for instance, “that a ‘neutral’ complementarity, rather than a superordination/subordination, more accurately describes the relationship between certain female and male roles in various precolonial African societies” (101), and Barbara Harlow maintaining that the situation of Third World women throws into question the “convenient feminist categories of race, class, gender as well as ‘unified’ women’s experience” (Milkman/Stansell 450–451). As well, the new analytical models permitted a much more complex understanding of the production and function of femininity, now conceived to be always inflected by other social categories, as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, reviewing three books on women in the American South, observed: “The personal lives of southern women were profoundly political, that is, they were inscribed in a distinct social system that they also helped to shape and for which they bear the responsibilities of their gender-, class-, and race-specific contributions” (162). Equally important, books like Claudia Koonz’s *Mothers in the Fatherland* showed how a definition of women as always part of men’s world and defined in relationship to men could resituate women as figures also possessing human agency and making their own gender-specific contribution to history, whether for good or—as in the case of Koonz’s examination of women’s role in National Socialism—for very ill.

The new feminist paradigms elaborated in the late 1980s slowly began to shape literary analysis as well. In a *Feminist Studies* essay reviewing five surveys of feminist literary theory and criticism published in 1985, June Howard identified the process by which this transformation took place. The definition of “difference” was the terrain of struggle in those texts, she explained: did it refer to the constitution of meaning through difference, as French theory would have it; to differences among women, a primary concern for Americans; and/or to the feminist project of “making a difference” and which form of feminist literary analysis would best promote that end? “These books,” Howard observes, “are true to their moment, in presenting the relations between Anglo-American and French feminist criticism as a confrontation, even an impasse. But they also provide evidence that the moment is already passing, perhaps that it has already passed” (169). A perspective that Toril Moi’s influential *Sexual/Textual Politics* did not pursue, Marxist feminism, is in Howard’s view most likely to point the

way out of a “static Anglo-American/French confrontation,” for (quoting Moi) “Marxist feminist cultural criticism enables the critic to link the literary work ‘to a specific historical context in which a whole set of different structures (ideological, economic, social, political) intersect to produce precisely those textual structures’ and opens up the possibility of ‘studying the historical construction of the categories of gender and . . . analysing the importance of culture in the representation and transformation of those categories’” (Howard 175–76 citing Moi 94). Howard particularly praised the “materialist feminist” approach of Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt’s *Feminist Criticism and Social Change*, which, as they themselves note, “has much in common with ‘the new Marxist cultural theory and the work of [the Marxist literary scholars] Tony Bennet, Fredric Jameson, Michael Ryan, and Terry Eagleton’” (Howard 184 citing Newton/Rosenfelt xxiv). The difficulties of attending to all the areas emphasized by the new materialist feminist approach are “vertiginous” and “formidable”: feminist literary scholars writing from a materialist feminist perspective must focus on “the power relations implied by gender and simultaneously of those implied by class, race, and sexual identification; an analysis of literature and an analysis of history and society; an analysis of the circumstances of cultural production and an analysis of the complexities with which at a given moment in history they are inscribed in the text” (Howard 186 citing Newton/Rosenfelt xix). “It is not surprising,” Howard notes, “that brilliant critics like [Gayatri] Spivak and [Cora] Kaplan have published relatively fragmentary work over the past decade (186).

Certainly, I might add, that is also the case for those of us far less illustrious, who also struggled throughout the 1980s to find an adequate method. By 1987, however, it seems to me that the corner had been turned. Spurred to counter-assault (at least within the academy) by the right-wing gains of the Reagan era, a range of progressives that included feminists had begun to elaborate analytical approaches that allowed them to address the “rainbow coalition” of concerns that had posed themselves in the 1980s, cobbling together a method that was historical and materialist and attentive to the theoretical advances of the past decades. Under the influence of Newton, Rosenfelt, and a host of other feminist scholars who had once called themselves Marxist feminists and socialist feminists, feminist literary scholars increasingly termed their own variant of that method “materialist feminism.” As Howard presciently observed from her vantage point of 1987, “Both in its content and in its style, materialist feminism seems to me to offer the best hope for an approach that resists both the glamour of high theory and the comforting certainties of political correctness and common sense, for an approach that is theoretically rigorous, historically specific, and politically engaged” (186).

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CHAPTER 7

Bachmann Reading / Reading Bachmann

THE WOMAN IN WHITE IN THE “WAYS OF DEATH”

*Sometimes it takes a coincidence,
sometimes intuition, to recognize the true stories
that are happening behind the play-acting.*
—Ingeborg Bachmann, “Todesarten-Projekt”

Only one single, brighter episode interrupts the dismal narrative of Ingeborg Bachmann’s unfinished novel, *The Book of Franza*: Franza’s recollection of May 1945, “the most beautiful spring.” *The Book of Franza* mostly details Franza’s husband’s deliberate attempt to drive her mad, her escape from him into her brother’s care, their trip together to northern Africa, and her subsequent decline and death there. But Franza also remembers Austria’s liberation in May 1945, a month whose burgeoning splendor coincided with the unrest and excitement of her own adolescent body. The “miracle,” as she terms it, means peace, freedom, and hope for Franza, brought to her small village in the person of an English captain, Sir Perceval Glyde, “the first man in her life” (*Franza* 42). She joyfully accompanies her captain on his journeys through the countryside and receives her first kisses from him as he leaves to return to England. “With that, Franza’s first love came to an end” (*Franza* 45), Bachmann’s narrator tells us, apparently this bleak novel’s only example of a heterosexual romance that will not result in destruction and death—the “Ways of Death” of Bachmann’s final novel cycle.

Thus it is all the more surprising to discover that Bachmann had found a prior literary model for her romantic captain in a figure seemingly quite his opposite. For “Sir Perceval Glyde” is not a name original to Bachmann’s novel: before his appearance in *The Book of Franza*, Sir Perceval figures as the oppressively masculine villain of Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*, a Victorian “sensation novel” which also otherwise shares many similar themes and structures with *The Book of Franza*. The comparison of their similarities (as well as

their striking differences) that Bachmann herself seems to have invited will reveal a good deal about Bachmann's reading habits and her methods of composition, and it can also clarify some puzzling aspects of both *The Book of Franza* and *Malina*. As well, the presence of this disguised allusion to another literary work may caution Bachmann's readers to be alert for other significant, if occluded, literary models for her fiction and in general to be aware of the importance of intertextuality for her own literary creations.

Like both *Malina* and *The Book of Franza*, *The Woman in White* is about gender, love, and politics, about sexual and social identity, about multiple doppelgängers and hints of incest, about male dominance and female submission, about confinement and madness. The novel's author, William Wilkie Collins (1824–1889), was a prolific writer of thrilling, suspenseful, and carefully plotted Victorian popular fiction intended—like that of his friend and associate Charles Dickens—for middle-brow, middle-class audiences. *The Woman in White*, his best-known work and one of the most widely read novels of the Victorian era, was published serially in Dickens's *All the Year Round* from 26 November 1859 to 25 August 1860 and first appeared in volume form on 15 August 1860. As was the case with many other “sensation novels” as well, questions of gender stand at the center of *The Woman in White*, and the concern of sensation novels with the role of women is now acknowledged to be one of the main reasons for the genre's success (Helsingier et. al 122–145). But, scholars argue, Collins, like other Victorian novelists, displays a deep ambivalence about the situation of women: “On the one hand, he creates characters, situations, and symbolic structures that implicitly indict a society that oppresses women. On the other hand, through his ambivalent depictions of those characters and situations, he stops short of acknowledging the basic premises of Victorian society” (Barickman 148–149). Unlike Bachmann's novels, Collins's novel ends with the villains vanquished, evil properly punished, and the legitimate order of (benevolent) male dominance restored. Elaine Showalter, author of one of the first book-length feminist studies of the British novel, can thus regard *The Woman in White*, along with Collins's other novels, as a mere apology for the system of gender relations Victorian men desired: “Like Dickens, Collins invariably ends his novels with sentimental happy marriages of patient woman and resolute man, marriages whose success is validated by the prompt appearance of male offspring” (*Literature* 162–163). But Bachmann's reading is more subtle and differentiated. To grasp how she appropriated this novel, we must read it, with her, “against the grain” to understand how she expands and explores the openings in the social and sexual order with which Collins tantalizingly plays, instead of closing them as Collins does in his conventionally Victorian happy ending.

Collins's four positive characters bear affinities to the central figures of both *Malina* and *The Book of Franza*. Three women stand in his novel's center, all evidently aspects of a single figure. Laura Fairlie, a blond, beautiful, childlike, and submissive heiress, is the central love interest. Anne Catherick, the "Woman in White," mysteriously resembles Laura (and is eventually revealed to be Laura's half-sister via a liaison between her father and a housemaid) but is congenitally weak-minded and deranged, one symptom of which is her insistence on always clothing herself in white. Marian Halcombe, Laura's half-sister on her mother's side, is as dark and ugly as Laura is fair, so that the viewer, we are told, is "almost repelled by the masculine form and masculine look of [her] features" (Collins 25), but she is endowed in return with masculine talents and a masculine assertiveness uniformly admired by the novel's other characters. Mad Anne dies; Laura marries, unhappily and then happily; Marian acts, is even permitted, in contrast to Anne and Laura, to narrate a section of the novel via her diary entries but in return is denied femininity and sexual fulfillment. The three half-sisters thus represent three irreconcilable possibilities for women. One might view these three partial women as a splitting of female possibilities like that displayed in the three major characters of *Malina*, the "I" representing female disruption and madness; the "I" in relationship to Ivan, a male-centered love; and the "I" in relationship to her doppelgänger Malina, ungendered, rational competence.

Affinities between Collins's major positive male figure and Martin, Franza's brother in *The Book of Franza*, are even more apparent. Though he is no blood kin to the sisters, the three disguise themselves for a time as siblings to escape villainous detection, and, until the time that his love for Laura is permitted to reveal itself, he describes his relationship to the sisters as brotherly. His name, Walter Hartright, tells all: like Martin, he is the *good* brother, nursing the deranged woman and protecting the weak; like Martin, he tells most of the story and attempts to unravel its mysteries. Yet, like Martin as well, he poses no threat at all to the order of male dominance and patriarchal inheritance: as must have been more apparent to Bachmann than to an English-speaking readership, Walter's function is, benevolently, to *walten*, to administer and control. By the end of the novel, Walter has become the proper husband for the proper Victorian heroine, and the book concludes with the birth of Walter's and Laura's son, another little Walter, proclaimed in the novel's penultimate paragraph as the legitimate masculine successor to *Laura's* properties—"the Heir of Limmeridge" (Collins 584). Like Walter, Martin is given the task of restoring threatened arrangements of male dominance, but Bachmann's treatment of the good brother is more daring and complex. Hinting at an incestuous attachment of the siblings

(a relationship borrowed from Musil), Bachmann presents Martin as a figure once Franza's friend and equal but now a man like any other. Yet because Martin is Franza's brother by blood, he cannot marry her to restore the patriarchal order, Bachmann thus showing that a man cannot be both equal and husband to a woman. But if Martin does not succeed in reinserting Franza into patriarchy, he can easily enough forget the disruptions she represented: He "came home," Bachmann tells us, "where he felt at home once again, there in the third district, and went to sleep and never thought this way again" (*Franza* 146, translation modified).

Apart from Sir Perceval's name, Bachmann's most obvious borrowing from *The Woman in White* are the two motifs around which Collins's novel is structured, conflated by Bachmann in *The Book of Franza*. Like Franza, Anne Catherick, the "Woman in White" of the title, is a woman unjustly confined to a private asylum by an evil man, that very Sir Perceval Glyde: "I have been cruelly used and cruelly wronged," says Anne (Collins 22). Like Franza, Anne escapes, attempts to elude her male persecutor, and seeks the assistance of the kindly brother figure; indeed, it is her chance encounter with Walter as she flees which initiates the series of events with which the novel is concerned, just as Franza's escape from the spa in Baden near Vienna into Martin's care introduces *The Book of Franza*. Though Anne appears to be a secondary figure, both her appearance in the title and her function as a double to Laura underline, even at the novel's commencement, the significance there of madness and confinement for the fate of women.

The mysterious meaning of the madwoman in white within the logic of Collins's book is clarified by a second confinement and escape midway in the novel upon which Bachmann also appears to draw for her account of Franza's fate. In sorry financial straits, Sir Perceval realizes he will inherit his wife's estate upon her death; because of her resemblance to Anne, he is able to imprison her in the asylum in Anne's stead and arrange for Anne's death, passed off as Laura's. By the time Marian has accomplished Laura's escape and entrusted her to Walter's care, Laura herself is sorely weakened and deranged by the ordeal: her husband had wished to kill her and had almost succeeded in driving her mad—that is, in imposing Anne's fate upon her. As well, her suffering has now so transformed her that she cannot be visually distinguished from Anne (for, as Walter had commented earlier, "If ever sorrow and suffering set their profaning marks on the youth and beauty of Miss Fairlie's face, then, and only then, Anne Catherick and she would be the twin-sisters of chance resemblance, the living reflexions of one another" [Collins 84]) and has no way of proving who she really is.

Sir Perceval has thus stolen not just Laura's possessions and her sanity but her very identity; as Nina Auerbach has put it, the "plot against Laura's identity is a terrifying reminder of the jeopardy of any Victorian woman's selfhood once she has attained the socially approved but psychologically and legally menacing position of wife" (141). This is the second motif Bachmann seems to have drawn from *The Woman in White*: the evil husband who is not satisfied merely to control his wife but, to serve his own purposes, wants entirely to eradicate her. As Franza laments of her own husband, Leopold Jordan: "He took my goods away from me. My laughter, my tenderness, my capacity for joy, my compassion, my ability to help, my animal nature, my shining rays, for he stomped out everything that rose up until it could no longer rise again" (*Franza* 80, translation modified). Though both wives escape, they are permanently marked and unbalanced by their husbands' persecution.

Bachmann's "Ways of Death" gives us every reason to believe that she found such oppression and tyranny, variously exercised, to be the normal state of heterosexual relations under the present order of male dominance: men seek to destroy women, whose existence is evident only through their absence, as Franza herself commented of an Egyptian king's effort to destroy all traces of his female predecessor: "Look, she said, but the pharaoh forgot that though he had eradicated her, she was still there. It can still be read, because nothing is there where in fact something should be" (*Franza* 109). Somewhat remarkably, a very similar opinion of male-female relations is voiced by Marian in Collins's novel: "No man under heaven deserves these sacrifices from us women. Men! They are the enemies of our innocence and our peace—they drag us away from our parents' love and our sisters' friendship—they take us body and soul to themselves, and fasten our helpless lives to theirs as they chain up a dog to his kennel" (Collins 162). Nor do the author's depictions of women's role in the Victorian marriages of his novel obscure the total subservience men demand from wives and to which their wives accede: as his editor remarks, "strict genteel etiquette . . . required absolute submission to the husband as a marital duty of the wife" (Collins 615). As well, Collins perceptively depicts his characters' problems as occasioned not by personal failings but by the social order: not who one is but how society regards one determines one's place in society. Hence, Laura does not doubt her own identity but must have it socially acknowledged in order to resume her rightful place; Sir Perceval finally meets his downfall when the discovery that his father and mother were not married reveals him to be an illegitimate usurper of his father's baroncy—though he is indeed his father's son. For Collins as for Bachmann, gender relations exist within a context of larger social relations determining their content

and the fate of the characters that must operate within their parameters.

But despite his flirtations with far-reaching questions about gender arrangements (present of course in far greater number in his novel than I have been able to detail here), Collins continues to uphold the gender conventions that his story has shown to be deeply problematic: as his commentators have observed, his novel is simultaneously both subversive and conventional (Loesberg 136). He restores the order the novel has drawn into question by unmasking the worst abusers of women there, including both Sir Perceval and his diabolical Italian associate, Count Fosco, as illegitimate holders of social power, suggesting that legitimate holders of male power would not so abuse their prerogatives. And he diffuses the critique of men's power over women by permitting *one* of his three women, Laura, the weakest and most dependent and childlike, to be happy and satisfied in a benevolently paternalistic marriage with Walter, while killing off mad Anne and reducing powerful Marian to the status of maiden aunt. Bachmann's appropriation of *The Woman in White* thus reveals some qualities of her own reading habits. It shows how she is able to read a relatively conventional novel against the grain, extracting from it the truths Collins finally obscures, the costs to women of such wedded bliss, the "ways of death" Collins did not wish to acknowledge.

As well, Bachmann's own reading of Collins gives us readers some suggestions about how we might best read her own work—also against the grain. As in Collins's novel, subjected women do not speak as subjects in Bachmann, and she explained in an interview "that I can only narrate from a male standpoint" (*GuI* 99). The women's voices we hear in her late works are either those of their madness and dreams; those of their identification with an ungendered (i.e., male) subject, as in *Malina*; or those of their "false consciousness," their identification with social roles imposed on women, as in many of the stories of *Three Paths to the Lake*. Bachmann thus requires that her readers remain as aware of the irony of her texts as she was of Collins's, understanding more about them than do either the characters or her male narrator. (It may be that the complexity of the reader response she requires contributed to the initial misunderstanding of her works, prompting, for instance, even one of her early feminist critics to believe that *Three Paths to the Lake* illustrated its women characters' *Verzicht auf den Mann* [renunciation of men] rather than, as we understand now, women's total subjection to men [Summerfield 211–216].) In her appropriation of the themes and structures of *The Woman in White*, Bachmann probes into the most dense and problematic areas of the work, opening up and exploring exactly those themes whose investigation Collins, after titillating his readers with a glimpse into such dangerous reaches, wanted finally to foreclose.

This is nowhere more the case than in the use Bachmann makes of two elements of Collins's novel whose relationship to his main plot remains submerged and murky in the original work. First, Collins complicates the relationship of Laura and the evil Sir Perceval with the presence of his Italian friend Count Fosco, grotesque in appearance but more clever and possessing an even greater degree of male power, so that even Marian is forced to acknowledge, "He looks like a man who could tame anything. If he had married a tigress, instead of a woman, he would have tamed the tigress" (Collins 195). Collins takes great pains to differentiate Fosco's violent Italian habits from more moderate English customs: another Italian tells Walter with respect to Italian politics, "It is not for you to say—you Englishmen, who have conquered your freedom so long ago, that you have conveniently forgotten what blood you shed, and what extremities you proceeded to in the conquering—it is not for *you* to say how far the worst of all exasperations may, or may not, carry the maddened men of an enslaved nation" (Collins 535). And Marian warns Fosco and Sir Perceval, "There are laws in England to protect women from cruelty and outrage" (Collins 267). (Fosco, in rejoinder, asserts that his slavishly obedient English wife is in fact following *English* dictates: "I remember that I was married in England—and I ask, if a woman's marriage obligations, in this country, provide for her private opinion of her husband's principles? No! They charge her unreservedly to love, honour, and obey him. That is exactly what my wife has done. I stand, here, on a supreme moral elevation; and I loftily assert her accurate performance of her conjugal duties. Silence, Calumny! Your sympathy, Wives of England, for Madame Fosco!" [Collins 570].) After Laura and Walter are safely married, Collins appends a subplot to account for Fosco's mysteries: he is a spy for a reactionary Italian regime and finally, toward the novel's end, is assassinated by members of an Italian brotherhood dedicated to Italian liberation. In his memory, his wife pens these words about her murdered husband: "His life was one long assertion of the rights of the aristocracy, and the sacred principles of Order—and he died a martyr to his cause" (Collins 582). But in the context of Collins's novel this subplot appears something of an afterthought, not really motivated by or connected to its main concerns regarding the fate of the Woman in White.

Writing a century later, Bachmann found it easier to show the connections of reactionary politics, male dominance, and female confinement and madness. The husband whose influence Franza cannot escape and who attempts to drive her mad has done his own research on the psychological consequences of internment (including medical experimentation) for former concentration camp inmates, and readers are obviously to connect Jordan's research interests with his

“diabolical experiment” (*Franza* 63) to make a case study out of Franza. Franza’s brother terms Jordan’s treatment of her “fascist,” and Franza is prepared to agree: “You say fascism, but that sounds strange, for I’ve never heard that word used to describe a personal relationship. . . . But that’s an interesting idea, for it had to begin somewhere. Why does one only refer to fascism when it has to do with opinions or blatant acts” (*Franza* 75). Bachmann’s own perspective—as well as the hundred years of history and theory that separate her and Collins—made it possible for her to grasp and depict the intimate connections between gender relationships and reactionary politics at a micropolitical level. As she explained in her preface to *The Book of Franza*:

[The virus of crime] cannot have simply disappeared from our world twenty years ago [i.e., in 1945], just because murder is no longer praised, desired, decorated with medals, and promoted. . . . Crimes that require a sharp mind [*Geist*], that tap our minds and less so our senses, those that most deeply affect us—there no blood flows, but rather the slaughter is granted a place within the morals and the customs of a society whose fragile nerves quake in the face of any such beastliness. Yet the crimes did not diminish, but rather they require greater refinement, another level of intelligence, and are themselves dreadful. (*Franza* 3–4)

Whether or not her novel draws in this respect directly on *The Woman in White*, she succeeds in showing in the “Ways of Death” volumes relationships that Collins only dimly perceived: how the order of authoritarian social regimes can also be tied to and rely upon an order of male dominance in the domestic realm deeply destructive to the women who are subject to its dictates.

A second area that remains opaque in Collins’ novel but that Bachmann is able to clarify is the major mystery, foregrounded in the novel’s title but never satisfactorily resolved, as to why Anne Catherick insists on clothing herself only in white. The explicit reason given for Anne’s obsession, a chance remark of Laura’s mother to Anne as a child that white became her, has no real bearing on the issues of gender and power with which the novel is most centrally concerned. To Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, white attire for women in the Victorian era (worn with frequency by women characters in Victorian novels) has a variety of meanings: bridal virginity, childlike innocence, feminine purity, passivity, vulnerability, submissiveness, the brightness of angels, the coldness of snow, the enigma of colorlessness, the pallor of death (615–621). Certainly all these meanings can be associated with the figure of Anne Catherick and are consistent with her function. But I would submit that in a novel published the year before the American Civil War began, another meaning of

“white” is at least subliminally present in Collins’s complex association of problems of gender with color, and it is *this* meaning that Bachmann explores in *The Book of Franza*. For Bachmann, “white” is a racial designation, and the system of male power that results in Franza’s psychic devastation is also racially specific—as Martin comments, Franza’s state reveals to him “the psyche of the whites, which was obviously more threatened than he could imagine” (*Franza* 54, translation modified). Franza also associates white imperial ambitions with the attempt of white men to destroy *her*, fearing their power even as she seeks to escape them in Africa: “But the alibi of the whites is strong. Don’t forget that. They tried everything to eliminate you, to blow you to bits on their mine-field of intelligence, which they misuse in order to make you serve their plans and schemes” (*Franza* 112). Raped by a white man at the Great Pyramid, Franza curses both whites and her husband with her dying breath: “The whites should. They should be damned. He should” (*Franza* 141–142). In this case as well, Bachmann is able in her appropriation of the themes of *The Woman in White* to tease out further meanings that remained implicit (if not altogether repressed) there, showing that the domination and subordination based on gender which both novels depict is culture-specific, connected in profound ways to white supremacy, a system of domination and subordination based on color.

So why did Bachmann name Franza’s romantic captain Sir Perceval Glyde? I suggest that in giving an apparently positive figure a name belonging to so negative an archvillain, Bachmann is telling *us* how to read this episode of her novel—once more, against the grain. In Franza’s memory, the liberation of her village by the English and her own first love take on both idyllic and utopian dimensions, and we readers (as Bachmann must have recognized) are inclined to read her account in this manner as well, as “a promise of peace that was betrayed.” But Franza’s own needs, desires, and expectations, even at fifteen, have already been shaped, formed, and deformed by her own male-dominant culture, socially constructed by a system of gender relations that requires women willingly to yield themselves to male control, even gladly to embrace male violence. Bachmann hints in this direction when she tells us that Franza (like the “I” of *Malina*) longs to be raped by victorious soldiers: “And ‘rape,’ that was another word that caused Franza to imagine things capable of taking away the spring, and, since there was no one she could speak to, rape and armies turned into longed-for heroes and troops who were on the march, which was for the good, since nothing ever happened in Galicien [her native village], only the village dying out and the place belonging to her alone as she waited for a miracle and for something miraculous to occur” (*Franza* 38). In Franza’s eyes, the mira-

cle occurs, embodied in that harbinger of peace and love, Sir Perceval Glyde. But we who are able to disencode Bachmann's text know that this is a false promise of peace, as ideologically suspect as the happy endings and wedded bliss of Victorian novels. In the world of the "ways of death" that Bachmann depicts, there is no peace at all, as the "I" of *Malina* learns in her dreams:

Malina: So you'll never again say: War and Peace.

Me ["I"]: Never again.

It's always war.

Here there is always violence

Here there is always struggle.

It is the eternal war. (*Malina* 155)

Examining Bachmann's appropriation of a novel like Collins's can thus teach us to read her own works with much greater subtlety. Because she believed that no language yet existed which would allow her female protagonists to reveal the true story of their own "ways of death," the story she wishes to tell is almost always different from the surface narrative with which her novels present us. The example of *The Woman in White* alerts readers to watch for signals built into her texts (many not yet explained, many doubtless not yet even discovered) that all is not as it seems. Moreover, Bachmann's own reading of Collins points out that many texts besides her own are not of a single piece, but instead (like the real world from which they derive) made up of contradictory and contending elements from which it is possible to derive both conventional *and* subversive meanings. This is a reading strategy that feminist (and other) literary scholars might do well to adopt, though it has not on the whole characterized our endeavors so far. Showalter's reading of *The Woman in White* attends only to its conventional aspects, an interpretation for which she finds the novel's first sentence paradigmatic: "The first sentence of *The Woman in White* announced Collins' endorsement of Victorian sex-roles: 'This is a story of what a Woman's patience can endure, and what a Man's resolution can achieve'" (*Literature* 162). But of course even Collins's first sentence in *The Woman in White* is much more ambiguous than Showalter allows: read in another way, it could as easily describe Laura's submission to the tyrannical Sir Perceval—or, for that matter, Leopold Jordan's determination to destroy his wife and Franza's willingness to yield to his power. Ahead of her critics, as she so often was, Bachmann has shown us how to recognize such ambiguities, to read both her own works and those of others so that they yield more of the multiplicities of meanings they contain.

READING BACHMANN IN 1987

This essay was written in summer 1987 and published in the spring 1988 issue of *German Quarterly*. Clearly, since writing the Wittgenstein essay two years before, I had found my way back to feminism, and this essay bears the marks of the methodological transition in which feminist literary scholarship, and literary analysis in general, was then engaged. Within my own experience, that transition did not occur without struggle. At the time I believed (of course) that I was on the “right” side of the contestation, though the position I assumed then now seems methodologically quite naive. At mid-decade, the response of some U.S. academic feminists (including me) to the dire political circumstances into which Reaganism had thrust women (and the world altogether) took the form of a repudiation of forms of high theory that seemed to have no application to practice: *they* looked at systems of signification, but *we* focused on “real women.” In her essay “Zwischenbilanz der feministischen Debatten [Interim assessment of the feminist debates]” in Frank Trommler’s *Germanistik in den USA*, Biddy Martin captured this moment within the organization Women in German (WIG): “Many articles in the [*Women in German*] Newsletter of 1986–87 construct a division between West German and American feminist Germanists that reproduces . . . the opposition between political engagement, democratic process, and empirical reality on the one hand and theory, textuality, and fashionable trends on the other. This perspective threatened to obscure the specificity of the work of West German and American feminists by judging them solely on the basis of whether they were compatible with ‘our’ work or merely derive from the French” (170). As Martin goes on to observe, that divide never really existed even within WIG, whose members were in fact located on both sides of the debate, yet for a time the consequence for the organization was denunciations, hurt feelings, and tears on both sides.

Within the Five College academic feminist community, too, the dispute was very apparent, crystallizing in a struggle over the meaning of “difference” like the one June Howard described, as we attempted to organize a series of five symposia on women and difference in connection with a faculty development project. In the last of the symposia, held in October 1987, “my” group took as its focus “Feminism and Activism: The Last Twenty-five Years”; the “theorists” invited Gayatri Spivak to hold a series of seminars for local academic feminists. This is Ann Rosalind Jones’s account of a meeting preparing for Spivak’s visit:

Another incident, in 1986, brought the conflict to a head for me. Several organizers of the Five College seminar on women in the Third World decided to begin by reading Gayatri Spivak’s dense commentary on the short story “Draupadi” by a Bengali writer, Mahasveta Devi; at the last minute, we threw in an article by Mark

Cousins purporting to explain deconstruction. The meeting was a catastrophe. Women from various fields, some of them activists in their fifties, others new arrivals in the area, objected violently to the opacity of all three texts. . . . One woman, an African-American literary critic, said, "I don't mind difficult reading, but isn't this approach finally just a way of focusing on the oppressor all over again?" Others asked, less temperately, how any of this theory was relevant to clitoridectomy in Ethiopia or the blindness of women working on assembly lines in "free" trade zones in the Philippines. Finally a woman who'd been a member of the previous study group [a feminist study group of the late 1970s in which Jones and I had both participated] stood up, declared, "Deconstruction is an empty yuppie theory; we need to read Fanon, not Derrida," and left the room. (75)

I recall the event somewhat differently, and I hope I wasn't the seminar participant whom Jones remembers stomping out of the room, but I fear I might have been.

In October 1986 I elaborated my negative assessment of the state of contemporary feminism in a paper called "'Is That All?' Whatever Happened to the Women's Liberation Movement? Reflections on the Course of American Feminism," repeating my talk at the 1987 MLA (and making many feminists mad at me, except for some old-time lefties: I was honored and pleased that Tillie Olsen came up after my talk to tell me how much she liked it). Like the *Nation*, though (which perhaps had influenced me), I ended by asserting that "even in these dark times we have already won some victories: in coalition we beat back Bork, over half a million gays and lesbians marched on Washington, and in this presidential campaign the Rainbow Coalition offers the real possibility of building a broad-based movement. . . . At the risk of sounding voluntarist, I just have a feeling, the times might be a'changin—but at least in part, whether they change or not is up to us" ("Is That All?" 301). Certainly in that paper my tempered optimism about feminism pertained to practice, not theory. Otherwise I was a participant in many of the activist struggles of the mid-1980s, most of which were not especially feminist in emphasis: I attended the major demonstrations in Washington, DC; did support work for my students who had occupied campus buildings to support divestment from South Africa and oppose CIA recruiting; again chaired the Five College Faculty and Staff Committee for Jesse Jackson as the 1988 Presidential campaign approached. In spring 1988 the program I direct celebrated its fifteenth anniversary with a faculty panel addressing a packed hall on the topic "The Opening of the American Mind," taking on the premises of Allan Bloom's book; I don't think Accuracy in Academe ever spied on my classes (despite its presence elsewhere on the University of Massachusetts campus), though my program was attacked by the National Association of Scholars in the early 1990s.

Quite by chance, however, during the mid-1980s I was also a member of a study group dealing with new scholarly developments in anthropology. It was in that context that I first discovered Stuart Hall's "Cultural Studies: Two Par-

adigms,” and my response was not unlike that of Christa Wolf when she found feminism: a “decisive change” in my “viewing lens” comparable only to my discovery of Marxism. I could almost feel the scales falling from my eyes: this was the method I had been looking for; this method would allow me to connect politics and literature again and could clearly be adapted to include gender, thus overcoming the impasse at which I felt feminism had arrived; since literature and its reception were forces that helped to consolidate or subvert all social constructions, literary analysis could, from a quite different perspective from that of the early 1980s, be once again conceived of as a political intervention.

I had heard at the MLA early versions of the essays assembled in the Newton and Rosenfelt collection and found them still too indebted to the base-superstructure model of old-time Marxist feminism. But the new historical methods of cultural studies and other approaches related to it, like new historicism and cultural materialism, now provided far more sophisticated ways to think about the relationship of “the textuality of history and the historicity of texts,” to cite Montrose’s chiasmus once more (“Professing” 20). I thus set out to learn all I could about the new methodologies and to integrate them into my own feminist analysis by employing a favorite academic learning technique: teaching courses and giving papers on topics I didn’t know very much about. In fall 1987 I offered a graduate seminar on the intersection of feminist literary theory and feminist history which was enormously instructive to me and, I think, to my students; in June 1987 I gave a talk, “Anthropology and the Politics of Deconstruction,” at the National Women’s Studies Association conference (held at Spelman College in Atlanta as a gesture toward white feminism’s effort to integrate race into its theory and practice); in October 1987 I talked at the German Studies Association conference on what I had learned so far from my graduate seminar in a paper called “Reading Gender Historically: The Encounter of Feminist Literary Theory and Women’s History” (a presentation that would eventually become the article “Feminist Scholarship and Germanistik,” published in the first German Studies issue of *German Quarterly* in spring 1989); in March 1988 I gave a related paper, “Reading Women’s Biographies and Autobiographies: Feminist History and Feminist Literary Theory,” at the National Association of Ethnic Studies. At the same time I was working on an essay, “History in Uwe Johnson’s *Jahrestage*” (begun in summer 1984, published in *Germanic Review* in winter 1989), which constituted a settling of accounts with the author on whom I had written my dissertation. That essay, however, did not really manifest the new method but is probably the most old-style Marxist study I have ever written, and it occasioned (rather to my delight) some outrage among Johnson scholars and beyond. Eventually, in 1990, I presented a not very good paper on new historicism at a conference at Brown University and, in 1991, a much better one at Madison on feminism and new his-

toricism which was published in *Monatshefte* in summer 1992—and by then I felt that I was capable of applying the new methods myself.

“Bachmann Reading/Reading Bachmann” was written as a very direct consequence of that learning process. To prepare for my graduate course in fall 1987 and to understand how new historical methods could be applied to literary texts, I set about to read the back issues of *Representations*, a Berkeley journal associated with new historicism. In an article by D. A. Miller on Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* I was startled to discover a name, Sir Perceval Glyde, that up to then I had associated only with *The Book of Franz*. I tracked down Wilkie Collins’s novel, devoured it with the relish that always accompanies my late-night forays into popular fiction (it was the summer, after all), never intending to treat that Victorian novel—not exactly within my area of expertise—in a scholarly study. But as I finished the book, so many new insights into Bachmann’s text and so many new ideas about how to treat it were whirling in my head that I could not resist.

This essay is, I think, quite different in method from the first four articles in this archive of historical readings of Bachmann and displays a number of features of the new approaches I was trying to appropriate. First, it focuses on representation, understanding both Collins’s and Bachmann’s novels as neither (simply) realistic nor mimetic works but as arrangements of structures and figures used to achieve particular literary ends. As well, it conceives signification to be a product of intertextuality; thus in this case it considers Bachmann’s novel to be a reworking of prior novelistic elements on which she was able and obliged to draw when she wrote her own text. The method’s close attention to structures and processes of signification is a consequence of the encounter of a historically based, more or less neo-Marxist approach with the techniques of structuralism/poststructuralism, and to the best of my knowledge no equivalent exists in earlier forms of Marxist analysis, despite the often very impressive examples of close reading they can offer. In effect, this aspect of the method is an expansion upon Marx’s observation in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*: “[People] make history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past” (Tucker 595). Here I present Bachmann as possessing sufficient authorial agency to configure new meanings, but she is also constrained to construct those meanings out of the older textual building blocks available to her.

What this approach further enables is a recognition of any text as polysemic, embodying a whole range of meanings, thus authorizing a wide range of readings (including those “against the grain”) that will depend on the particular political, historical, and social stance of the reader. (That, evidently, is the insight this whole book seeks to apply to readings of Bachmann’s texts.) In addition, as a consequence both of language’s inherent polysemic qualities and of the fact that a literary text is necessarily constructed out of the often not commensurable discourses of the larger society, this method conceives texts to be

sites where sometimes contradictory discourses intersect. The texts themselves are thus no longer seen as the somewhat mystical organic unities that romantics and New Critics believed they discerned but are able to be read as structures of patched-together contradictions whose incompatibilities authors try to reconcile. (This particular method of reading texts derives, I believe, from Pierre Macherey's *Theory of Literary Production*, where he maintains, for instance: "The order which [the work] professes is merely an imagined order, projected onto disorder, the fictive resolution of ideological conflicts, a resolution so precarious that it is obvious in the very letter of the text where incoherence and incompleteness burst forth" [155].)

Finally, the method I have employed here conceives of literary texts as doing ideological work and, in the case of *The Woman in White*, arousing the reader's interest by opening up major ideological fissures of the society and then relieving the anxiety produced by restoring social order at the end. This is almost certainly an idea I derived from Stephen Greenblatt (who in turn borrowed it from Foucault), which finds its best expression in Greenblatt's rather gloomy notion of "containment," a function particularly of Shakespearean and other Renaissance texts: though the literary text may seem to draw into question, even subvert, dominant ordering paradigms in the course of its development, by the end of the work all is safely under control again, with an apparently natural order once more sweetly restored (see, e.g., Greenblatt's *Shakespearean Negotiations*). I am very pleased that Bachmann's text offers me a reading strategy that allows me to see—even more clearly than some professional Victorianists—how *The Woman in White* not only interrogates but finally forecloses one of the major ideological issues of Victorian society. For my own examination of Bachmann, this study also represented a kind of breakthrough, confirming my growing suspicions that Bachmann intended all portions of her "Ways of Death" to be read ironically, as the packaging of a range of social problems into narratives so conventional that the figures who inhabit them could have no clue how their problems could be addressed or sometimes even that those problems existed at all.

On the other hand, I don't think it's possible to call the approach of this essay either materialist or historical. To be sure, like Collins's other feminist critics, I read *The Woman in White* in the context of Victorian gender conventions and sexual mores. I also gesture in the direction of history when I maintain that Bachmann could address this complex of concerns more satisfactorily because, writing a hundred years later, she could more clearly see "the connections of reactionary politics, male dominance, and female confinement and madness." But otherwise there's not really anything historical about this reading at all, and I make use of the common convention within literary scholarship of using the author as apparent agent ("Bachmann's reading is more subtle"; "Bachmann requires"; "Bachmann probes") when I am of course merely talking about *my* reading. Except for the irrefutable presence of Sir Perceval Glyde's name in the text, I have absolutely no historical

evidence that would speak to when, how, and why Bachmann turned to this text, and I particularly can't substantiate my assertion that Bachmann deliberately transformed the "white" of Collins's title into a racial designation. Of course, it is not necessary that readings conform to the dictates of particular methods, historical or otherwise; they need only reveal something of interest about the text. In that respect I am quite fond of and pleased with what I still consider to be an ingenious and elegant little essay. In the larger context of my own appropriation of a new historically based methodology, however, in 1987 I still had some distance to go.

In contrast, chapters 8, 9, and 10 of this book's part 3, "Reading Bachmann Historically," illustrate my current appropriation of the historically based approach for which June Howard called in 1987. Though in quite different ways, the three final chapters understand Bachmann's texts as complex responses to the historical situation that obtained when they were written. Gender is a central term in each chapter's analysis, but it is understood as a historically specific category modulated by other equally important social categories and always under pressure from a range of discursive and nondiscursive social forces. Though all three chapters acknowledge Bachmann's agency as a writer and regard her texts as interventions into particular historical situations, I also consider her texts to be patched together out of the (frequently contradictory) discursive materials available to her when she wrote; they are thus often unable to transcend the limitations of her time. My ability to discern Bachmann's historical blindnesses is mainly a consequence only of my changed historical positionality. As I try to clarify in each chapter's introduction, my readings are also historically specific, enabled by the new methods elaborated by feminist and other cultural studies scholars since 1990. As well, each of these chapters explores Linda Alcoff's assertion that "positionality" can designate not just a location "objectively" given but also a perspective "subjectively" chosen. By stressing quite different aspects of Bachmann's writing in the final three chapters, I want once more to emphasize that differently situated scholars asking differing questions about texts or topics will produce different kinds of answers that are not to be considered right or wrong, but simply—different.