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Part Three: Reading Bachmann Historically. Chapter 8, Bachmann and Theories of Gender/ Sexuality: Femininity in "The Good God of Manhattan"

Sara Lennox

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PART III

Reading Bachmann Historically

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CHAPTER 8

Bachmann and Theories of Gender / Sexuality

FEMININITY IN “THE GOOD GOD OF MANHATTAN”

*It would be best if women and men kept their distance
and had nothing to do with each other until
both had found their way out of the tangle and confusion,
the discrepancy inherent in all relationships.*

—Ingeborg Bachmann, *Three Paths to the Lake*

This chapter draws on recent advances in U.S. feminist theory to argue for a new kind of reading of Ingeborg Bachmann’s texts. Almost all U.S. feminist scholars now agree that femininity and masculinity are social constructions that vary enormously across time and culture, and many recent scholars have focused their investigations on how definitions of femininity and masculinity are generated, sustained, and transformed within particular societies. Feminist literary scholars have shown that literary texts contribute to the production of gender as a discursive category by sustaining, modulating, and/or challenging their culture’s discourses of gender. As those scholars have demonstrated, literary and other texts can also function as the sites of contests about definitions of gender (and of many other things), revealing social tensions and fissures because they are always pieced together out of the heterogeneous discursive materials of the societies in which they originate. The reception of a literary text, feminist scholars argue, can be another locus of struggle around representations of femininity and masculinity, as readers with divergent interests emphasize different aspects of the conflicting discourses present in the text. I attempt to apply to Bachmann’s writing these new methods elaborated by Anglo-American feminist scholars in order to show how her texts derive from the discursive constructions of a particular historical period. I argue that her work represents femininity in contradictory ways because it draws upon contending notions of gender which Bachmann was unable to reconcile. Her earlier feminist critics, I finally maintain, produced readings of her works that corresponded to the par-

ticular concerns of *their* era. My own reading, stressing different elements of her writing, is an effort to produce another interpretation of her texts more in accord with the feminist needs of the present.

Specifically, I want here to investigate one of Bachmann's early works, her radio play "The Good God of Manhattan," written in 1957 and first broadcast in 1958. I argue that the radio play employs two quite different, even contradictory, conceptions of the relationship of power, sexuality, and gender. Most obviously, Bachmann relies upon a notion of the relationship of civilization and Eros/femininity derived from the 1950s, one that recalls the writing of Herbert Marcuse: sexuality (particularly in alluring female form) is a force so threatening to the social order that civilization must repress sexuality in order to protect itself. The antagonists of Bachmann's radio play are the Good God of Manhattan, figured as a single omnipotent principle of social domination, and Jan and Jennifer, passionate lovers whose erotic transport threatens the stability of the God's regime. When Jan, the male partner, reaffirms his allegiance to the God's quotidian order, it is the woman, Jennifer alone, who becomes the embodiment of a subversive sexuality antithetical to civilization and is murdered by the God.

Though this discourse of sexuality continued to inform Bachmann's writing until her death and also shaped her feminist reception in the 1970s and 1980s, it rests on assumptions that many contemporary U.S. feminist scholars today, influenced by the more recent writing of Michel Foucault on power and sexuality, now consider untenable. As I show here, however, within "The Good God of Manhattan" a second and somewhat submerged discourse coexists uneasily with the first, representing femininity and sexuality as products of the power that calls them into being: Jennifer is portrayed as a woman driven to the heights of ecstasy because Jan's masculinist power allows her to adore a man who torments and debases her. Viewed from this perspective, "The Good God of Manhattan" can also be read as a text that probes the social construction of femininity. That strategy of representation, much more in accord with current U.S. feminist thinking about sexuality and gender, would continue to inform Bachmann's subsequent work, finally providing the central premise on which the "Ways of Death" was founded. "The Good God of Manhattan" can thus be viewed as a text where conflicting discourses of gender and sexuality contend. Though a reading of this radio play emphasizing that first, Marcusean discourse may consolidate and stabilize a certain regime of sexuality or of gender by positing that sexuality or femininity is "naturally" subversive, another reading stressing the second discourse, I want finally to argue, can unsettle those oppositions again.

What connects Bachmann most centrally to Marcuse's thought, particularly

as he elaborated it in *Eros and Civilization* (1955), is their common assumption of the fundamental opposition of power and erotic passion. Both Bachmann and Marcuse conceive of power as taking the form of what Marcuse calls domination, the product of a single, all-encompassing system of social control, imposed from without on individuals against their own desires and interests by means of what Marcuse calls repression, a term he used, as he explains in *Eros and Civilization* (8), “in the non-technical sense to designate both conscious and unconscious, external and internal processes of restraint, constraint, and suppression.” Conversely, both Marcuse and Bachmann conceptualize Eros as a force anterior and exterior to domination, preserving a memory of and longing for gratification that can become the germ of rebellion against domination—a “Great Refusal,” Marcuse called it, that is “the protest against unnecessary repression, the struggle for the ultimate form of freedom” (*Eros* 149). To Marcuse, women incarnate the promise of liberation from repression, since the (repressed) memory of the bliss of original union with the mother is preserved in every human psyche. For that reason Marcuse joins a long line of masculinist thinkers in construing women as a potential threat to the present repressive social order: “The beauty of the woman and the happiness she promises are fatal in the work-world of civilization” (*Eros* 161).

In the first volume of his *History of Sexuality* (1978), Michel Foucault pointed out that such notions of power, sexuality, and the sexualized female body are historically specific ones, arising in Europe in the early modern period and prevailing into the time in which he himself wrote. He called the premise on which Marcuse’s and Bachmann’s ideas about domination and eroticism rest the “repressive hypothesis”: society’s relationship to sexuality is conceived (as Marcuse had maintained) to be one of repression, sex taken to be a powerful instinctual drive originating outside the social order that society must regulate and control. Indeed, for proponents of the repressive hypothesis, sexuality seems so hostile to society that even speaking about it (as Bachmann’s play does) can seem to be subversive: “If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence,” Foucault explains, “then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law, he somehow anticipates the coming freedom” (*History* 6). Though the repressive hypothesis and ideas about power, sexuality, and gender connected to it have still not been entirely banished from contemporary social analysis, many current cultural theorists—in good part thanks to Foucault’s influence—now reject the idea that anything at all (sexuality, femi-

ninity, various marginal groups) occupies an innocent and uncontaminated site external to the operations of power whence a fundamental challenge to power could be launched. To many theorists, feminist and otherwise, appeals such as Marcuse's and Bachmann's to sexuality's liberatory potential now seem to be painfully outmoded relics of an older time, "a blissful vision," as Domna Stanton put it in a survey of more recent scholarship on sexuality, "that seems decidedly dated at this postmodern twilight of the century" (41).

For what reasons would Bachmann have turned to a theory like Marcuse's that conceives of power as a single monolithic system and imagines that resistance can survive only in reaches to which power has no access? Though Foucault has argued that a conception of power as "a general system of domination exerted by one group over another . . . whose effects pervade the general social body" (*History* 92) has prevailed in the West since the Renaissance, that model had particular saliency in the 1950s, the period from which both *Eros and Civilization* and "The Good God of Manhattan" derive. Both texts were written at the height of the Cold War, when the entire world seemed subsumed under the control of two great power blocs, and many major German thinkers of Bachmann's time—among the most prominent, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Hannah Arendt as well as Marcuse—were convinced that all mass industrial societies (bourgeois democracy as well as fascism or Stalinism) tended toward totalitarianism (a bleak vision that was a kind of mirror image of the decade's anticommunism, as Jost Hermand has remarked [66]). The postwar United States was conceived to be a "totally administered society" that secured its hegemony via the inexorable processes of technological rationality and the manipulation of consciousness by advertising and the mass media. Writers across the political spectrum decried mass culture's baneful effects on the freedom and autonomy of individuals: to cite only one example, from 1954 through 1956 Jürgen Habermas and Günther Anders debated "Die Dialektik der Rationalisierung" (the dialectic of rationalization), the "Mißverhältnis von Kultur und Konsum" (the discrepancy of culture and consumption), and "Die Welt als Phantom und Matrize" (the world as phantom and matrix) in a series of articles in *Merkur*—an interchange with which Bachmann must have been familiar, since during that time period she published seven of her poems in the same journal.

Bachmann was also directly familiar with Western efforts to elicit voluntary consent and eliminate dissent by controlling consciousness: from 1951 to 1953 she worked for the U.S. radio station Rot-Weiss-Rot in Vienna, whose explicit purpose was inducing Austrians to embrace the American way of life. (As one internal Rot-Weiss-Rot memorandum put it: "One of the more delicate func-

tions of American personnel in Austria is not to encourage people to say what they feel . . . but rather, as well as we can, to suggest to them the right thing to think" [Wagnleitner "Irony" 287].) Her radio play was written under the impression of her own visit to the United States in summer 1955, where she attended a Harvard International Seminar led by Henry Kissinger and intended to teach "America's deeper values" to "persons between twenty-five and forty who are about to attain positions of leadership in their country" (*Harvard* 2). (See chapter 10 for much more discussion of U.S. activities during the Cold War and Bachmann's response to them.) It is thus quite understandable that Bachmann would figure domination as the omnipotent ruler of the largest city of the major Western superpower—the Good God of Manhattan. Conversely, at a time when, especially from a Central European perspective, any agent of social change that could oppose totalitarian control seemed absent or ineffective and domination seemed to have invaded the psyche itself, Bachmann, like Marcuse, looked for resistance in the one realm she could still imagine as uncontaminated by the social order: eroticism, the most intimate arena of private life. Similarly, in an era when women were strongly encouraged to withdraw from the public arena and define themselves as men's opposites, Bachmann, like Marcuse, could imagine them as the antithesis of the social order that men controlled. Like Marcuse in search of an agent of rebellion against domination in a time of political reaction, Bachmann makes eroticism that vehicle of liberation, and in her play the only force powerful enough to threaten the rule of the Good God is the passion of Jan and Jennifer, her ecstatic lovers.

There is a good deal of evidence for Bachmann's familiarity with Marcuse's thought in general and with *Eros and Civilization* in particular. She cites three works by Marcuse in the bibliography of her dissertation, though she does not discuss them in the text. And Robert Pichl, the administrator of the Bachmann archive, reports that at the time of her death her library contained several books by Marcuse published in the 1960s and 1970s (though not *Eros and Civilization* in English or either of its two German translations [Pichl]). The composer Hans Werner Henze, Bachmann's companion and housemate in the 1950s, reported in a 1988 interview that it was Bachmann who first brought *Eros and Civilization* to his attention (Morris, interview), and though it is not clear when she first read it, one might surmise that she discussed it with Henze sometime before the end of 1958, when their close relationship ended (Hapkemeyer, *Entwicklungslinien* 99). In a 1999 interview Henze added, "Yes, we knew the author of that book. We often talked the whole evening about those things. It was quite wonderful [*ganz schön*]" (Morris, "Leben"). *Eros and Civilization* was published by Boston's

Beacon Press in 1955, the year that Bachmann attended the Harvard summer seminar, and she might well have purchased an American copy. Perhaps Bachmann even met Marcuse during her visit to Boston, since he was teaching at Brandeis University then, and seminar participants were encouraged to pursue social contacts in the Boston community. Bachmann certainly had later Frankfurt School connections: though Sigrid Weigel was unable to verify Kurt Bartsch's claim that Bachmann stayed with Adorno while she prepared her Frankfurt lectures on poetics (Bartsch, *Ingeborg* 18), she documents Bachmann's extensive relationship with Adorno from the time of the Frankfurt lectures onward (Weigel, *Ingeborg* 473). It is probably safe to assume some familiarity with Marcuse's ideas among most left-liberal German-speaking intellectuals of Bachmann's generation (whether they actually read his work or not), since *Eros and Civilization* played a major role in shaping the discourse on sexuality in Germany from the book's publication in 1955 until well into the 1970s. In any case, as Foucault's analysis of the repressive hypothesis suggests, Marcuse was to some degree merely a very talented compiler of some assumptions about power, sexuality, and femininity that were pervasive in the culture from which both Marcuse and Bachmann derived.

Whenever it was that Bachmann first read Marcuse, it is apparent that some of the ideas she encountered in his work were ones at which she herself had already arrived independently. Her conception of love as an ecstatic, extrasocial "other condition" (*W* 1: 317) was influenced by Robert Musil, whose work she had first read in her teens (*GuI* 124) and with whose writing she again concerned herself intensively in the early 1950s. Like Jan and Jennifer in "The Good God of Manhattan," the protagonist of Bachmann's first radio play, "A Business with Dreams" (1952, thus written before the publication of *Eros and Civilization*, and also published in the *Werke*), also escapes from a debased reality into a realm of erotic fantasy and freedom. What is important for my argument here is not whether Marcuse influenced Bachmann (though I think he did) but rather how similarly they construct their discussions of particular problems. Following Foucault, that is what I mean by "discourse," a term I use here to mean not just what is said about a topic such as domination, eroticism, or femininity but, more fundamentally, the largely unspoken rules that establish how, at any particular historical point, the topic can be conceptualized at all. Like a great many of their contemporaries, both Marcuse and Bachmann move within a discourse that rests upon the repressive hypothesis. They conceive of power and sexuality as binary opposites: power (in the form of domination) is a single, monolithic, all-encompassing system of social control that endeavors to subsume all it surveys

and attempts to repress something conceived to be its opposite—sexuality, femininity—which originates in a realm outside of domination's sway.

The repressive hypothesis provides the structuring principles of "The Good God of Manhattan" and has also been central to many interpretations of Bachmann's radio play. In a polemical 1970 exchange titled "War das Hörspiel der Fünfziger Jahre reaktionär? Eine Kontroverse am Beispiel von Ingeborg Bachmanns 'Der gute Gott von Manhattan'" (Was the radio play of the 1950s reactionary? A controversy using the example of Ingeborg Bachmann's "The Good God of Manhattan"), Wolf Wondratschek and Jürgen Becker (themselves both obviously influenced by the New Left rhetoric that was endemic to German cultural criticism of that period) offered what might be regarded as a paradigmatically Marcusean reading of Bachmann's play. Both take for granted that the Good God embodies domination and that the lovers are his antagonists; what they debate is whether the play adequately explores why liberation is impossible in the world the play portrays. Wondratschek considers Bachmann's radio play both reactionary and typical of its genre in the 1950s because it remains in the realm of dream and "leaves reality absolutely undamaged" (*läßt allemal die Realität unbeschädigt*, a phrase he borrows from Adorno). He faults Bachmann for failing to illuminate the objective conditions that were the real impediments to her doomed lovers' happiness and charges her with addressing instead only the private realm of the emotions: "The author focuses completely on the no-man's land of pure emotionality, though, to be sure, on its destruction, without investigating existing forms of opposition to emotionality, which would clarify that that destruction is 'of this world,' as, after all, the reference to Manhattan in the title would seem to suggest" (190). But Becker comes to Bachmann's defense. He sees in the figure of the Good God of Manhattan "the concretization of a very real and thoroughly social principle" (193) and understands that the play is not just about love but about liberation. It is because the radio play's lovers anticipate an anarchic freedom from social constraints which the bourgeois order cannot tolerate, Becker argues, that the Good God must take action against them: "It's not that love is destroyed, as Wondratschek puts it in his naive and bourgeois way, but rather that the interests of society, which is only willing to allow for happiness as a conventional existence in house slippers, prevail over the hopes, over the desires of individuals, who on behalf of everyone want not only to have achieved but also to practice a new consciousness of love and freedom." Revealing the present social order's profound hostility to the satisfaction of subjective needs, Bachmann's radio play in Becker's view thus accomplishes the political task most appropriate to literary works by drawing the legitimacy of that order into question "via the

destruction of the complicities that the present order of things produces in order to justify itself" (194).

As Wondratschek correctly perceives, Bachmann signals to her listeners that she is addressing contemporary concerns by making her God the ruler of Manhattan and by setting her play in a New York courtroom sometime in the 1950s. "Manhattan" is a synecdochal representation of industrialized society in the West, "that city," as Kurt Bartsch has put it, "that embodied the highest standard of Western civilization and the essence of progress for the bourgeois capitalist society of the 1950s" (*Ingeborg* 85). It's possible as well that the "Manhattan" of the title, especially when coupled with a bomb-throwing deity, recalls the Manhattan Project, which constructed the first atomic bomb, a technological advance representing the highest pinnacle of "progress" that the Western civilization of the 1950s had achieved. Moreover, Bachmann's lovers arrive in Manhattan by train, a figure in European literature for Western progress ("the engine of history") since the invention of the railroad.

Despite Wondratschek's complaints about Bachmann's lack of interest in social reality, by using anonymous voices to serve as the play's chorus, her play thematizes the invasion of the public sphere by impersonal forces over which individuals have no control. As several commentators have pointed out, the voices evoke mass culture, endlessly repeating banal but vaguely ominous catchwords: "GO AT THE GREEN LIGHT PROCEED / REMEMBER AS LONG AS THERE IS TIME / YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU" ("GG" 9). Whether they are "an expression for the depersonalized rushing past one another and for the lack of human communication in the metropolis," as Hilde Haider-Pregler argues (68), or, more likely, advertising slogans (as in Bachmann's poem "Reklame" [Advertisement, *Storm* 109]), they document American mass culture's pervasive effects on daily life. As Andreas Hapkemeyer remarks (in rather highfalutin language) of "Advertisement": "Ingeborg Bachmann represents poetically what the philosopher and sociologist Herbert Marcuse, who lived in America for a long time, termed the magical, authoritarian, ritual elements of the media and advertising, which tend in the direction of preventing humans from pondering their most primordial questions, overlaying them with sham questions and answers" (*Entwicklungslinien* 85). When Jan, who has vowed to remain with Jennifer forever, drops into a bar on his way back from cashing-in his return ticket to Europe, the voices, emanating from the bar's radio or television (and there identified explicitly as advertisements) demonstrate their efficacy as a mechanism of social control by successfully enticing him to reinvolve himself in the quotidian concerns of normal life.

But apart from setting her play in a city that represents Western civilization's furthest advance, Bachmann is otherwise not much interested in using it to explore the economic and political structures that sustain domination, as Wondratschek correctly observes. In "Die Wahrheit ist dem Menschen zumutbar" (Man can face the truth), the speech with which she accepted the "Hörspielpreis der Kriegsblinden" (Radio play prize of those blinded in wars) for this play, she explained that she wanted her writing to reveal the pain that is not so easily perceived: "That's what art should bring about, that in this sense our eyes are opened" (*W* 1: 275). As she told an interviewer, she had intended that her radio play explore not "exterior" problems but what lay behind them: "In the great love dramas like, for instance, *Romeo and Juliet* or *Tristan and Isolde*, the destruction of the lovers is a consequence of external difficulties. I wanted to get rid of these external difficulties and show that something else stands behind them, a power that I have personified in the Good God" (*Gul* 56). In her Frankfurt lectures on poetics, she explained that in this century the subject [*das Ich*] stands in a different relationship than it had in earlier times to the historical conditions that produce it: "The first change that the subject experienced is that it no longer inhabits history but rather that recently history inhabits the subject" (*W* 4: 230). Exploring the consequences of the present form of social organization for subjectivity, her writing was concerned with problems internal to the psyche; she explained in one of the prefaces to *The Book of Franza* that "the real settings" were "the interior ones, laboriously concealed over by the external" (*Franza* 4). This radio play thus addresses, as Hans Höller has pointed out, "interior events transposed to the outside," "the objectification of love on the inner stage of the radio play" ("Szenen" 18). This is where Marcuse's texts became useful for Bachmann: combining a social and a psychological analysis, his theory provided her with a discursive framework that allowed her to show how a historically specific social form might shape and deform subjectivity and what prospects might exist for eluding its grasp.

Bachmann thus configures her Good God to correspond to the discourse of power on which Marcuse also drew. At the outset of the play, the old man ushered into a New York courtroom on a hot August day in the 1950s appears to be a gangster or vagrant off the New York streets, on trial for committing what appear to be both senseless and brutal crimes: throwing bombs at a series of lovers and most recently ordering the execution of a young American student named Jennifer, the victim of a bomb delivered to her hotel room by the God's evil henchmen, the squirrels of Manhattan. But as the interrogation proceeds, the old man—whom the judge acknowledges to be "the Good God of Manhattan.

Others say the Good God of the Squirrels” (“GG” 57)— increasingly converses as an equal with the elderly judge.

By the play’s end, the judge and the God agree that they are merely different incarnations of the same governing principle:

JUDGE: There aren’t two judges here—just as there are not two orders.

GOOD GOD: Then you must be in league with me, and I just don’t know it yet.

Perhaps you didn’t intend to put me out of action but wanted to articulate something that is better left unsaid. Then the two keepers of order would be one and the same. (“GG” 91)

The God declares that he has committed violence against love to preserve the social order: “I did it so there would be peace and security, and so you could sit here quietly and observe your fingertips. So the way of all things remains the way we like it” (“GG” 90–91). Though the judge upholds the charge against the God—that is, acknowledges that he has committed the crime—no sentence is passed, and the judge allows the God to leave by the side exit, thereby implicitly conceding that the God’s attacks on lovers were necessary to defend the single system which, two incarnations of the same principle, they both represent. The representation of power in this play thus conforms to the morphology of power on which the repressive hypothesis depends. It is single, unitary, and total—“there are not two orders.” Explored via a courtroom trial, it is shown to take the rule of law (what Foucault called “juridico-discursive” [*History* 83]). It is a coherent system that stands in a negative relationship to those subject to it: it limits their freedom, demands their obedience to its general precepts, imposes prohibitions and sanctions and censorship, and punishes transgressions. “Justice prevailed,” says the God (“GG” 80). Finally, figured as two male authority figures advanced in age in whom authority is embodied, power takes a shape that Foucault has termed monarchical: “At bottom, despite the differences in epochs and objectives, the representation of power has remained under the spell of monarchy. In political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king” (*History* 88–89).

The God thus might be regarded as something like Marcuse’s repressive performance principle—his especially repressive incarnation of Freud’s reality principle—which seeks to subdue Eros because it represents the “free gratification of man’s [*sic*] instinctual needs,” which is “incompatible with civilization” as presently organized (*Eros* 3). Toward the end of the play the God clarifies that love is the primary antagonist of his order in what he terms his “confession of faith”:

I believe in an order of things for everyone for every day that we live.

I believe in a great tradition and its great power, where all feelings and thoughts have a place, and I believe in death to its adversaries. I believe that love is on the dark side of the world, more destructive than any crime, than any heresy. I believe that, where it surfaces, a vortex forms like before the first day of Creation. I believe that love is innocent and leads to ruin, that you can only go on by accepting guilt and by operating through prescribed channels. ("GG" 90)

To ensure that the toil necessary to support civilization continues to be performed, the performance principle must modify and channel humans' original desire for immediate pleasure: thus the God, mostly concerned with the regulation of subjectivity, demands that thoughts and feelings accommodate themselves to prevailing social arrangements—the "fixed order," the "system of institutions, laws, agencies, things and customs" that are the "social content" of psychological processes (Marcuse, *Eros* 197). The God has no dispute with those who confine their sexuality to arrangements that serve the purposes of social reproduction: "But who cares about people who leave the straight and narrow for that freedom only to show instinct later. People who tamed that small, initial fire, who took it into their hands and built it into a cure for loneliness, a partnership, an economic interest group? A more acceptable status within society is thus created. Everything in balance and in order" ("GG" 90). (In Marcuse's words: "The sex instincts bear the brunt of the reality principle. Their organization culminates in the subjection of the partial sex instincts to the primacy of genitality, and in their subjugation under the function of procreation" [*Eros* 40].) But Love-as-Eros is a threat because it represents a form of psychic excess that always threatens to burst the bounds that the performance principle sets it, retaining a now-tabooed recollection of freedom and happiness against which the limited satisfactions of the present repressive order could be measured.

As the God's confession of faith shows, love in this play is conceived of as an innate instinctual force prior to the law, "before the first day of Creation" on which the God brought his order into being, and for precisely that reason, because its innocent origins lie outside the law, the God considers love more dangerous than crimes or heresies that acknowledge the law while breaking it. The very incarnation of the principle of domination as a god, together with the religious language the God uses—"profession of faith," "I believe," "first day of Creation"—as well as the "hell" to which the squirrels earlier in the play consigned various other pairs of lovers, bestows metaphysical authority upon the God's order and suggests the dire consequences of rebellion against it. Because chaos and disorder disrupt and subvert the order, the God declares that guilt—

psychic violence turned inward— is necessary to tame the destructive force of love so that his order can survive. If this play is understood as an exteriorized account of events internal to the psyche, the God can be viewed as a figure for domination internalized within the psyche, repressing the sexual instincts by inflicting guilt in the manner that Marcuse described: “The restrictions imposed upon the libido . . . operate on the individual as external objective laws and as an internalized force: the societal authority is absorbed into the ‘conscience’ and into the unconscious of the individual and works as his own desire, morality, and fulfillment” (*Eros* 46). The Good God would thus become the embodiment of the “great Super Ego, exercising itself only in a negative way,” the terms in which Foucault (*Power* 59) described Marcuse’s concept of repression.

Bachmann’s play constructs a complex series of images that elaborate upon the binary opposition on which the repressive hypothesis depends, counterposing the God’s single repressive principle of order to the lovers’ anarchic eroticism. Thus the God is associated with legality, territoriality, order, convention, and constraint, while the lovers are portrayed as exceeding the limits he sets. The God’s utilitarian and pragmatic principles rule the day, but love is “on the dark side of the world” (“GG” 90) or even constitutes a different temporality altogether: “Anti-time is now beginning” (“GG” 89). Often the lovers explicitly transgress the laws, regulations, or customs for which the God stands: they challenge the “rules of the game” (“GG” 69), “violated its every use” (“GG” 71), and threaten the “law of the world” (“GG” 85). Or the God’s realm is portrayed as a territory with particular demarcations whose borders the lovers transgress: they engage in “crossing a boundary” (“GG” 89), break through “the crust of the earth” (“GG” 69), dissolve “the natural bounds” (90), and become a rebellious military force that fights for freedom: “Freedom. A mischief maker that takes possession of the legions of lovers and defends them blindly” (“GG” 78). Or they are even imagined to be rare radioactive elements that contaminate the earth: “They are like those rare elements found here and there, those insane substances, with radioactive and combustive power that destroy everything and call the world into question. Even the memory of them contaminates the places they’ve touched” (“GG” 92–93). However it is figured, the love of Jan and Jennifer always functions as one pole of the opposition that structures the repressive hypothesis, simultaneously a destructive and disruptive force that negates the God’s values and a positive force that struggles for freedom against the God’s repressive order.

Bachmann further underlines her play’s opposition of civilization and Eros by portraying love as a gypsy, drawing upon centuries of European projections onto gypsies that portray them as Western civilization’s negative and positive

antagonists. Within the racist and orientalist discourses of Western Europe, gypsies' status has some affinities to sexuality, embodying both a threat to social order and an imagined freedom from it. As "stereotypical figures of magic and menace," Katie Trumpener has observed (849), they are used to figure whatever particular intellectual movements are regarded as civilization's opposite:

For neoclassicism they are there to symbolize a primitive democracy; for the late Enlightenment, an obstruction to the progress of civilization; for romanticism, resistance and the utopia of autonomy; for realism, a threat that throws the order and detail of everyday life into relief; for aestheticism and modernism, a primitive energy still left beneath the modern that drives art itself; and for socialist and post-colonial fiction, finally, a reactionary or resistant cultural force that lingers outside of the welfare state or the imperial order. (874)

In her first appearance, approaching Jennifer in a nightclub to tell her fortune, the gypsy is already associated with other urban eccentrics and outcasts (a handwriting reader in the bar, a beggar on the steps) and marked by skin color and attitude as racially/ethnically other: "a real Gypsy," says Jennifer, "brown, red, and so sad," (in contrast to Jennifer herself, who is "pink and white" ["GG" 62, 76]). Representing herself as a fortuneteller, the gypsy is either a charlatan and fraud or one who can rupture the continuum of Western time to foretell the future, using magical talents quite at variance with the work skills demanded in a high-tech modern city. Later in the play the God makes the gypsy woman a trope for love itself, again constructed as his antagonist:

That's why I'm on this Gypsy woman's heels. For as long as I can remember, she doesn't come from anywhere, she doesn't live anywhere, and prefers this aerie. She walks with a stoop. But, then, without warning, she'll take off up over the asphalt, up and away, without a trace—

Of love, I should say—

We can't apprehend her and bring her here. And she will never give evidence. She's nowhere to be found. Not even where she just was.

And I could swear that she still loved those two yesterday. She made the cactus bloom purple and the poplars loom in the darkness. And today she already loves two others and makes the mimosas tremble—

She has no conscience. Instead, she tightens up her black bodice, lets her red skirts swirl, then darkens someone else's world with her immortally sad eyes. ("GG" 78–79)

Imagined to be immune from the effects of the order rather than bearing the marks of its treatment of her (a conception that must have been difficult

to sustain a decade after the Holocaust), Bachmann's gypsy, like the marginal groups in Marcuse's later works, is conceived of as the negation of a repressive civilization. Dressed in folkloristic attire inappropriate for a modern city ("black bodice," "red skirts"), she is elusive ("we can't apprehend her and bring her here"; "she's nowhere to be found"); disrespectful of laws ("she will never give evidence"); without home or *Heimat* ("she doesn't come from anywhere, she doesn't live anywhere"); but attached to distant sensual realms ("purple cactus," "mimosas"). This gypsy can even fly, suggesting that she shares some traits with the witch, another female figure discursively constructed as a threat to civilized order, and she dwells in an "aerie" with eagles, entirely beyond civilization's reach. If there is only one order, this ethnic outsider is not part of it; like love, she is considered to be outside of culture altogether. The ease with which Bachmann can mobilize a discourse of ethnic otherness to support the repressive hypothesis may perhaps reveal an even more fundamental structure of binary opposition underlying Western thought—a central term counterposed to its threatening but alluring other—on which both discourses of ethnicity/nationhood and those of sexuality/gender depend.

As Bachmann's play establishes the lovers' and the God's opposition, it also proceeds progressively to remove the lovers, as their passion grows, from arenas and activities that the God controls. The God never leaves the contained but public space of the courtroom (and he and the lovers never meet, since the squirrels act as his intermediaries). But the lovers first explore the four corners of Manhattan (the Bowery, Chinatown, Harlem, the Brooklyn Bridge) and then retreat to an alternative sphere that is both domestic and intensely private: a hotel room where they fry fish in the kitchenette, wash their socks in the bathroom sink and hang them over the shower bar, and glue broomstraw on the walls to make their retreat more nestlike: They "lock the door for the second time" and then "get up still a third time to make sure it's locked" ("GG" 79). Whereas the God is earthbound, the lovers escape into the heavens, seeking the heights that the gypsy woman frequents: they spend their first night together on the ground floor of a "sleazy hotel" ("GG" 62) but move on subsequent nights to ever higher hotel rooms on the seventh, the thirtieth, and finally the fifty-seventh floor. As the God wryly comments, the higher they move, the more they leave the cares of daily life behind: "Everything sinks so visibly into the river bed below, with all its driftwood of further lovers, old burdens, helpless raftsmen with short-term goals. A miniature version of everyday life is amusing. Observed from a distance, common sense shrinks down to size and, sadly, looks a lot like a speck of boredom" ("GG" 78). By the end of the play

they have achieved their own version of heaven-on-earth, as Jan had predicted on the evening their affair began:

JAN: "You will spend this evening with Jennifer on this heavenly earth. . . ."

JENNIFER: Why "heavenly earth"?

JAN: Because that's the name here. Ma-na Hat-ta. That's how some Indians explained it to me. ("GG" 61)

Jan and Jennifer thus associate themselves with the gypsy by also betaking themselves to a site of ethnic otherness, so that Manhattan stands no longer for New York City but for the oxymoronic "heavenly earth" of the Indians, the New World, the primeval virgin territory of innocent savages still uncorrupted by civilization.

Likewise, the activities in which the lovers engage challenge the God's regime in ways that closely parallel Marcuse's arguments. As they fall in love, they increasingly abandon purposive, goal-directed activity; their unmotivated laughter is the first indication that they will no longer accommodate themselves to the God's order, as he recalls: "There was, for example, that laughter. Yes, to be exact, it began with that. (*darkly*) With that indescribable smile. Without any apparent provocation, they keep laughing. . . . They laugh in public but also in private. . . . That smile just sits there like a question mark, but it's a very ruthless one" ("GG" 69). Their games, which serve no worthwhile end, are, the God tells the judge, the next sign: "Now they were at play. They played love. . . . But their playing was just like their laughter. They violated its every use" ("GG" 70–71). (As Marcuse observes, "Play is *unproductive* and *useless* precisely because it cancels the repressive and exploitive traits of labor and leisure" [*Eros* 195]).

Increasingly the lovers' relationship to language changes, as they replace representational language with figuration. In the throes of passion, Jan proclaims the advent of a new language predicated upon the renunciation of purposiveness: "I know nothing else except that I want to live and die here with you. And speak to you in a new language. I no longer have a career, and I can no longer run a business. I'm not useful anymore and I must abandon everything. I want to divorce myself from everyone else" ("GG" 92). One might read the lovers' lyrical exchanges as an effort to retreat to a realm of imagination and art where they can reestablish contact with the pleasure principle that still rules the unconscious. Jan's ecstatic prose poems affirm language as metaphor and reconfigure the boundedness of bodies as he probes Jennifer's body parts and seeks a travel guide that will explain the wondrous delights of this strange new land: "And I want a book that tells what exists in you, your climate, flora and fauna, the causes of your

sicknesses, and their silent opponents in your blood. The organisms, the tiniest ones that I take in when I kiss you. I'd like just once to see what happens in the evening when your body is illuminated and warm and ready to celebrate. I can already see something now: transparent fruits and precious stones, carnelian and ruby, shining materials" ("GG" 87). As Judith Butler suggests of Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*, Jan's disaggregation of Jennifer's body is a protest against an order that insists upon impermeable bodily boundaries, "the deconstruction of constructs that are always already a kind of violence against the bodies' possibilities" (Butler 126). In Marcusean terms, the body is "resexualized," and this spread of the libido manifests itself "in a reactivation of all erotogenic zones and, consequently, in a resurgence of pregenital polymorphous sexuality and in a decline of genital supremacy. The body in its entirety [becomes] an object of cathexis, a thing to be enjoyed—an instrument of pleasure" (*Eros* 201).

Still, though Jan and Jennifer together establish their love as a counterrealm where the values of the performance principle no longer obtain, the play makes very clear that the lovers are far from equally willing to yield themselves to an eroticism that challenges civilization itself. It's Jennifer who makes the first advances to Jan and very soon devotes herself entirely to her love for him, whereas Jan is initially much more reluctant to involve himself in a relationship beyond the level of dalliance and sexual adventure—a posture that does not bother the God at all: "I have nothing against the frivolous, the bored and the lonely who break down now and then. They don't want to be alone and just kill time" ("GG" 67). Jan maintains an ironic and often brutal distance from Jennifer's efforts to elicit gestures of affection from him, demanding an "agreement on distance" ("GG" 69), treating language as a manipulable tool that helps him achieve his amorous ends: "Should I tell you something about a few women, or very many, about disappointments—that's what you call it, right? Or unforgettable experiences. I'm familiar with the vocabulary, and I've come up with a few versions of my past. Depending on the context" ("GG" 82).

As he finally recognizes that their love will transport him to a utopian realm that will leave the terms of his prior life far behind, he prepares himself for transfiguration: "I want to break free of all the years and all the thoughts of all the years. I want to tear down this structure that I am, and I want to be the other person I never was" ("GG" 84). Yet his attachment to daily life remains strong. Even after he has pledged himself to Jennifer and canceled his ship ticket back to Europe, he succumbs to the momentary temptation to stop at a bar, as the judge reports with satisfaction:

Because suddenly, once the decision had been made, *he* felt like being alone. He wanted to sit alone for half an hour, think as he had thought before, and speak as he had spoken before, in places which meant nothing to him, and to people who meant nothing to him. He had lapsed. Routine stretched its hand out to him for a moment. He was normal, healthy, and honest like a man who has a quiet drink before dinner and has banished his lover's whisper from his ear, her alluring scent from his nostrils—a man . . . whose eyes come to life again at the sight of newsprint, a man who has to dirty his hands at a bar again. (96).

So Jan is not in the hotel room when the Good God's bomb explodes, it's Jennifer alone who dies for love, and, in an ironic echo of the end of *Faust* the God can proclaim Jan "saved" ("GG" 189) because he has not fundamentally contravened the God's order: "The earth had him back again" (96).

The effect of the play's ending is thus to associate Jan with the principle of power the God represents, despite Jan's effusive assurances to the contrary, and domination is associated not just with modernity or rationalization but also with men. By default, a woman, Jennifer, whose erotic transport condemns her to death, remains as the embodiment of a subversive and transgressive sexuality that challenges the God's performance principle. It was Jan for whom the gypsy woman foretold a long life (62), while Jennifer, extracted from the God's temporal continuum, had no future to read. It is Jennifer alone who suffers the *Liebestod* and enters into what Foucault calls another kind of Faustian pact, willing to risk life for love: "to exchange life in its entirety for sex itself, for the truth and sovereignty of sex. Sex is worth dying for" (*History* 156). Though Bachmann's play began by posing Eros as the negation of and alternative to domination (the God spoke only of "couples" undistinguished by gender), it ends by aligning men/masculinity with the principle the God represents, and Jennifer becomes merely another exotic New World woman seduced and abandoned by the European conqueror. Though the play never explicitly thematizes gender, the consequence of making Jennifer the figure that stands for sexual freedom is, as in Marcuse's theory, to associate men with domination, while femininity (or female sexuality)—Jennifer and her mentor, the gypsy woman—embodies Eros conceived of as the subversion of governing values, a principle of resistance so unwaveringly opposed to domination that Eros can never be recuperated. Feminists will recognize this elision of femininity with sexuality as a familiar sexist notion that men have embraced for centuries: as Simone de Beauvoir put it in *The Second Sex*: "[Woman] is called 'the sex,' by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex—absolute sex, no less" (xvi). Bachmann's recourse to an essentialist conception of woman as civili-

zation's other once more reveals this play to be a product of the profoundly misogynist period in which it was written.

If Bachmann's reliance on various elements of a theoretical model that more recent feminist theorists have called into question characterized only this single radio play, this chapter might be worth no more than a footnote in Bachmann studies. But in fact it can be shown that this same constellation structures much of her later writing; as Jürgen Seim remarked, it is "often the case in Ingeborg Bachmann's work" that "the woman alone bears the suffering of love" (398). In the later texts a patriarchal principle often imposes its control on an isolated female figure who serves as the repository of an alternative dream of freedom. Three related conceptions continue to shape Bachmann's later writing: woman as "disloyal to civilization" (to use Adrienne Rich's term), woman as embodiment of Eros, and woman as victim. As Kurt Bartsch has noted: "The paradigmatic opposition of masculine-rational and female-emotional, the failure to integrate reason and emotion as well as the ending (return to existing social constraints or destruction) characterize both the radio plays and the fiction of Ingeborg Bachmann, and there not just the stories that are obviously about women" (*Ingeborg* 88).

Undine of "Undine Goes" counterposes the marvelous accomplishments of civilization that a generic "Hans" has brought into being to the lure of liberation that she represents and, more feisty than most of Bachmann's female characters, returns to her watery realm rather than accommodate herself to his terms. Ritta Jo Horsley maintains that "Undine Goes" is pervaded by a dualism that it never explicitly challenges: "On the contrary, by hypostatizing the traditional dichotomies into male and female figures it reaffirms a dualistic model. The oppositions of culture and nature; rationality and feeling; logical discourse and poetic utterance; social order and ecstasy of freedom; and masculine and feminine are assumed as given, and by their eloquent embodiment gain new power" ("Re-reading" 234). In *The Book of Franza* Leopold Jordan stands for science, masculinity, and whiteness; he seeks to eradicate all that can't be contained within his categories, including his wife Franza's subjectivity and sexuality as well as various other victims that are associated with her, such as Jews and colonized peoples. As Franza recalls: "He stole all of my possessions. . . . I am a Papua" (*Franza* 80; translation modified).

A number of critics have commented on the parallels between *Malina* and "The Good God of Manhattan." Hans Mayer called his review of the novel "*Malina* oder Der große Gott von Wien" (*Malina*, or the Great God of Vienna) and remarked: "This first novel also addresses the fundamental old theme: the

irreconcilability of contemporary society with that which German classicism wanted to understand as harmonious development of the personality. In Ingeborg Bachmann's well-known radio play, the Good God of Manhattan kills those who truly love because in the unconditionality of their emotions, they endanger the dominant order of alienation" (164). Angelika Mechtel similarly observed in her review of *Malina*: "There are also parallels to Ingeborg Bachmann's radio play *The Good God of Manhattan*. There nothing is allowed to exist in this administered and neatly arranged world except that which allows itself to be administered and arranged into its proper place, for instance, a love that leads to self-abandonment" (185).

Even in *Three Paths to the Lake*, whose female characters seem most fully integrated into a society that is destroying them, some repressed aspect of their psyche rebels and cries out for help. Thus in "The Barking" the senile Frau Jordan believes she hears barking dogs that will avenge her ill treatment by her son. Miranda is the happy victim of a hysterical myopia that allows her not to see ugliness in "Eyes to Wonder," a story dedicated to Georg Groddeck, who, several decades before Freud, "discovered" the Id, the repressed component of the human psyche that actually controls human behavior. As Bachmann explained in her enthusiastic review of Groddeck's *Book of the It*: "The Ego is a mask, the manner with which each of us goes around, and we are ruled by the Id, the Id does it, and it speaks in symbols through sickness" (*W* 4: 352). It can thus be argued that the repressive hypothesis underlies much of the work that has brought Bachmann feminist renown in the years since she was rediscovered by the women's movement in the late 1970s. Indeed, chapter 2 of this book provides a great deal of evidence to substantiate that argument, and chapter 3 illustrates how I myself fell prey to the repressive hypothesis.

As detailed in the commentaries to the chapters of Part Two, such feminist ideas about a single essential principle of womanhood uncontaminated by the characteristics of the culture from which particular women derive have more recently fallen into great disrepute. In part under the influence of Foucault, whose impact on Anglo-American feminist scholarship has been considerable, most feminist scholars in this country now repudiate the use of essentialism for anything but strategic purposes and regard women as the complexly structured products of the discursive and nondiscursive forces of the society in which they are situated. (Judith Butler has commented, for instance: "The female body that is freed from the shackles of the paternal law may well prove to be yet another incarnation of that law, posing as subversive but operating in the service of that law's amplification and proliferation" [93].) Such analyses were much slower to

seep into Germany, and some German feminist scholars have suggested that German women have a particular investment in female victimhood because it allows them to ignore women's complicity in German fascism (*Frauen gegen Antisemitismus*). Ingeborg Bachmann's work (including her treatment of fascism) has played some role in allowing German women to situate themselves outside their own culture, whose crimes thus become the responsibility only of men. Thus, if my analysis of Bachmann's writing here is correct, a feminist rethinking of Bachmann's work might also assist in promoting some other much-needed changes in analyses produced by the German women's movement.

Yet as I suggested at the outset of this chapter, interpretations of Bachmann that rest on the repressive hypothesis are not the only readings possible. It can also be argued that Bachmann's representation of femininity and female sexuality is much more complex than the foregoing account might seem to indicate. It is a comment on several generations of this play's readers that virtually no one before Peter Beicken (who has himself obviously been influenced by American feminism) mentioned the sadomasochistic elements of Jan and Jennifer's relationship, which are not in conflict with but a necessary component of the intensification of their love. Beicken has pointed out that from the beginning, their relationship is embedded in a violence that belies its presentation as an alternative to the God's order:

The destructive influence of socially mediated violence also makes itself felt in the relationship between Jennifer and Jan. How much this violence is a counterpart to the love plot can be recognized in various statements, particularly by Jan, whose aggression extends beyond mere threats and has real violent physical acts as its consequence, as the scars on Jennifer's hands prove. Psychic violence is also part of Jan's normal behavioral norms. . . . One could speculate in various ways to get to the bottom of this question: for instance, does Jennifer accede to this because she's prepared to suffer; because love is always a risk that includes injury and loss of self; because this female type in accord with the 1950s is prepared to accept male violence or inability to love as natural; because a women who loves is prepared to subordinate herself. (120–21)

Pursuing Beicken's suggestions, one might read in this and other Bachmann texts stories of masculinity and femininity as a particular historical period constructs them. Beicken views Jan's sadism as one more component of the God's order: "What makes Jan receptive for the agency dealing with him, what finally makes him behave in accordance with the will of the Good God, is his internalization of masculine role expectations that are also in conformity with the norms of social convention that the God represents" ("GG" 120). That may indeed be

the case. But what is more important for a new feminist reading of this play is that Bachmann shows submission to male power, female masochism, as the enabling condition of a female eroticism that is willing to embrace its own obliteration and destruction (Jennifer declares: "Soon I'll be nothing," and "I would be free of myself" ["GG" 91]) in order to love. That construction of femininity and sexuality constitutes a second discourse in "The Good God of Manhattan" much at variance with the first, which offers the possibility of a quite different feminist reading of this play.

Jessica Benjamin's study *The Bonds of Love* is very useful for thinking about the question of masochism from a feminist perspective. Benjamin also rejects the repressive hypothesis, the opposition between instinct and civilization, and draws on Foucault to maintain that desire is a production of power that functions "not by denying our desire but by forming it, converting it into a willing retainer, its servant or representative" (4). Adapting a male-dominant Freudian psychoanalysis for feminist purposes, she argues that a society that configures the male and female psyche as ours does cannot permit the reconciliation of female agency and female desire. Instead, sexual complementarity, she maintains, demands that "man expresses desire and woman is the object of it." Thus "woman's missing desire often takes the form of adoring the man who possesses it," and "women seem to have a propensity for what we may call 'ideal love'—a love in which the woman submits to and adores an other who is what she cannot be" (86). Voluntary submission to the man's erotic domination thus somewhat paradoxically allows the woman to achieve independence and gratification via obedience to and identification with the one who possesses it. The more she abandons herself to a man who transgresses her boundaries and violates her autonomy, the greater her satisfaction. Her pleasure derives from her knowledge of her subjugation by him, and her surrender to him confirms her connection to the power and desire she wishes to possess herself. Benjamin argues that in a male-dominant, gender-polarized society, where woman is, as de Beauvoir put it, "man's primary other, his opposite—playing nature to his reason, immanence to his transcendence, primordial oneness to his individuated separateness, and object to his subject" (quoted in Benjamin 7), the fulfillment of female desire takes the form of submission to the male will, a structure of domination anchored deep within the female psyche.

Benjamin's analysis makes it possible to read "The Good God of Manhattan" also as a story of the social construction of female desire. At the play's outset, Jennifer is introduced as a modern woman (one reason it is necessary for her to be an American) who possesses agency and seems to control her own desire: she

is a student of political science (still not exactly a feminized field) who travels to New York on her own, makes the first sexual advances to Jan, a strange European man, casually recounts her own erotic adventures with a variety of men at college (“And Arthur kisses me goodnight, or Mark, or Truman”), and, though she knows it’s unorthodox (“One shouldn’t go into hotels with strangers. Isn’t that right?”), spends the night with Jan in a sleazy hotel (“GG” 63, 64). Yet from the beginning of their relationship, Jennifer wants Jan to hurt her, physically and psychically (that is, where her desire is at issue, she employs her agency to bring about his domination and her submission). She is responsible for urging Jan to dig his nails into her palms, as he reminds her when she complains of the pain: “You’re the one who’s been leading me on. I’ve never wanted to hurt someone like that” (“GG” 64). Once she’s fallen in love, this independent young woman yields the initiative to Jan entirely, and he takes the lead in determining the course of the love affair, deciding when they should remain together and when they should part; he teases and taunts her while she bows to his demands and whims. When he threatens to beat her because she has dared to agree to his demand that they part (“I should beat you in front of all these people—I’m going to beat you” [“GG” 170]), she agrees eagerly. Though, as I suggested earlier, Jan’s exploration of the flora and fauna of the far reaches of Jennifer’s body can be read as a challenge to genital supremacy and the boundedness of the body, it is also given the shape of a voyage of discovery, with Jan as the colonial (European) master who takes possession of this virgin land (another reading of Jennifer as representative of the New World), who willingly yields herself to him: “If only I could do more, tear myself open for you and give you my every fiber, every bone in my body, just as it should be,” says Jennifer (“GG” 88). Jan’s domination and Jennifer’s submission to it drive her, the play’s dialogue suggests, to unknown heights of passion:

JAN: Is that what’s become of you! Just look at you! From a pink girl with diaries, good-night kisses, necking in cars with Truman and notebooks full of doodles under your arm, very nice, and how do you like it? . . .

JENNIFER: Save me! From you and from myself. . . .

JAN: Are you crying? Go ahead and cry!

JENNIFER: Do you think we’re insane?

JAN: Maybe.

JENNIFER: Do you despise me?

JAN: Just a little. Just enough so you never cease to amaze me. (“GG” 81)

In their last scene together, Jennifer submits entirely to Jan—against his will!—

constructing him as a traditional patriarch to whom she wishes only to subordinate herself:

JENNIFER (*slowly as she falls to her knees*): Oh, it's true. Never again.

JAN: What are you doing? Don't do that!

JENNIFER: Kneeling before you and kissing your feet? I'll do it forever. And I'll walk three steps behind you, wherever you go. I'll drink only after you have drunk. I'll eat after you've eaten. Wake, when you sleep. ("GG" 92)

The portrayal of Jennifer suggests that Bachmann, like Benjamin, views female autonomy and female desire as mutually exclusive. In the realm of eroticism, Jennifer uses her agency to bring about her own subordination. Though she is a victim in this play, it is a victimhood she actively seeks as the condition of her own erotic satisfaction. Within this discourse of sexual complementarity, women must become men's sexual objects to meet their own erotic needs. To realize her desire, Jennifer is willing to renounce her position as Jan's equal and embrace her own subordination.

The question of masochism (a subject that feminists have generally not been eager to address) needs much more investigation in Bachmann's writing. A passage from an unpublished preface to *The Book of Franza* suggests that Bachmann connected issues of sadism and masochism to the questions her "Ways of Death" pursued: "I come from a country, without showing off about its geniuses, which has always concerned itself with those unknown beings, human beings, their unfathomability, profundity. I also don't have any explanation for why a number of revolutionary discoveries have taken place in my country. I'm just acknowledging it. From the undiscovered Sacher Masoch to the greatest pioneer, Sigmund Freud, however historical he may also have been, this line has never broken off, this recherche" (TP 2: 16).

Perhaps some of the passages Bachmann underlined in her 1918 edition of Otto Weininger's *Geschlecht und Charakter* (Sex and character) are also relevant to the construction of femininity within a discourse of sexual complementarity: "Woman is only sexual, man is also sexual" (114); "Coitus is the highest value of woman, she seeks to realize it always and everywhere" (354); "The female seeks her perfection as object" (396; Bothner 214). Pursuing these hints, one might argue that her play draws attention to the way that femininity is constituted at a particular historical juncture, thematizing what Foucault called the "hysterization" or "sexualization" of women's bodies, a conception of the feminine body that conceives it to be "thoroughly saturated with sexuality" (*History* 104). This interpretation would hold good whether the play is regarded as a representa-

tion of the nature of social relations between men and women in “Manhattan” or as an exploration of intrapsychic reality, as Hapkemeyer has suggested: “Jan and Jennifer can be interpreted as lovers, but also as two components of the same personality, which the names already suggest, which derive from a common root” (*Entwicklungslinien* 87). (It’s not in fact true that the name “Jennifer” derives from “Jan”—it is a variant of “Winifred”—but Bachmann might well have wished to use the linguistic similarity of the two names to suggest that psychically Jennifer was a product of, dependent upon, or subordinate to Jan.) By portraying a female figure whose erotic satisfaction derives from her sexual subordination, Bachmann draws upon a discourse of sexuality that understands power as producing, proliferating, and intensifying sexuality rather than repressing it. Instead of embodying a pre- or extrasocial sexuality, within that second discourse Jennifer is interpellated into an already gendered discourse of sexuality within which female desire is defined as subordinate to men’s. Though it is certainly an exaggeration to say that this second discourse prefigures Foucault, the position Bachmann assumes in her treatment of Jennifer is close to what Foucault proposed when he argued, “We must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power” (*History* 157). A reading of this play that stresses the second discourse (which is, I think, entirely irreconcilable with the first) makes it possible both to criticize aspects of this work which remain rooted in their time and to produce interpretations that speak to feminists of the present day.

A reading of “The Good God of Manhattan” that investigates the work’s conflicts and tensions instead of attempting to produce a unitary interpretation might in addition identify a number of other discourses in the play which also contradict or undercut aspects of what I have identified as its dominant discourse. Bachmann’s representation of New York City is another site where contradictory discourses intersect. If “Manhattan” stands for the single order of the God, Bachmann simultaneously portrays it as a locus of eclectic urban activity where everything is permitted and possible: “This city of cities, in its restlessness and agony, took in everyone. Anything could thrive here!” (“GG” 168). Although cultural critics such as Marcuse and other members of the Frankfurt School were appalled by American mass culture, Bachmann’s lovers are in contrast delighted by it: collecting plastic swizzle sticks from a bar and paper fans depicting Catherine of Sienna from a church; playing music in a record shop in Harlem “in the company of several blacks”; riding a horse-drawn carriage in Central Park, where they are overtaken by drum majorettes leading a parade of war veterans (“GG” 68, 71). Far from being a location where all is reduced to a single uniform standard, Manhattan offers a variety of sensual pleasures: one can

eat “Italian and Chinese, Spanish and Russian”; stand “on Broadway under the Pepsi Cola waterfall, near the big Lucky Strike smoke ring” (“GG” 61 70); or purchase almost anything.

Joseph Strutz has pointed out that the God himself depicts New York as a “site of social chaos” (381), using exuberant figurative language that recalls Georg Heym’s expressionist poem “Der Gott der Stadt” (The god of the city). Manhattan’s squirrels, the God’s henchmen, can perhaps even be read as similarly ambiguous figures: their service to the God may underline that in the world the God controls, even nature has been brought under the sway of domination, yet these quirky talking animals also seem to derive from a magical realm (part Brothers Grimm, part Walt Disney) qualitatively distinct from the God’s grim rationalized regime. (On the other hand, if Bachmann’s inspiration for squirrels in the service of “Manhattan” derives from the U.S. plan in summer 1948 for provisioning Vienna in the event of a Soviet blockade, code-named “squirrel cage” [Bischof, “Austria Looks” 188], then the squirrels indeed serve the God’s totalitarian order.) Within the logic of this play, there seems to be no explanation for why the city of Manhattan is represented as a heterogeneous center of urban delights that escapes the God’s total power; after all, the God presents himself as the agent of an order that controls everything but love. It thus seems necessary to view Bachmann’s play as existing at the intersection of two conflicting 1950s discourses on “America” (or its synecdochal representation, Manhattan), the one portraying the U.S. as the highest stage of a rationalized technological progress tending ever more toward totalitarianism, the other treating the United States as a land of unlimited possibilities for which Europeans yearned.

A reading of “The Good God of Manhattan” stressing its contradictions offers another sort of insight into Bachmann’s later works. Viewed through the lens of newer feminist analyses, those texts can be read as representations of femininity as a particular period constructed it, instead of (or as well as) accounts of female victims extracted from time and space who are oppressed by all-powerful men. Bachmann’s female figures would then no longer seem to stand for a transhistorical, essentialized principle of womanhood but could be understood as products of the political systems of which their lives are part. The failure of Bachmann’s female figures to comprehend or challenge the power men exercise over them could be viewed as a representational strategy that allowed Bachmann to portray her women as they understood themselves. Indeed, Bachmann suggested something of this sort when she maintained in the preface to *Franza* that her “ways of death” took place “at times, within the thinking that leads to

a crime, and at times, within that which leads to dying" (*Franza* 4): if a certain kind of (male) thinking allows men to destroy women, another and related kind of (female) thinking produces women who accede to, even embrace, their victimization. That construction of femininity assumes its clearest form in the relationship of the "I" of *Malina* to Ivan, who treats her as badly as Jan treats Jennifer and whose every wish she nonetheless desires to satisfy. Loving Ivan is the condition of her (female) existence ("I live in Ivan," says the "I" [*Malina* 24]), and the end of Ivan's love for her means her end, too: as Malina, her male doppelgänger, declares at the end of the novel, "There is no woman here" (*Malina* 224). That is how Bachmann's writing represents "history within the I/psyche" (what Foucault called the "body totally imprinted by history" [*Language* 148]): Bachmann's female figures are completely congruent with the historically specific discourses that call them into being.

To understand Bachmann's texts in this manner, it would be necessary to read her narrative standpoint as always an ironic one (as Irene Holeschofsky has suggested of *Three Paths to the Lake*): though her female characters entirely affirm the categories that engender them and attempt to make the best of what they never even recognize as a bad situation, we readers are intended to understand the costs to them of the social circumstances to whose dictates they conform. That, I think, would provide a new and useful reading strategy for Bachmann's "Ways of Death" and could also explain why she abandoned *The Book of Franza*—whose protagonist does understand and rebel against what has been done to her—for the more complex literary strategies of *Malina* and *Three Paths to the Lake*, whose female figures can never construct a narrative that allows them to talk about their own destruction: "I'm not telling, I won't talk, I can't," says the "I" (*Malina* 172); "although all these stories were true, she omitted others because they were badly suited for telling," thinks Elisabeth Matrei in "Three Paths to the Lake" (*Paths* 132; translation modified). What would still be missing from such an analysis, because feminist methodology as yet provides no tools to undertake it, is a reading of Bachmann's figures' psychological constitution as a product of a very specific historical period. That reading would not propose that Jennifer is a masochist or the female protagonist of *Malina* is murdered just because they are women living under modern Western patriarchy, but, more specifically, investigate how Jennifer's psychic makeup might be related to the cold war or how the "I" might be a product of Vienna in the 1960s. In chapter 10 I begin such an investigation; more generally, however, devising a methodology that would enable such inquires into the relationship of literary texts to extraliterary historical processes and forces remains an unfinished project of feminist literary scholarship.

Yet, even should such problems be solved, I would not attempt to argue that a reading of Bachmann's texts based on current (or future) Anglo-American feminist thinking would be the correct one while all others are wrong. Nor do I maintain that the first reading I advanced of Bachmann, based on the repressive hypothesis, is false. That aspect of Bachmann's writing really is there, as I hope I have shown, and earlier feminists did not misread her when they underlined those dimensions of her work. Both of the readings I have proposed here can be supported by textual evidence and emphasize aspects of her play that continued to inform her writing through the "Ways of Death." In fact, her works oscillate between these two conceptions of femininity, which cannot at all be harmonized with each other. Rather, by emphasizing two disparate readings of this radio play, I want to make two larger methodological points. First, Bachmann's texts (like almost everything else) are not of a single piece but sites where contradictory discourses intersect; second, readings of Bachmann's works, as of any text, are always interested, stressing what meets their readers' needs and disregarding what seems of less utility (as I myself have done). I am arguing that it is now time for Bachmann's feminist critics to undertake new readings of her works that would both question what is timebound, outmoded, and problematic in her writing and explore ways in which her texts could be reread to address new feminist concerns. It seems very likely that the postulation of masculinity and femininity (or power and sex) as mutually exclusive oppositions both naturalizes and stabilizes cultural constructions that are not in feminists' interests and also prevents us from seeing an actually much more contradictory and unstable reality into which different kinds of political interventions would be necessary. If one reading of Bachmann may naturalize an essentialist conception of an inherently subversive sexuality or femininity, another reading can draw such notions into question again. As Judith Butler has suggested, "If the regulatory fictions of sex and gender are themselves multiply contested sites of meaning, then the very multiplicity of their construction holds out the possibility of a disruption of their univocal posturing" (32). That could be a feminist strategy for reading Bachmann's works, too.

In endeavoring to reread Bachmann from a more historical perspective, feminist critics who view her texts as products of a period that is now past would be doing no more than reacknowledging what Bachmann herself conceded in her Frankfurt lectures: "Thinking, rooted in time, also succumbs to time" (*W* 4: 195). She, too, for better or for worse, bore the imprint of the time that produced her as she struggled to meet the charge she set the writer: "In the best case, one can succeed at two things: to represent one's times, and to present something

whose time hasn't come yet" (*W* 4: 196). Perhaps also in a different way than she intended, Bachmann represented the thinking of her time, and some of those strategies of representation now seem no longer altogether adequate to our own. We feminist literary historians can nonetheless honor Bachmann's radio play for its "resolute attempt to keep the space of emancipation open" (as Douglas Kellner remarked of *Eros and Civilization* [1956]) in a time of political reaction, undertaking new feminist readings that do not abandon the emancipatory goal at which her text aimed.