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Part Three: Reading Bachmann  
Historically, Chapter 9. Bachmann and  
Postcolonial Theory: White Ladies and  
Dark Continents

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## CHAPTER 9

# *Bachmann and Postcolonial Theory*

## WHITE LADIES AND DARK CONTINENTS

*... the psyche of the whites, which was  
obviously more threatened than he could  
imagine ...*

—Ingeborg Bachmann, *The Book of Franza*

“[Austria] is different from all other little countries today because it was an empire and it’s possible to learn something from its history. And because the lack of activity into which one is forced there enormously sharpens one’s view of the big situation and of today’s empires,” Ingeborg Bachmann observed in a 1971 interview (*Gul* 106). The postcolonial theory developed since 1990 helps to explain why and how Bachmann was able to use her Austrian vantage point as a privileged perspective from which to regard “today’s empires” and the forms of imperialism for which they have been responsible. For over a decade, postcolonial scholars have argued that European history cannot be detached from the history of Europe’s imperialist practices; as Anne McClintock puts it, “Imperialism is not something that happened elsewhere—a disagreeable fact of history external to Western identity. Rather, imperialism and the invention of race were fundamental aspects of Western industrial modernity” (5). Postcolonial theorists and a range of scholars investigating the construction of “whiteness” have recently begun to demonstrate that the racial formations of the imperial world were constitutive of white European identities in the metropole as well as in the colonies, “race” thus helping to define the most intimate domains of modern life—including gender relations, the sexual politics of the private sphere, and sexuality itself. As I have emphasized in previous chapters, Bachmann maintained that in twentieth-century literary texts history could no longer be treated as an external medium in which figures acted but must instead be regarded as a force that configures the self: “history within the I/psyche”

(*W* 4: 230). Reading the “Ways of Death” through the lens offered by postcolonial theory can show how Bachmann represents imperialism past and present as a component of history central to the constitution of her characters.

As its title suggests, this chapter focuses on how Bachmann represents the relationship of imperialism to the construction of the white female psyche in the “Ways of Death.” “White Lady” (in English) is a phrase Bachmann associates with Eka Kottwitz, one of the figures in a “Ways of Death” fragment (*TP* 1: 424; a point I explore in greater detail below); “Dark Continent” (in English) is the term Freud used in *The Question of Lay Analysis* to describe “the sexual life of adult women” (20: 212). Freud’s use of this image—the term Victorians applied to an Africa to which their own imperialist activities would bring light (Brantlinger)—reveals, Mary Ann Doane has argued, the imperial underpinnings of Freud’s theory: “The force of the category of race in the constitution of Otherness within psychoanalysis should not be underestimated. When Freud needs a trope for the unknowability of female sexuality, the dark continent is close at hand. Psychoanalysis can, from this point of view, be seen as a quite elaborate form of ethnography—as a writing of the ethnicity of the while psyche. Repression becomes the prerequisite for the construction of a white culture which stipulates that female sexuality act as the trace within of what has been excluded” (211).

From very early on, similar imperial imagery also shaped Bachmann’s writing. Her 1957 poem “Liebe: Dunkler Erdteil” (Love: Dark Continent) represents Africa as a lush and exotic realm of sexuality beyond the repressive boundaries established by Europeans, with black masculinity—“the black king”—figured as the agent of an erotic power before which the poem’s “you” prostrates herself and at whose mercy she conceives herself to be: “But there you always fall upon your knees, for he chooses and rejects you without grounds” (*Songs* 295). Bachmann’s poem might be regarded as a rather conventional European projection of orientalizing motifs onto a non-European geography, and such a reading would not be wrong. But by brushing this poem somewhat against the grain (to use Walter Benjamin’s phrase again), it is possible to advance a more interesting reading which treats this poem as a representation of the degree to which racialized and imperial fantasies are constituent elements of the European female psyche. Bachmann’s later treatment of the intersections of imperialism and female identity, I want to propose here, also oscillates between those two positions, sometimes projecting familiar European fantasies onto a non-European backdrop, at other times achieving a more profound interrogation of the imperial underpinnings of Central European femininity. By inter-

rogating the literal encounters of Bachmann's protagonists with (inhabitants of) the Dark Continent in two uncompleted portions of the "Ways of Death"—*The Book of Franza* and the Eka Kottwitz fragment—I want to show how discourses of race and empire underwrite her female figures' identities. Virtually alone among postwar women writing in German, I argue, Bachmann attempts to explore the racialized foundations of Central European fantasies, yet by continuing to project white fantasies onto non-European figures she herself does not always escape the racist structures her work attempts to challenge. Finally, I want to examine "Three Paths to the Lake," the last text Bachmann wrote before her death, to show how she connects white women acting under postcolonial conditions, imperial Austria, and the "ways of death" of which her White Ladies are the victims.

In an often quoted introduction to *The Book of Franza*, Bachmann provided instructions on how to read her book: "The real settings, the interior ones, laboriously concealed by the external, are elsewhere" (*Franza* 4). As I showed in chapter 2, the feminist scholars who rediscovered Bachmann's writing in the 1980s regarded *The Book of Franza* as an exploration of the location and function of femininity within discourse which provided the key to understanding Bachmann's entire oeuvre; as Sigrid Weigel put it in her introduction to the 1984 *text + kritik* volume that became a landmark of feminist Bachmann criticism, "in [her texts] it is a question of a structural relationship between fascism, patriarchy, ethno- and logocentrism and the central role of language/writing for this context, within which the 'feminine' as the embodiment of the repressed other is subjected to a wide variety of ways of death" ("Andere" 5). In this reading, Bachmann's tale of Franza's flight from her tyrannical Viennese husband into the North African desert in the company of her beloved brother, Martin, is an investigation of the mechanisms via which an oppressive Western order denies women and other "others" a voice. This analysis mainly conflates gender and race, viewing them as equally the product of a single system of subordination, and "the whites" against whom Franza inveighs are conceived to stand synecdochically for domination *tout court*. In Weigel's words, "The whites thus stand for the insight that the history of colonization and the history of patriarchy have different victims but a single perpetrator" ("Ende" 82). That is clearly Franza's own view of her situation, for she compares her husband's brutal treatment of her to the colonial exploitation of native peoples and their indigenous treasures. Other evidence in the novel, however, suggests that Franza's position should not be equated with Bachmann's own (see Albrecht, "Sire"). For 1990s feminists, of course, forced by protests of women of color to acknowledge white women's

racial privilege, readings that fail to disaggregate race and gender have become impossible. In its various unfinished versions, I want to show, Bachmann's fragment can be read as a contradictory text that at some points concurs with Franza's own conflation of gender and race but in other instances holds Franza's treatment of race and empire up for examination. In neither case, I want to emphasize, is Bachmann's unfinished novel *about* North Africa; rather it is about how a European woman (whether Franza or Bachmann herself) represents her orientalist encounter with it.

Bachmann's various accounts of her own trip to Egypt and the Sudan in spring 1964—which she initially wished to integrate into her Büchner Prize speech, then intended as a separate novel, to be called the “Wüstenbuch” (Desert book), and finally used as the basis for the North African sections of *Franza*—are all structured around a recurring leitmotif: “The whites are coming, I am of inferior race [Die Weißen kommen, ich bin von niedriger Rasse]” (*TP* 1: 180). As she revealed in a draft introduction to *Franza* (*TP* 2: 73), these phrases are borrowed from Rimbaud, specifically from *Un saison en enfer*, where Rimbaud maintains, “Je suis de race inférieure [I am of inferior race]” (95), and, somewhat later, “Les blancs débarquent. Le canon! Il faut se sottomettre au baptême, s'habiller, travailler [The whites are debarking. The cannon/canon! It is necessary to submit oneself to baptism, to get dressed, to work]” (98). As Christopher Miller observes, though Rimbaud later traveled to Africa (where he became a gunrunner and possibly a slave trader), here his critique of “whites” and identification with Africans—(“Je suis une bête, un nègre [I am a beast, a Negro] [97])—are merely vehicles for advancing a critique of contemporary French civilization by drawing on Africanist motifs: “His artificial Africanness consists of an image that persists in European discourse, that of the free reign of desire, of removal from the mediation of language and the rule of repression” (C. Miller 152). (Later in this chapter I term that discourse the discourse of primitivism.) Dirk Göttsche has maintained that the structure of *Franza* reflects “Rimbaud's conceptual world. Rationality, masculinity, and European culture are associated with the principle of the objectivizing domination of nature and humanity, while the magical, the feminine, and the Egyptian (colored [*sic*]) culture are associated with a subordinate but utopian counterprinciple” (“Schwarzkunst” 149–50). In the final version of *Franza*, Bachmann expands Rimbaud's remarks into a forceful denunciation of the hegemonic force of European cultural imperialism which, the editors of the critical edition observe (*TP* 2: 476), recalls the analysis of colonialism in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (and is so key a passage in Bachmann's oeuvre that I have already cited it several times in this book:

The whites are coming. The whites are landing. And if they are driven back, then they will come again. No revolution or resolution can prevent it, nor any controls over the currency. They will come again in spirit if there's no other way for them to come. And they will resurrect themselves in a brown or a black brain, which will become white once again. They will take over world through such indirect means. (*Franza* 112)

But despite the affinities of Bachmann's statement with the analysis of one of the most renowned critics of Western imperialism, one might nonetheless maintain that for Bachmann, as for Rimbaud, these racialized images represent their own European instrumentalization of the language of empire: colonialist metaphors serve the primary function of providing a vivid trope for the all-pervasive force of a European rationality from which they endeavor to disengage themselves by aligning with that which Europe designates as its other. As Christopher Miller puts it, "The gesture of reaching out to the most unknown part of the world and bringing it back as language . . . ultimately brings Europe face to face with nothing but itself, with the problems its own discourse imposes" (5).

The earliest versions of *The Book of Franza*—drafts for Bachmann's Büchner Prize speech and her "Wüstenbuch"—were written in the first person and to some extent still retain autobiographical elements ("they [her male Arab acquaintances and, as emerges later, her lovers] call me, with short peremptory syllables, always by my surname, while I only know their first names, bakma, how are you. I say, I am fine. I really am" [*TP* 1: 239]). Those drafts already revolve around European problems to which North Africa is considered to offer alternatives and answers (and already cite Rimbaud as the antecedent to Bachmann's own approach). The ends to which Bachmann, at least at an early stage of the text's composition, wished to turn the journey are evident in her initial plan for the account of her own trip to Egypt and the Sudan in spring 1964: as the editors of the critical edition point out, she first intended to contrast the "sickness" of "unloved Berlin" (ultimately the topic of her Büchner Prize speech: see chapter 10)—where she spent her fellowship year in 1963–64 as she attempted to recover from the devastating effects of the dissolution of her relationship with Max Frisch—and the "healing" she had experienced in the North African desert. In the novel's final version, Franza remains convinced that the desert will be a site of healing for her because, like Rimbaud, she takes it to be a location where "the whites" (i.e., the forms of European thought of which she conceives herself to be a victim) hold no sway. One can thus locate this text within a long line of narratives in which the orient is represented as corresponding or responding to the traveler's own interior needs. For the "belated travelers" of the late nine-

teenth century, as Ali Behdad observes, the trip to the Orient was a voyage of “romantic self-discovery” and a “solitary quest for elsewhere” in “response to the onset of modernity in Europe” (21, 16).

It is then possible to read Franza’s journey to North Africa as what Behdad has identified as the contradictory discourse of “belated Orientalism.” That discourse, as Behdad describes it, often “vacillates between an insatiable search for a counterexperience in the Orient and the melancholic discovery of its impossibility. . . . On the one hand, these texts identify themselves differentially against . . . the truth claims of official Orientalism by expressing an unease with classification and objectivity. On the other, they find it impossible to avoid the baggage of Orientalist knowledge that has mediated the desire to produce another discourse on the Orient” (15). Franza’s experience of the orient is often explicitly shown as mediated by her European guidebooks, citations from which dot the text as recognizably foreign bodies. Though Franza appears to be entirely uninterested in the guidebooks, her response to Egypt takes the form of a romantic repudiation of everything the guidebooks recommend, a defiantly dichotomous reaction still negatively determined by the terms of the prescriptions it rejects. Franza fervently insists, as she travels deeper into North Africa, that she has left behind the entire canon of Western knowledge and eluded European power: “The whites. Finally they were nowhere to be seen” (*Franza* 94). She also warns herself that white cultural hegemony is not so easy to evade: “Thus will I discover my rights. But the alibi of the whites is strong. Don’t forget that” (*Franza* 112). But exactly this representation of North Africa as a site of oriental otherness that can rescue Franza from Europe reveals itself to be a product of romantic white fantasies that are themselves constructed by and mediated through the orientalist texts of earlier travelers.

How Franza’s (or Bachmann’s?) white female fantasies about the orient might be connected to the Dark Continent of white female sexuality is most clearly revealed in various accounts of an “orgy” in the “Wüstenbuch” (*TP* 2: 271), which survive in the novel’s final draft only in veiled allusions to the “embraces at the Nile” (*Franza* 143; translation modified) and the suggestion that Martin has slept with two Arab acquaintances. As Edward Said has remarked, “The Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies”; to travelers the association between the orient and the freedom of licentious sex meant that “the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe. Virtually no European writer who wrote on or travelled to the Orient in the period after 1800 exempted himself or herself

from this quest" (*Orientalism* 188, 190). The first-person narrator of the "Wüstenbuch" conceives of her erotic encounter with Salah, Mahmed, and Abdu—always framed by the Rimbaudian refrain, "The whites are coming. I am of inferior race"—as extracting her from whiteness altogether—"Three bodies that intertwine, the single satisfaction, the killing of the other race" (*TP* 1: 257). She also represents (à la Eldridge Cleaver) the transgressive sexual act as a gendered act of revenge against domination by white *men*: "The white man is inferior. And he's afraid that I'll say it out loud. I killed him in our bed, he will never forgive his inferiority. He needs the police against it, law, arrogance, he needs violence, because he can't prevail in his bed" (*TP* 1: 283). As in "Love: Dark Continent" (or in "The Good God of Manhattan"), here too eroticism extracts the lovers from the ruling order and aligns them with the quintessential otherness for which the orient stands.

As the journey to North Africa made it possible for Franza to construe bacteria-induced illnesses as a danger only to whites, so similarly the "I" of the "Wüstenbuch" imagines that venereal disease is of no concern to nonwhites: "The venereal diseases [*Geschlechtskrankheiten*] of the whites, I understand very well that no one knows them here" (*TP* 1: 240). Sex with her three Egyptian friends cures her of the "sexual illness" of white femininity: "I thought of it as an act of revenge, and it was not a revenge, but the repudiation of ridiculous notions. From now on the venereal diseases of the whites will only make me laugh" (*TP* 1: 272). Bachmann's effort to combat white culture reproduces several of its core racial and sexual preconceptions: that the orient is a site of licentious and wanton sexuality; that men of color are particularly potent and gifted lovers who, in competition with white men, lust especially after white women; that sexuality is outside of culture, thus associated with "others" also thought to be exterior to civilization; and that through her sexual relationship with a man of color a white woman can declare herself "disloyal to civilization" and place herself outside its bounds. Paradoxically, one might maintain, Bachmann's attempt to escape whiteness proves how very white she is.

Yet a question might be asked of this novel fragment similar to the one asked of a novel that represents a much more viciously racist white consciousness, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: is this a racist novel or a novel about racism? Frequently, Bachmann's text offers hints that readers should regard Franza's own judgments with some skepticism. In one of the last drafts, Bachmann clearly pokes fun at Franza's romantic notion that she is destined to become a heroic martyr whose (distinctly masochistic) sacrifices could save the Third World (surely a liberal and female variant of the Victorian conviction that Euro-

pean efforts would bring light to the Dark Continent): “Perhaps she could do something, but it had to be something real, later Africa or Asia, under the hardest conditions, with sacrifice, with heroism, sacrifice definitely had to be part of it, and it should be grand, lots of effort, but glorious for her, with an early death, she would jump in after someone who was drowning, dash into a burning house and throw a child out the window into the blanket waiting to catch it and then burn to death, bandage a wounded man and then be shot by mistake in North Africa” (*TP* 2: 233–234).

Franza’s declaration that she has escaped the whites is somewhat undercut by the ubiquitous bottles of Coca-Cola she drinks along her journey; as the title of Reinhold Wagnleitner’s study of U.S. influence in Austria after 1945, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War*, suggests, Coca-Cola can readily serve as a powerful and easily recognizable symbol of Western cultural imperialism. In the North Africa destined to save her from the whites, Franza encounters acts of brutality that do not fit her dichotomous model of evil Europe and the pristine orient: a woman bound by the hair at the Cairo train station, and a camel slaughtered at a wedding feast—both figures with whom she identifies (again appropriating non-European experiences as her own)—so inexplicable in their otherness that her European categories leave her at a loss to interpret them. One of the most striking indications that Franza’s appropriation of North Africa might be regarded as Bachmann’s attempt to represent white female fantasies about the orient is her mystical experience on a Red Sea beach, where she is convinced that she has seen God and her father when she is in fact confronted with a dead tree trunk. Her response, “The Arabian desert is surrounded by shattered visions of God” (*Franza* 119), the editors of the critical edition point out (*TP* 2: 486–487), is quite possibly borrowed from *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, written by one of the greatest of the romantic orientalisists, T. E. Lawrence (“Lawrence of Arabia”). It is possible, then, that when Bachmann comments on a travel party of elderly American women, “all of them over sixty and decked out with canes and giant hats, . . . recalling renowned travelers an age gone by being served in style while traveling on a steamer up the Nile to the granite quarries and on to Elephantine” (*Franza* 105; translation modified), she means that description of the European woman traveler on her grand tour of the orient also to apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to Franza—who is in fact in an earlier version of this same passage called a “Lady,” in English, by an Egyptian soldier in Luxor (*TP* 2: 103), underlining the fact that in the context of Egypt she, too, is a White Lady.

One might thus maintain that Franza’s travel accounts, like those of many

women travelers to the orient who preceded her, consist of the fantasies she projects onto North Africa, fantasies that are “interior settings” disguised as a travel narrative about real geographical sites. Perhaps one could even read Franza herself as the Dark Continent, her travel to North Africa thus conceived of as a journey into the unknown territory of her own psyche. Bachmann’s description of Franza’s fascination with the monuments of Egyptian antiquity might then be seen as an elaboration of Freud’s imperial metaphor in his *Aetiology of Hysteria*, where he compares his own task to that of “an explorer arriv[ing] in a little-known region where his interest is aroused by an expanse of ruins with remains of walls, fragments of columns, and tablets with half-effaced and unreadable inscriptions”: after questioning the region’s “perhaps semi-barbaric peoples” and excavating the site, the explorer may decipher and translate the inscriptions: “*Saxa loquantur!*” (3: 192)—The stones speak!—a passage that recalls Franza’s geologist brother’s effort to find a geological explanation for the undiagnosed illness that causes his sister’s psychic and physical symptoms.

On the other hand, even if it should be possible to read this contradictory text as an investigation of race and empire, it is not so clear that Bachmann’s metaphorizing of the imperial traveler—that is, using the journey to a real non-European country as a vehicle for exploring the state of the European psyche—could not itself be regarded in some complex ways as an imperial gesture. One might then direct a critique against Bachmann’s use of North Africa similar to that which Susan Shapiro leveled at Jean-François Lyotard’s treatment of “the jews”: “‘The jews’ becomes a way for the European subject both to critique the (logo) center and identity with/as the margins of the West without changing its terms. It maintains the logic of the West by reducing otherness to a symbol of the limits of the West, its limit-text. . . . While it is clear that the jews is a constructed trope, the constructedness of the *real Jews* is effaced or forgotten. . . . [T]here is no space left in the West for the intervention of actual Jews in their multiple and conflicting identities” (190). It is very possible that the “sickness” from which Franza is suffering is that of whiteness, or white femininity, itself (“She had not arrived at Luxor,” writes Bachmann, “but instead at a point in her illness, not having traveled through the desert, but through her illness” [*Franza* 105])—but that is not a malady to which Bachmann herself was entirely immune. Furthermore, even should this have been the reading of her novel that Bachmann intended, more than a decade of scholarship focused on *Franza* shows that such an interpretation was not evident to most readers. Perhaps it was for such reasons, among others (see also chapter 10), that Bachmann finally

abandoned this novel fragment altogether. As she wrote to her editor in 1966, “The manuscript seems to me like a helpless allusion to something that still needs to be written” (*TP* 2: 397).

In later “Ways of Death” texts, Bachmann developed more successful strategies for representing the encounter of the White Lady and the Dark Continent. Where *The Book of Franza* had directly thematized the clash of race and gender categories, later texts merely *display* a female psyche constituted by historically specific discourses of race and gender, her figures so entirely the products of history that they are unable to advance a critique of their own circumstances beyond that which prevailing discourses would allow. One might even maintain that in certain respects the White Ladies in Bachmann’s later “Ways of Death” texts accede to a definition of themselves as the Dark Continent: that is, they accept the racial preconceptions that define white female sexuality as unexplored terrain, a riddle, an enigma, which white men wish to colonize but whose heart of darkness neither men nor women (who in these texts remain mysteries to themselves) can fully plumb. Although White Ladies cannot be represented as the direct agents of imperialism, they are clearly implicated in its racial logic, as captive to racial fantasies and projections as white men (though implementing them in gender-specific ways). One key component of their racial identity is thus their utter obliviousness to their own racial determinants. As well, contra scholars who attempt to exempt Germans and Austrians from orientalism because Germany and Austria had no direct national interests in the Middle East, the vantage point from which Bachmann views imperialism emphasizes the imbrication of all Europeans, not just those with an explicitly colonial past, in the imperial/neocolonial and racial order of the West. Such a reading of Bachmann’s investigation of imperialism makes it possible to read her haughty rejoinder to criticisms of *Malina* as something more than a feeble justification for that novel’s apparent lack of attention to politics: “If for example I say nothing in this book *Malina* about the Vietnam War, nothing about so and so many catastrophic conditions of our society, then I know how to say it in a different way—or I hope that I know how to say it” (*Gul* 90–91). What Bachmann’s texts quite deliberately portray, one might maintain, is the kind of consciousness that made Vietnam possible.

A key incident in Bachmann’s Eka Kottwitz/Aga Rottwitz fragment, added to that unfinished novel in 1968–69, moves the violent encounter of race and gender to the center stage of the “Ways of Death.” An African student accompanies Countess Kottwitz, a brilliant political journalist and the novel’s protagonist, home after a lecture and makes violent love to her. Although the countess, hitherto quite uninterested in lovemaking (“over thirty, she still . . . had . . . not a clue

what an orgasm was" (*TP* 1: 419)), experiences the sexual encounter as a bestial assault, she finds it has left her sexually awakened and "completely transformed" (*TP* 1: 427). Yet even though the African declares his love for her, Countess Kottwitz, "who was no Lady Chatterley" (*TP* 1: 426), refuses to acknowledge her newly aroused passion for him. Instead, she proclaims she is now finally able to love her current boyfriend, Jung. When Jung leaves her for another woman, Eka throws herself from a window and is permanently paralyzed. The scene immediately preceding the sexual encounter offers a clue to how Bachmann wanted her story to be read: sitting in a bar in the Hamburg hotel Vier Jahreszeiten, Countess Kottwitz orders a drink called a "White Lady" (*TP* 1: 424).

One might read this passage as a vivid illustration of the white female fantasy that Fanon describes in *Black Skin, White Masks*: "A Negro is raping me." In general, as Mary Ann Doane points out, Fanon views sexuality as a major arena for the articulation of racism. His analysis of this racialized fantasy is founded upon Helene Deutsch's and Marie Bonaparte's definitions of adult female sexuality as fundamentally masochistic. That conception of femininity finds support in many passages in Bachmann's writing: the "I" of *Malina* muses, for instance, "No normal man with normal drives has the obvious idea that a normal woman would like to be quite normally raped" (*Malina* 180). Following Freud, Fanon maintains that normal adult female sexuality requires the renunciation of aggression and the acceptance of properly female passive sexual aims. In a racist society, Fanon maintains, "the Negro becomes the predestined depository of this aggressiveness. If we go farther into the labyrinth, we discover that when a woman lives the fantasy to be raped by a Negro, it is in some way the fulfillment of a private dream, of an inner wish. Accomplishing the phenomenon of turning against self, it is the woman who rapes herself" (175). Doane's gloss on this passage is useful: "Fanon finds that the fantasy of being raped by a Negro constitutes the assimilation by the woman of a cultural treasurehouse of images concerning blackness and their incorporation within what is a basic structure of femininity" (231). Though Bachmann might have formulated Fanon's explanation somewhat differently, his is an analysis with which she might not fundamentally have disagreed. From "Love: The Dark Continent" and "The Good God of Manhattan" through *Malina*, her female figures seek out powerful men who hurt them and to whom they can submit themselves, and their sexual pleasure is greater if they can also see themselves as contravening social taboos. To the White Lady, rape by a "Negro" optimally satisfies these criteria.

What makes the portrait of this White Lady far more compelling than those of Bachmann's other figures who achieve a transgressive sexual satisfaction is

the careful delineation of how precisely the features of Countess Kottwitz's character that make "rape" by a "Negro" especially exciting to her also prevent her from acknowledging this relationship as one that finally meets her sexual needs. The boyfriend Jung is represented as an indifferent lover who fails entirely to respond to Eka's awkward attempts to arouse him:

Jung had kissed her a few times, in the early days, that was the single form of affection that occurred to him, otherwise he fell upon her occasionally, and Eka didn't admit to herself that it was unbearable for her, that she expected something else, she just didn't know what, and sometimes she was overcome by silly notions, she threw herself on him like [a] child and hugged him and pressed herself against him in the desperate hope that something would occur to him. Jung either shoved her away with a laugh [or] called her a silly teenager, while Eka's face got grayer and grayer and more and more strained and had nothing at all in common with that of a teenager. (TP 1: 420)

The encounter with the African takes place as a consequence of mutual sexual attraction, as Bachmann underlines in a passage that charmingly reproduces the confusion of swelling sexual passion: "Then he took her by the hand, and she saw his beautiful black hand, her beautiful white hand, both beautiful hands, slim, too long, hands too long, hands too much" (TP 1: 424). But as this enormously erudite woman has no idea where the student's African homeland might be located ("He was from Somaliland, and Eka admitted to herself that she didn't exactly know, for once not exactly, though she knew everything exactly" [TP 1: 424]), so the only terms Eka can find to describe their passion derive from a racist vocabulary that defines their erotic exchange as violent and barbaric: "In the next moment the Somali student had torn her from the armchair, perhaps not exactly torn, but taken" (TP 1: 426); "in this situation that just seemed grotesque to her" (TP 1: 425); "it's bestial, I'm dying, I'm dying" (TP 1: 425); "After he raped her once more he left" (TP 1: 427); "I was no longer a human being, I was an animal" (TP 1: 429). She can experience sexual pleasure with the African because the intensity of the sexual act disrupts her white interpretive schema—"it was simply the end of all her preconceptions" (TP 1: 425)—and it unsettles her ego boundaries: "her ego [*Ich*] was eradicated" (TP 1: 430). But once she reestablishes her psychic boundaries—"in the process of restoring her ego [*dabei, ihr Ich wiederherzustellen*]" (TP 1: 425)—she is convinced that she loves only Jung, a white man. In their commentary to this passage, the editors of the critical edition point to its affinities with the utopian "orgy" of the "Wüstenbuch," a connection supported by a later version of this passage in which

the “rapist” is called “Abdu,” also the name of one of the trio of Egyptian lovers. But what makes this fragment different from Bachmann’s other utopian evocations of erotic transport is Eka’s incapacity to transcend the cultural limitations that prevent her from embracing a sexual relationship proscribed by the culture of which she is part.

Of course, there is a way out for the White Lady, as Bachmann underlines via her allusion to D. H. Lawrence’s novel: to satisfy her sexual needs, Eka could follow the example of Connie Chatterley, jettison her miserable affair with Jung, and cast her lot with the Somali student. In a paper called “Do White Ladies Get the Blues? Nancy Cunard and Desire,” Sabine Broeck has shown that other twentieth-century White Ladies, such as Lady Nancy Cunard, heir to the Cunard steamship line fortune and patron of the Harlem Renaissance, made the decision to flout racial and sexual taboos. Yet not just racism but also her aristocratic fastidiousness make that impossible for Eka, in whom even bad taste in furniture occasions a physical reaction, and this student dares to call her *Liebchen* and wants to sleep with her after they have made love: “sleep with her, now that was really the last straw [*mit ihr schlafen, das war nun wirklich die Höhe*]” (*TP* 1: 427). As Bidy Martin and Chandra Mohanty put it in a quite different context: “Change has to do with the transgression of boundaries, those boundaries so carefully, so tenaciously, so invisibly drawn around white identity” (203). Unable to transcend the definitions that constitute her, Eka instead constructs a story that allows her to remain who she is and affirm her sexuality, too: “I don’t love this Negro, I love Jung” (*TP* 1: 428). But as the editors of *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* emphasize, the myth of the black rapist is a sexual story that white men tell each other to justify their violence toward black men *and* their control over black and white women (Snitow et al. 328). By opting for that myth, Eka makes the choice to reinsert herself into a racist social order that also subordinates women. After Jung leaves her, even that narrative construction is no longer available to her, and there is no way for her both to remain a White Lady and to affirm her sexuality: she is paralyzed by her absence of choices. So she leaps from the window, destroying the body that has betrayed her, and thenceforth is also really, not just metaphorically, paralyzed—confined for life to a wheelchair. In one of the introductions to *The Book of Franza*, Bachmann called her female figures’ implication in categories of their social order “thinking . . . that leads to dying” (*Franza* 4). Like the other “Ways of Death,” the Eka Kottwitz fragment reveals the self-destructive consequences of women’s compliance with the dictates of the society that has called them into being.

What conception of the formation of female subjectivity underlies the Eka

Kottwitz fragment? While criticizing Fanon's flattening of the complex concepts of sexual difference, desire, and sexuality, Gwen Bergner has argued that one of his major accomplishments in *Black Skin, White Masks* is adding race to the psychoanalytic explanation of the production of subjectivity: "Fanon transposes psychoanalysis—a theory of subject formation based on sexual difference—to a register where it accounts for race as one of the fundamental differences that constitute subjectivity" (76). One might argue that that is also Bachmann's achievement in this text, that that is how she represents "history *within* the I/psyche." Anne McClintock, in pursuit of her project of developing a "*situated psychoanalysis*—a culturally contextualized psychoanalysis that is simultaneously a psychoanalytically informed history" (72), proposes that Julia Kristeva's notion of "abjection" helps to explain the function of racist exclusions in modern industrial societies. Following Freud, Kristeva also maintains that civilization is founded on the repudiation of those elements that society considers impure: "The abject is everything that the subject seeks to expunge in order to become social; it is also a symptom of the failure of this ambition. . . . the expelled abject haunts the subject as its inner constitutive boundary; that which is repudiated forms the self's internal limit. The abject is 'something rejected from which one does not part'" (McClintock 71 citing Kristeva, 9). This conception of abjection might help explain both the disruptive allure for Eka of sex with the Somali student and the urgency of her denial that she is aroused by him; the abject, Kristeva argues, "simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject" (5). If the rejection of blackness and an active female sexuality is the guarantee of the stability of Eka's white female psyche, acknowledging the repressed and threatening otherness they represent could cause the whole racial-sexual edifice to come tumbling down.

Yet though it is quite easy to advance a psychoanalytic explanation for the psychology of Eka and other "Ways of Death" figures, it may also be important to stress the limitations of such a Freudian model. Ann Laura Stoler has pointed out that much postcolonial analysis is based on "the premise that colonial power relations can be accounted for and explained as a sublimated expression of repressed desires in the West, of desires that resurface in moralizing missions, myths of the 'wild woman,' in a romance with the rural 'primitive,' or in other more violent, virile, substitute form" (167–68). It is exactly this "repressive hypothesis," however, that Foucauldian analysis has drawn into question. Though Bachmann clearly understands (female) desire as molded by social forces, much of her work seems also premised on the assumption that "desire is a basic biological drive, restricted and repressed by a 'civilization' that forces our sublimation of it,"

to use Stoler's formulation (171). Foucault would of course argue that desire was not repressed by or opposed to a (racialized) order of civilization but produced by it. The question that might then arise is to what degree notions of a natural and primordial desire which civilization needs to channel and regulate might relate to or even derive from imperial strategies developed to control unruly, oversexed natives (or white women, for that matter— a speculation that the application of the Dark Continent motif to white female sexuality would support). As Stoler puts it: "The nineteenth-century discourse on bourgeois sexuality may better be understood as a recuperation of a protracted discourse on race, for the discourse of sexuality contains many of the latter's most salient elements. That discourse on sexuality was binary and contrastive, in its nineteenth-century variant always pitting that middle-class respectable sexuality as a defense against an internal and external other that was at once essentially different but uncomfortably the same" (193). If there is merit to this argument, it could then be maintained that Bachmann's attempt to grapple with the racialized foundations of female sexuality, by portraying a female figure whose repressed (or abject-ed) desire is loosed by her sexual encounter with a black man, might still remain captive to precisely the discourses of race, gender, and sexuality that her texts want to interrogate.

As well, one might again ask whether in this text Bachmann also contributes in a less complicated way to the perpetuation of racist stereotypes. Though the complex narrative stance of the fragment makes it difficult to determine to what degree Eka's responses determine the representation of the sexual encounter, to what degree a (somewhat) more impartial narrator is speaking, the sexual act seems to be portrayed as violent, brutal, and lacking in reciprocity, the Somali student oblivious to Eka's protests and cries of pain: "she noticed that he didn't notice at all, not because he was a sadist to whom her tears, her despair gave pleasure, but rather because she was no one at all for him, not a person, merely an object" (*TP* 1: 425). The student himself is represented as a Noble Savage possessed of a wholeness unavailable to Europeans: "He was so at one with himself, with his body, with his will, that he simply didn't hear this Eka, this blind woman, any longer." And his sexual potency is nothing short of prodigious: "Then he lay down, after two hours, and said to her, . . . I'm very tired today, please forgive me" (*TP* 1: 426). Finally, the student is not treated as a subject in his own right: except in the very last draft he has no name and, though a student of political science in his fifth semester, is unable to express himself in German: "Eka . . . didn't understand for a moment how somebody could speak German so badly and could study here nonetheless" (*TP* 1: 423).

This text, one might thus argue, is not an account of the complexities and

misunderstandings of cross-cultural encounters but instead uses rather conventional representations of a black figure to talk about the problems of white women. As Leslie Adelson inquired, faced with a not entirely dissimilar treatment of black men in a text by a white German woman writer: “If the story is not about the relationship to blacks as persons, and it is not, then why use them as a symbol?” (52). Though it is always difficult to determine to what degree the perspectives of Bachmann’s figures and her own coincide, it appears that other portraits of black figures in her texts (leaving aside the embarrassing racist gaffe of her 1956 poem “Harlem”: “The black city rolls its white eyes” [*W* 1: 113]) suffer from similar problems. In a passage omitted from the final version of *Malina*, the “I” seeks the sexual services of an otherwise mute black man during a transatlantic crossing: “On the ship to America there was an arrogant young Negro at the bar, looking for work, dismissed from a French band, with a miserable vocabulary, he always came in the night, during the day we greeted each other fleetingly, he acted as if he didn’t know me, I also scarcely looked at him” (*TP* 3.2: 719). “Again and Again: Black and White,” an unpublished poem in the Bachmann archive, recalls the racial fantasies of “Love: The Dark Continent.” The poetic “I” imagines that her skin has absorbed the color of her black lover and fancies “that my young blackness derives from your old / from your age-old native blackness.” “You call me,” the poem concludes, “like the Queen of Zambezi” (“Immer wieder”). Though Bachmann is clearly attempting to mobilize racial images for antiracist purposes, her appropriation of them to address the needs of white women seems to retain white women at the center with the resources of the rest of the world at their disposal—a practice suggesting that Bachmann herself is not altogether exempt from the criticism she directs at her figures. One might thus make the same point about Bachmann that Adelson has made of the portrait of violent black GIs in Anne Duden’s *The Opening of the Mouth*: “As to whether *Opening* explodes a racist premise or reproduces it, I can only answer, yes, it does both” (54).

In “Three Paths to the Lake,” the final story of the collection *Three Paths to the Lake*, Bachmann makes the connection between postcoloniality and Austrian imperialism toward which she gestured in the interview I cited at the beginning of this chapter, assessing the consequences of participation in a colonial/postcolonial paradigm for her white female protagonist and again showing how the imperial white psyche is implicated in the very “ways of death” responsible for its destruction. Toward the beginning of “Three Paths to the Lake,” Elisabeth Matrei, the story’s central figure, stranded in a London hotel without a ticket for a flight back home to Austria, discovers herself to be surrounded by postcolonial

peoples: "Room service consisted of Indians, Filipinos, and Africans, once there had been an old Englishman, and all the guests, too, were from Asia and Africa, she rode in the large elevators in the midst of silent masses, the only white person." Dismayed that "her old London had disappeared, everything she had once enjoyed," Elisabeth complains that the postcolonials do not even speak English properly: "The guests and employees communicated in an English limited to a handful of expressions, and using one more than the allotted number meant not being understood. It wasn't a living language that was spoken, it was a kind of Esperanto . . ." (Edward Said has commented on such discomfited reactions to a postcolonial presence: "The world has changed . . . in ways that have surprised, and often alarmed, metropolitan Europeans and Americans, who now confront large non-white immigrant populations in their midst, and face an impressive roster of newly empowered voices asking for their narratives to be heard" [*Culture* xx].) A well-traveled cosmopolitan, Elisabeth adapts herself to her circumstances: "She quickly forgot her English, using that confounded Esperanto," but she is surprised by her own discomfort in the postcolonial metropole. "She had never felt apprehension in Asia or Africa and had enjoyed being alone and leaving the others when she traveled with a group, being the woman who rode away, but not here. In this place everything was so monotonous, the people were all completely mindless, nothing was right" (*Paths* 130, translation modified).

As the editors of the critical edition point out in their commentary, "The Woman Who Rode Away" is the title of a 1925 short story by D. H. Lawrence (*TP* 4: 630). Notorious at least since 1970, when Kate Millett denounced its sexism in *Sexual Politics* (285–293), Lawrence's story explores the consequences of the decision of a white American woman living in Mexico to leave her European husband and ride away in search of the "secret haunts of [the] timeless, mysterious, marvelous Indians of the mountains" who still maintain "their own savage customs and religion" (347). "She is weary of the white man's God," she tells the Indians she encounters in the mountains. "She would like to serve the gods of the Chilchui" (360). As Lawrence presents them, this group of Indians, latter-day descendants of the Aztecs, believe that whites have stolen the Indians' power over their god, the sun, but as one member of the tribe explains, "When a white woman sacrifices herself to our gods, then our gods will begin to make the world again, and the white man's gods will fall to pieces" (372). Held captive by the Indians for months, the woman scarcely minds, musing that "her kind of womanhood, intensely personal and individual, was to be obliterated again, and the great primeval symbols were to tower once again over the fallen individual independence of woman" (371). The story ends on the day of the winter solstice

as the woman, naked and spread-eagled upon a sacrificial altar in a deep cave, awaits the moment when the last rays of the setting sun enter the cave and the blind old priest plunges his flint knife into her heart.

Why does Elisabeth Matrei turn to the title of D. H. Lawrence's story to characterize her prior experience in the Third World, and what does Bachmann's allusion to Lawrence's text tell us about race, gender, sexuality, and postcoloniality in her work? Here, as elsewhere in her writing (see also chapters 7 and 10), Bachmann employs a reference to another author's text as an ironic device to establish the larger discursive context within which her character functions and thereby to tell her readers something about the character that the character herself does not know (for instance, that Eka Kottwitz, though "no Lady Chatterley," functions within discourses of sexuality similar to Lawrence's). Even though Lawrence's tale of a dissatisfied wife's quest for obliteration might on first examination seem to have little relationship to the self-reflections of Elisabeth, a world-renowned photojournalist, it can in fact be used as a kind of key to unlock several levels of meaning in Bachmann's story. Elisabeth, like Lawrence, moves within a discursive universe premised upon the binary opposition between a universalizing Western modernity and an otherness comprising everything the West is not, and her distress about current events and her "imperialist nostalgia" (Rosaldo 70) for the old Austro-Hungarian empire rest on another version of that binary paradigm, her longing for a long-lost Austrian home contrasted to the postmodern rootlessness of a figure in the story borrowed from Joseph Roth's *Radetzky marsch* (Radetzky march) and *Kapuzinergruft* (Crypt of the Capuchins): Franz Joseph Eugen Trotta. Those fatal binaries are also linked to the causes of Elisabeth's personal and sexual malaise, so dire that she declares, "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" (*Paths* 175)—a quotation that, as the editors of the critical edition tell us, is also borrowed from D.H. Lawrence (*TP* 4: 633).

In *Primitive Passions: Men, Women, and the Quest for Ecstasy*, Marianna Torgovnick identifies "The Woman Who Rode Away" and Lawrence's other late texts set in Mexico and New Mexico as examples of what she terms primitivism. "The West," she argues, "has been engaged, almost continuously, in defining itself against a series of 'primitive' Others in its midst and without. . . . The primitive," she continues, "is the sign and symbol of desires the West has sought to repress—desires for direct correspondence between experience and language, direct correspondence between individual feelings and the collective life force. It is the sign and symbol of desire for a full and sated sense of the uni-

verse" (*Primitive* 8). In an earlier book, *Going Primitive*, Torgovnick connects the primitive to "going home": "The metaphor of finding a home or being at home recurs over and over as a structuring pattern within Western primitivism. . . . Whatever form the primitive's hominess takes, its strangeness salves our estrangement from ourselves and our culture" (*Going* 185). The primitive, Torgovnick concludes, thus becomes the solution to the "transcendental homelessness" that Georg Lukács considered to be the condition of the modern Western mind (*Theory* 41)—no doubt the reason Franza believed that in North Africa she would "come into [her] own."

In a postmodern and postcolonial era, however we now recognize that though the quest for a return to origins, fullness of being, full presence, and "home" may be a founding myth of Western thought—in Novalis's words, "Philosophy is actually homesickness, the urge to be everywhere at home" (135)—it is also only that, a myth. As Iain Chambers puts it, "We can never go home, return to the primal scene, the forgotten moment of our beginnings, and authenticity, for there is always something else in between. We cannot return to a bygone unity, for we can only know the past, memory, the unconscious, through its effects, that is, when it is brought into language" (*Border* 104). Moreover, we now know as well that the belief in such an imaginary unity, whether located in an archaic past or in other primitive peoples and places, is fundamentally an imperialist gesture that disregards the actual heterogeneity of that which is not modern or Western and places all of history and all the rest of the world at our own Western disposal. Or, as Chambers observes: "In absolute difference the rhetoric of alterity locates a pure otherness awaiting our words, like the 'empty' wilderness—from the African *veldt* to the American West—waiting to be settled and domesticated and brought into the redemptive time of our history" ("Signs" 57–58).

Precisely this frame of reference explains Elisabeth Matrei. In many regards she can be regarded as the epitome of modernity. She is emancipated in the most literal sense: she is groomed by famous male photographers for her profession as a photojournalist and insists on assuming the position of men even on the most dangerous Third World assignments: "I can't accept my being spared and not the men. It's not like that anymore with other things, all that changed long ago!" (*Paths* 141). (Alternatively, one might maintain that as a photojournalist Elisabeth, like other "emancipated" female figures in Bachmann's writing—Nadja, a translator, in "Word for Word"; Charlotte, a pianist, in "A Step towards Gomorrah"—is consigned to the female realm of reproduction though paradoxically within the public arena, expected faithfully to reproduce the products, activities, and utterances of the subjects of world history—namely,

men.) At the end of the story she accepts an assignment a male photographer is unable to carry out and is preparing to fly to Saigon to photograph the Vietnam War. (One recalls again Bachmann's statement that in *Malina* she was able to address the Vietnam War "in another way.")

As a photojournalist, Elisabeth is committed to what the editor of *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* has termed "ocularcentrism," "a distinctly modern historical form . . . allied with all the forces of our advanced technologies. The power to make visible is the power to control" (Levin 2-3, 7). (Photographs accompanying the accounts of explorers and anthropologists are one obvious example of how vision and technology have combined to document and control the world's others, as the authors of *Reading National Geographic*, among many others, have pointed out [Lutz/Collins].) Enlightenment is evidently the process of making visible what is obscured, subjecting it to the clear light of reason, and Elisabeth is convinced that photojournalism performs precisely this task, producing an enlightened understanding of world events such as the Algerian War and the Suez Crisis: "People had to be made aware of what was going on there, they needed to see those pictures to 'wake up' to reality" (*Paths* 140-141). Via her success at taking on the power of the male gaze, Elisabeth is able to assume the stance of the universal, disembodied (i.e., male) Enlightenment subject. But as Meyda Yegenoglu emphasizes: "Since the universal is conceived of on the basis of one and access to it is restricted, the only possible way for women to enter into this privileged space and enjoy its benefits is through *imitating the male gesture*. In other words, they are allowed to enjoy the benefits of universality only if they assume a male position. The strange paradox here is that women's acceptance of a share in the universalistic simultaneously implies a denial of their difference. There is then no affirmative entry to the universal for women as women" (105). That is to say, Elisabeth's very assumption of universal subject status means precisely that she will be unable to attend to or even articulate her own female concerns: "She never said a word about the things that really upset her, because they weren't fit to be put in any words at all" (*Paths* 172)—a point I explore in greater detail below.

This analysis can help us, I think, to explain Elisabeth's discomfort in the new postcolonial London. Despite—or perhaps even because of—her avowed support for Third World liberation struggles, Elisabeth occupies a position paradigmatically that of the liberal Western subject who regards the model of progress and development advocated by the West as world-historical—a view that, as Leela Gandhi puts it, regards "'history' as the grand narrative through which Eurocentrism is totalised as the proper account of all humanity" (171).

Within the liberal version of this narrative, the West's others either become (like) Europeans or remain in their proper place. "Propelling itself forward in pursuit of linear redemption," Chambers maintains, "ever newer, ever brighter, ever better, and constantly forgetting itself in order to overcome itself, Western modernity underwrites an alterity located elsewhere in backwardness, in a black cloth of darkness, to both underline and justify its movement" ("Signs" 57). To be sure, that backward, primitive alterity can readily also become conceptualized as object of desire, as Torgovnick emphasizes. But what this Western subject cannot tolerate are others who refuse the site of alterity allocated to them. Rey Chow, for instance, argues that a neo-orientalist anxiety reveals itself in the desire—very like that of "the woman who rode away"—to retrieve and preserve the pure, authentic native. Chow continues, however, that under the conditions of globalization, like those Elisabeth encounters in London, the native is no longer available as "pure, unadulterated object" but is, rather, "contaminated by the West, dangerously un-Otherable" (Gandhi 127 citing Chow 12). In effect, the Empire talks or writes back, as the title of a famous anthology would have it (Ashcroft et al).

Chambers summarizes precisely the situation Elisabeth encounters in London: "So, a linguistic and literary context such as 'English,' which has historically stood in Britain, or at least in metropolitan London, for a specific cultural, historical, and national identity, comes to be re-written, re-routed, and re-sited. Inhabiting English, other stories, memories, and identities cause metropolitan authority to stumble. For they talk back to it, take the language elsewhere, and then return with it to interrupt the nation-narration at its very 'centre.'" ("Signs" 49). As Chambers details, the disruptions to the dominant paradigm of Western modernity occasioned by the emergence of the postcolonial subject are profound:

The proprietary rights of language, history and truth are no longer able to hide in the metaphysical mimicry of universal knowledge or national identity. Such accounts are now exposed through a radical historicity as partial and partisan. Such journeys among the uneven and unexplained effects of these "contact zones" that have now expanded to compose much of metropolitan culture throughout the world, challenge the myth of modernism as a homogeneous movement and moment, restricted to a centralised economic power and a particular geopolitical population and place. The predator of progress, establishing the ratio of the West, today encounters transmutation and travesty in the very languages it assumed were its own. ("Signs" 50, 57).

Indeed, the woman who rode away has reason to be concerned—the universalistic system of values that had founded her belief in the legitimacy and value of her actions is entirely drawn into question by the condition of postcoloniality.

Elisabeth's is not, however, the only relationship to the new postcolonial culture represented in "Three Paths to the Lake." One of the great loves of Elisabeth's life, Franz Joseph Trotta, is also her philosophical and political antagonist in Bachmann's story, and the challenge he poses to her positions makes it possible to bring this critique of Elisabeth back home to a postimperial Austria. The "home" in the small Austrian city to which Elisabeth returns on a visit to her father stands for the same sort of solace, familiarity, and *Geborgenheit* (security) that Torgovnick ascertained to be the fundamental structure of the Western desire for the primitive, and the lake that she can reach via none of the three hiking paths, since the new autobahn built for German tourists has cut off access to it, is a metonymic representation of the oceanic dissolution that Westerners hope the primitive will allow them to achieve. In contrast to the Esperanto of London, Elisabeth is soothed by the "familiar tones" (*Paths* 131; translation modified) of Austria and "that old civil-servant German" of her father, "always appropriate to himself, his idiom and his mood": that is, his speech manifests a "direct correspondence between experience and language" (*Paths* 177). Elisabeth perceives the roots of the Austria she loves in the old Austro-Hungarian empire, "this gigantic, pointless empire which was more loved than hated" (*Paths* 170, translation modified); like her father she believes that Austria was most profoundly transformed not by National Socialism but by the dissolution of the empire, "that the year 1938 had not been a turning point: the split had occurred much earlier and everything that followed had been a consequence of this older split, and that his world—which he had hardly experienced after all—was destroyed for good in 1914" (*Paths* 179). From the perspective of the present Elisabeth conceives her brother and herself to be condemned to estrangement because the empire is gone: "But what made them strangers wherever they went was their sensitivity, because they came from the periphery and thus their thoughts, feelings and actions were hopelessly bound to this ghostly empire of gigantic dimensions. The right passports didn't exist for them, for it was a country which didn't issue passports" (*Paths* 122–23).

From a postcolonial perspective it is possible to recognize this apparently benign nostalgia as in fact a desire for the restoration of the good old days of empire (and, connected to empire, perhaps, as Ellen Friedman has suggested, a longing for vanished master-narratives altogether, a "yearning for fathers, for

past authority and sure knowledge that can no longer be supported” [240].) It is the Rothian Trotta—originally a Slovenian, now a French citizen—who both embodies the postimperial condition and reveals what is most problematic about Elisabeth’s stance. For the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire has had an effect on Trotta like that of postcoloniality, as Claudio Magris comments more generally of Joseph Roth’s figures in his classic study *Der habsburgische Mythos in der österreichischen Literatur* (the Habsburg myth in Austrian literature): “With the collapse of the empire all values, all guaranties for a strong secure life and the precious pleasure of everyday life seem to disappear. The Austrian-Hungarian decline seems to mean the irretrievable end of all healthy, firmly established possibilities of life” (257–58). Trotta acknowledges his position as “a real exile, one of the lost ones” (*Paths* 139); rather than longing for the purity of an originary mother tongue, he speaks all languages of his exile equally well; unconvinced that humanity is infinitely improvable, Trotta ridicules Elisabeth’s “fresh, strong faith” that her photographs will make people “see reason” (*Paths* 143); arguing that it is shameful to photograph human suffering for the amusement of newspaper readers, Trotta forces Elisabeth to recognize that her profession is implicated in the injustices she believes she is combatting. Most important, as a member of a subordinate group in rebellion against the old empire rather than of its ruling elite—that is, one of the empire’s others—Trotta disrupts Elisabeth’s affection for an innocent Austria upon which Germany preyed. Intimating that Austrians’ behavior after 1938 may be rooted in their imperial past, Trotta observes that, though the German soldiers in Hitler’s army were only following orders, Austrian soldiers were genuinely deprived: “The enjoyment they got out of every kind of brutality imaginable was written clearly all over their ugly faces” (*Paths* 151). Whereas Elisabeth, like other Western subjects, longs and strives in many ways to return to an originary home, Trotta represents the position of Joseph Roth, who affirmed the diaspora, who asserted, “A human being is not a tree,” and who argued, “Wandering is not a curse but a blessing” (Gerhard 12 citing Roth, “Segen” 532).

In this context, Elisabeth’s later relationship to a much younger lover, twenty-eight-year-old Philippe, a veteran of the Paris events of May 1968, reinforces Trotta’s lessons. If 1968 can be regarded as a last great effort on the part of Westerners themselves to combine a struggle against Western imperialism with a struggle for their own subjective self-realization, its failure might also be regarded as marking the end point of that Western quest for universal justice

and happiness. By the time of this story (probably summer 1971), Philippe's outbursts of rage are no longer directed at "the regime, capitalism and imperialism, but at his comrades who had disintegrated into splinter groups and were battling against each other" (*Paths* 207), and his decision at the story's end to leave Elisabeth and marry the pregnant, drug-addicted daughter of a rich mobster signals his—and others'—betrayal of the aims of 1968. "But where had the May gone?" wonders Elisabeth (*Paths* 212). Nor does the historical course of events in the non-European world prove Elisabeth right and Trotta wrong: Algeria after liberation also fails to become a shining exemplar of human progress toward universal emancipation. Dismayed at "what was threatening to become of that freedom," Elisabeth suppresses her private doubts, maintains her public commitment to struggles of national liberation, and reports "all sorts of positive things with cautious reservations," nonetheless aware that her article represents "her first conscious defection to the land of lies" (*Paths* 144–145).

Over the course of subsequent decades, the example of Trotta's postimperial displacement erodes Elisabeth's confidence in the values on which her activities had been premised and compels her to acknowledge the contradictions of her own location. Once she relinquishes her belief that she is contributing to a project of universal human liberation, she is finally forced into a kind of ontological exile like Trotta's own: "He had left an impression on her . . . because he made her conscious of so many things, because of his origins and because he—a real exile, one of the lost ones—had made her—an adventuress who expected God knows what from the world during her lifetime—had made an exile of her: Long after his death he slowly pulled her down with him to ruin, alienating her from the miracles and allowing her to recognize this alienation as her destiny" (*Paths* 139). In conjunction with the Lawrence citation, Trotta's response to Elisabeth suggests a reading of this story that would locate Elisabeth, much in contrast to what she believes her intentions to be, within a discursive paradigm that permits only one monolinear history, the history of the victors, and leaves no discursive space, no language even, for the conquered and colonized to tell their different story.

Finally, Elisabeth's conception of herself as "the woman who rode away" has multiple consequences for the construction of her own femininity. In many ways "Three Paths to the Lake" is a refiguring of the constellation of characters in *Malina*, though Elisabeth combines in one person the cool, rational, masculine Malina and the distraught unnamed female "I" who can find no language to tell her own story. As I have already suggested, the universalistic, disembodied sub-

ject position Elisabeth assumes brings her fame and even some fortune but no happiness at all. At many points in her life she merely moves through the paces of her female role without any interior engagement: as a young woman “she had gone to bed unemotionally, only, as she had believed, to do a man a favor” (*Paths* 138); after age forty, “her increasing success with men was directly related to her increasing indifference to them” (*Paths* 174). In effect, like the “I” of *Malina*, she is “really” a woman only when she is “really,” passionately, in love, and then she performs femininity according to a script men have passed down (the performer in her father’s play, as in *Malina*), loving only men (themselves tellingly from the old empire) who treat her badly and abandon her inexplicably, leaving her sobbing alone by the telephone. But “Three Paths to the Lake” is *Malina* with a difference: whereas the “I” of *Malina* acts almost exclusively within the private realm, here Elisabeth shows that the gender paradigm to which she conforms—disembodied universal subject versus woman as man’s object—is also inadequate to deal with a postmodern and postcolonial public realm except from the perspective of the dominant order: that is, one diametrically opposed to what Elisabeth believes to be her own quest for justice. One might then inquire whether the quotation she borrows from Lawrence to characterize gender relations and her hopes for their future rectification may be likewise intended to critique her standpoint as a *woman* as profoundly as the allusion to “The Woman Who Rode Away” indicts her as a neocolonialist. Elisabeth muses of romantic heterosexual love, “Perhaps one day something else might come along but only then, and it would be strong and mysterious and have real greatness, something to which each could once again submit” (*Paths* 175). Here sexuality is postulated to be the alternative to her public, masculinist role—but perhaps here, too, she is subjecting herself to a mystical concept of love in the same way that the woman who rode away subjects herself to the flint knife in the icy cave; perhaps here she is once more trapped in fatal binaries that will destroy her as surely as the Good God of Manhattan blew Jennifer to bits and Eka Kottwitz is imprisoned in her wheelchair.

In a somewhat related context, as she interviews prestigious gynecologists to formulate the text for a photo-reportage on abortion and is appalled that the doctors understand nothing at all about what really concerns their women patients “with their problems and their men and their inability to say one single true word about their lives,” Elisabeth rages: “Why doesn’t someone ask me for a change, why not ask someone who thinks independently and dares to live, what have you done to me and so many others, you with your insane empathy

with every kind of problem, hasn't it ever occurred to anyone that you kill people when you deprive them of the power of speech and with it the power to experience and think" (*Paths* 173). Not simply from the perspective of postcoloniality but also from the perspective of gender relations, Elisabeth's conception of herself as the woman who rode away suggests that she has accommodated herself to, or is the discursive product of, conceptions about gender relations that are virtually assured not to meet her needs as a person *or* as a woman.

And this, finally, may explain Bachmann's own peculiar comment about women's emancipation in a 1971 interview (that is, shortly before she published *Three Paths to the Lake*): "Perhaps that's quite remarkable for you that precisely a woman who always earned her own money, who paid for her own university study, always lived alone, that she says that she doesn't care at all about women's emancipation. I've always found the pseudomodern woman with her tortured efficiency and energy completely strange and incomprehensible" (*Gul* 109). At the end of the same interview Bachmann remarks that, as she wrote *Malina*, she had the feeling "that I'm writing against something. Against a persistent terrorism. After all, people don't really die from illnesses. They die from what's been done to them" (*Gul* 110). It may be that Elisabeth, precisely such an emancipated, pseudomodern woman, is also a victim of the system that has made her a professional success, and, as Bachmann's use of literary allusions in this story may demonstrate, that she is also incapable of saying a single true word about her life. In "Three Paths to the Lake," Elisabeth's reflections may record not just the bloody struggles that accompany movements for national liberation and decolonization but also, and unknown to her, the story of her "way of death."

Yet again it's necessary to ask how the bleakness of "Three Paths to the Lake" might be related to Bachmann's own inability to extricate herself from the system she wished to criticize. On the one hand, there is certainly nothing wrong with considering the problems of white women and men, even in a postcolonial era (though one might argue, as some critics have maintained of postmodern and even postcolonial theory, that this is a way to retain white people at the center of consideration after real historical developments have displaced them). On the other hand, Bachmann sees the problems of the era entirely from a white perspective—doubtless her point if she wished to show how history inscribes the white psyche. But the chaos and disorder Bachmann believes she perceives in the postcolonial world doubtless look rather different from the perspective of newly liberated peoples. In fact, as Homi Bhabha has pointed out, the sense of alienation Bachmann's characters feel when encountering new hybrid cultural forms is precisely a consequence of the subversive political intervention that such new

cultural productions undertake, reversing “the effects of the colonial disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority” (156). Similarly, at least for non-Western peoples, the status of exile might also be considered one of gain as well as loss, a position from which contemporary intellectual and political leadership could best be undertaken, as Said has underlined: “it is no exaggeration to say that liberation as an intellectual mission, born in the resistance and opposition to the confinements and ravages of imperialism, has now shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, decentered, and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation today is the migrant, and whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages” (*Culture* 332). What one might thus conclude about these texts is that they display the White Lady who, though oppressed by gender, has enjoyed the racial privilege of the center stage of world history and now only most reluctantly and regretfully moves—or is pushed—aside.

The 1966 essay by Christa Wolf that I have so often cited might, despite the very different historical context in which it was written, explain why Bachmann was not always able to overcome the limitations of her own white European standpoint. “She has never been in a position,” writes Wolf, “to search for affiliation with a progressive historical movement. She tends rather—or at any rate lets some of her characters tend—to step out of society, to track down, in despairing isolation, the conditions which her society dictates to the individual, to seek out the price that naked existence demands and that is paid a million times over.” The solution to the problems Bachmann addresses cannot, Wolf argues, be solved by an author or texts alone but depends instead on “changes in society that would give his profession a new foundation and himself a new responsibility” (*Reader* 94). A decade and a half later, as the emergence of postcolonial peoples and their writing increasingly compelled Westerners to ponder their own complicity in imperialist postures and practices, Wolf asked in her third *Cassandra* lecture: “The literature of the West (I read) is the white man’s reflection on himself. So should it be supplemented by the white woman’s reflection on herself? And nothing more?” (*Cassandra* 225) Virtually alone among post-war German-language writers—as Wolf noted in the *Cassandra* lectures—Bachmann moved in the direction of the “something more” that Wolf was seeking, reflecting on the White Lady *in order to* raise questions about the racialization of the white psyche. Precisely her own implication in the conditions she described permitted her to extrapolate from Austria’s imperial past to examine the dissolu-

tion of other empires, and the persistence of imperial attitudes, in the present. By probing the racialized foundations of white female identity, exploring discontents of the white female psyche that are also her own, Bachmann is thus able to show why merely appropriating the racial prerogatives of the white man will not suffice to meet the needs of the White Lady.