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## **Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters: Feminism, History, and Ingeborg Bachmann**

Item Type	article;article
Authors	Lennox, Sara
Publisher	University of Massachusetts Press
Download date	2025-02-17 08:07:07
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/50214">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/50214</a>

PART II

*A History of Reading*  
*Bachmann*

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## 1981

“Around 1981,” Jane Gallop observes in her book of the same title, “a good number of feminist literary academics in this country were focused on the ‘difference between French and American feminism,’ on the question of psychoanalysis or deconstruction and their usefulness or danger. ‘We’ were not only American feminists like me who thought French psychoanalytic, deconstructive theory a great thing but also those who expended a good deal of energy attacking it. Around 1981, this conflict, this debate seemed central, and to many more academics than me, to feminist literary studies” (3). Now, gazing back from the perspective of the early twenty-first century on the battles that then rent U.S. academic feminism, the distinctions between these two methods of feminist cultural analysis seem much smaller, and the course that American (academic) feminism has taken since its emergence in the late 1960s might even be understood as leading toward the convergence of the two approaches. In its earliest phases of both activism and analysis, the U.S. women’s movement primarily agitated against men’s sexist treatment of and discrimination against women. Socialist feminists (indebted to a Marxist, class-based paradigm) and radical feminists (who saw men’s oppression of women as primary) sought a revolutionary social transformation, whereas liberal feminists wanted equality in a society otherwise unchanged, but all agreed that women possessed the same capabilities as men and deserved the same opportunities.

The earliest feminist literary scholarship focused, like Kate Millett in her groundbreaking *Sexual Politics* (1970), on male (and sometimes even female) authors’ stereotypical images of women. Susan Koppelman Cornillon, for instance, declared in the preface to her anthology *Images of Women in Fiction* (1972) that her book addressed all of women’s social roles, “beginning with the most desiccated and lifeless traditional stereotypes of woman as heroine and as invisible person, progressing through an awakening to reality, wherein the woman is treated as person, and ending with the newest insistence by women that we are equal in all respects to men”(x). But by the mid-1970s (perhaps under the influence of the new groups of women without experience in the social movements of the 1960s who now declared their allegiance to feminism), many academic and nonacademic feminists had arrived at a much-altered understanding of women’s situation and the tasks that would be necessary to ameliorate it. As the influence of socialist feminism waned with the decline of the New Left, a new kind of radical feminist assumed leadership of the movement. Radi-

cal feminists now took the position that women were not only different from men but perhaps even superior to them, so that existing gender differences (which, some argued, included qualities that might be considered fundamentally female) should be preserved and elaborated, not elided or obscured. Some feminists attempted to determine qualities that could be identified as particularly, perhaps essentially female—attachment to life, peacefulness, capacity to form connections and embrace interdependency, cooperation, tolerance of ambiguity. Feminists of the later 1970s sought to discover in the past and elaborate in the present an already existent female counterculture. Culture thus became the appropriate realm for political activity, and the proper political practice for feminists increasingly came to be seen not as challenging male dominance in the public arena—a domain somewhat contemptuously relegated to liberal feminists—but as constructing autonomous or even separatist feminist institutions. No politically correct woman, radical feminists argued, would wish to enter into any sort of relationship with men, let alone assume an “equal” position in institutions dominated by them.

“Cultural feminism,” as this feminist tendency came to be called in the late 1970s, loosed an enormous energy and creativity: the past accomplishments of women were rediscovered and celebrated and a wide array of new feminist institutions brought into being: battered women’s shelters, rape crisis lines, women’s centers, bookstores, restaurants, journals, publishing houses, record companies, rock groups, and even “the other MLA,” as feminists in the seventies referred to a whole range of feminist counterevents within the official convention. Though early U.S. feminists had regarded psychoanalysis as a field dominated by sexist male analysts endeavoring to reconcile women to their traditional feminine duties, by the late 1970s, under the influence of scholarly studies such as Juliet Mitchell’s *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974), Dorothy Dinnerstein’s *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (1977), and Nancy Chodorow’s *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), cultural (and other) feminists used psychoanalysis to provide an explanation for why and how girls relinquished their first love objects, their mothers, and learned to assume their proper position within a patriarchal order. In her influential *Signs* article “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1980), Adrienne Rich maintains that women choose male sexual partners and otherwise “collaborate” with men only as a consequence of male violence and situates all woman-identified experience on what she terms a “lesbian continuum.” The paradigmatic work of cultural feminism in the late 1970s was Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology* (1978). Daly details the crimes of male culture (ruled by a single necrophilic principle which sometimes seems to derive from male anatomy), catalogues the multitude of ways in which all women can be perceived to be victims of all men, and, in a brilliant series of wordplays, attempts to recover original feminist meanings in a language debased by men. For Daly,

the task of feminists is to repudiate, by an act of will, their identification with male culture, separate themselves from patriarchy, and join in a voyage toward a community of free lesbian women—Spinsters, Hags, and Cronos.

Under the influence of cultural feminism, the question that dominated the work of literary scholars up to the early 1980s had been posed by Silvia Bovenschen: “Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?” As Elaine Showalter observed, the appropriate activity of feminist literary scholars was “gynocritics,” defined as “the study of women as writers, and its subjects are the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition” (“Feminist” 248). From the late 1970s to the present the vast majority of feminist literary analyses have focused on writing by women. Within the various national literatures feminists attempted to retrieve lost and neglected women writers, to establish the canonical literary figures of feminism, to uncover a female countertradition, to identify the literary qualities that distinguish women’s writing from men’s. At issue was not merely feminist content but also form, for if the shape, the morphology of every aspect of female experience was different from men’s, then that difference would inevitably also express itself in the aesthetic forms necessary to contain it. Or, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar emphasize in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), if women writers are constrained to use men’s methods and follow their rules, at the very least they succeed in embedding their own subversive message like a palimpsest in their texts, and those cryptic communications can be retrieved by a later generation of feminist scholars who have learned to read against the grain texts endeavoring to accommodate themselves to patriarchal norms.

Such feminist accomplishments in many areas of cultural analysis prepared the ground on which “French feminist” theory would flourish (battles between proponents of “French” and “American” feminism notwithstanding), and at least in the version in which U.S. feminist academics received French feminism, the two tendencies seemed to display many similarities. The French thinkers (of whom Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva were the most frequently cited) seemed to propose that some qualities were shared by all women, that those qualities had been suppressed by men (or a male-dominated system of signification), and that access to them could be achieved by attending to the specificity of the female body, the female unconscious, and female language. Whether in Kristeva’s appeal to a presymbolic, “semiotic” realm of poetic languages deriving from the child’s connection to the mother’s body, Cixous’s demand that we write in mother’s milk, or Irigaray’s two lips speaking their *jouissance* or orgasmic pleasure, the maternal body and female eroticism were central to the release of that which a phallogocentric symbolic order had

prevented from expressing itself. Culture was hence the most important realm within which to challenge patriarchy, since it had been systems of signification (often delimited by the adjective “Western,” though adherents of this paradigm never investigated whether “non-Western” structures of representation might function differently) that were responsible for the systematic repression of femininity and hence must be challenged by finding some alternative voice in which women might nonetheless speak. By thus breaking the silence and claiming their right to a female subjectivity the possibility of whose existence Western discourse denies, women draw into question the premises on which Western symbolic systems rest and, as a revolutionary act, explode the entire phallogocentric order. As in the analyses of the groups around the French journal *Tel quel*, the French feminist approach placed special emphasis upon the revolutionary potential of avantgarde literary texts, termed by the French feminists *écriture féminine* or sometimes *parler femme*. Via their appropriation of French theory, feminist literary scholars in the United States were able to arrive by a different route at the same conclusions (very flattering to their own discipline) to which United States feminist theory had led them: that literary texts by women and the feminist analysis of them constituted one of the most (if not the most) crucial sites of feminist intervention.

From the perspective of the early twenty-first century (and within the framework of this book), it may seem startling that I have been able to produce such a historical narrative of academic feminism without any reference to historical events that may have helped to shape it. It is also hard to understand how feminists of that era could have advanced analyses so breathtakingly unaware of women’s historical situation and the various historically specific forces that interacted to produce it. Such obliviousness to history and culture, however, was itself characteristic of many feminists’ self-understanding in this period, who were fond of quoting the assertion by Virginia Woolf in *Three Guineas*: “As a woman, I have no country.” In retrospect, feminists’ freedom to disregard the larger historical context seems itself historically occasioned, enabled by the moderate liberalism of the 1970s which allowed feminists still to imagine that they could preserve or establish women’s spaces exterior to male power. And though cultural feminism was founded on assumptions that now seem demonstrably incorrect, for a time those premises were enormously productive for a particular group of white, middle-class women (arguably still the hegemonic group within academic feminism). The women’s movement has probably never again recovered the vitality it manifested in the 1970s. Those premises were to be challenged “around 1981,” though feminist literary scholars had perhaps not yet seen the writing on the wall.

In February 1981, Tom Hayden, writing in the *Nation*, declared: “What the conservatives called ‘bleeding heart liberalism’ finally hemorrhaged and died in

1980" (193). In "The Wraps Are Off," the first editorial of the *Nation's* first issue in 1981, its editors drew the consequence:

Let there be no illusions about the nature of the new Government of the United States, composed of Reagan et al. (and especially Al Haig), and the 97th Congress. Forget the Honeymoon. Dismiss the notion that the Presidency enobles. Prepare for the very worst. . . .

On the evidence of the Cabinet choices and the radical policy formulations of the "transition," there seems little doubt about where Reaganism is heading. We had better start preparing to resist. The interlude of spurious hope is over. (3-4)

The hopes of the women's movement had been curtailed as well. In the context of a *Nation* series in November–December 1981 on the future of the women's movement, Frances Lear asserted tersely: "Feminism has had a generous share of heroes, but the 1980 elections proved that it does not have clout" (635). In the same series, Ellen Willis began her article by taking account of the changed circumstances: "The momentum of the movement has drastically slowed, and if it is to survive, let alone progress, it must regroup and begin a new offensive" (494).

Willis took particular aim at cultural feminism because of its damaging impact on the women's movement more generally:

While cultural feminism has always been one tendency in the women's movement, in recent years it has become increasingly prominent and more aggressive in attempting to establish itself as the feminist orthodoxy. It has been a drag on the movement in two ways. First, it provides no intellectual basis for a concrete antisexist politics. If anything, it does the opposite, channeling female energy into counter-cultural projects, fantasies of restoring an alleged golden age of matriarchy, or moral crusades against male vice. It also reinforces oppressive cultural stereotypes, especially the assumption that men have a monopoly on aggression and active genital sexuality (cultural feminists often equate the two), while women are nonviolent, nurturing and more interested in affection than in sex. (495)

She and the other contributors to the *Nation* series called upon feminists to break out of their isolation and to reaffirm their allegiance to oppositional politics. Indeed, over the course of the 1980s, a new attention to women's historical situatedness would come to shape feminist activism, theory, and analysis. As I hope Part 2 of this book will show, over the decade the new feminist orientation would "trickle down" (a favored image of those years) to feminist literary scholarship as well.



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### CHAPTER 3

## *In the Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters*

MALINA

*Look, she said, but the pharaoh  
forgot that though he had eradicated  
her, she was still there. It can still be  
read, because nothing is there where  
in fact something should be.*

—Ingeborg Bachmann, *The Book of Franza*

Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina* is about the absence of a female voice; in some respects it reads like an illustration of the feminist theory which has evolved since its publication to explain why, within Western discourse, women are permitted no voice and subjectivity of their own. It may be that feminism is the collective struggle of women to constitute that voice, but that battle has barely begun. In what voice, then, does a female scholar write about the absence of a female voice? I have realized that my struggle with *Malina*, Bachmann's struggle to write it, and the struggle she describes in it are all part of the larger war in which we women (against our will and often without our conscious knowledge) are combatants—and which may have killed Bachmann. "Our bodies, falling, will dam that great river of sexism," Tillie Olsen said in 1979 at the MLA, "and over us others will pass." Feminist literary scholars still speak mostly with that sovereign (male) voice which explains the literary text to less astute readers. (What other choice do we have, particularly given our precarious position at the edge of academics? We have to play by their rules.) But *Malina* shows what women lose when they try to accommodate themselves to the categories of male subjectivity. Though Bachmann is without solutions herself, we feminists can read her novel as part of our struggle to challenge those categories within which we have no right to speak as women and to construct some other, more authentic, female voice.

Bachmann explained in a 1972 interview that her novel *Malina*, published the previous year, had provided solutions to problems of composition with which she

had struggled for years. With *Malina* as opening or overture, she could proceed with her work in progress, a mammoth novel cycle titled “Ways of Death”: “I wrote almost a thousand pages before this book, and these last 400 pages from the very last years became the beginning that I had always lacked. I didn’t find the entrance to that book—and for me this has now become the book which makes my access to the Ways of Death possible” (*Gul* 96). How, the interviewer asks, did she happen upon the double figure of Malina and the “I” of the novel?

For me it’s one of the oldest, if almost inaccessible memories: that I always knew I had to write this book—very early already, while I was still writing poems. That I constantly searched for the main character. That I knew: it would be male. That I could only narrate from the standpoint of a male character. But I often asked myself: Why? I didn’t understand, in the stories either, why I so often had to use a male “I.” It was like finding my character to be able not to deny this female “I” and nonetheless to emphasize the male “I.” (*Gul* 99–100)

Of all the authors mentioned in *Malina*, not a single one is a woman: for Bachmann, there is no female narrative voice. At the end of the novel, the female “I” disappears into a crack in the wall, and only Malina is left. “It was murder,” reads the novel’s last line (*Malina* 239). “Malina will be able to tell us,” Bachmann explains, “what the other part of his character, the ‘I,’ left behind for him” (*Gul* 96). These are the “ways of death,” told in Malina’s male voice, experienced by the female “I” and the cause of her destruction.

The novel *Malina* itself has been badly received and ill-understood since its publication in 1971. Most recently [1980], Marcel Reich-Ranicki called it Bachmann’s “late, incidentally weak and confused novel” (“Tageslicht” 387); in the latest installment of the *Kritisches Lexikon zur Gegenwartsliteratur* (Critical lexicon of contemporary literature) Bernd Witte gives probably the most accurate assessment of it yet, but in his limited space he must ignore most of the work’s difficulty. But *Malina* is a difficult work, and its relative inaccessibility is tied very closely to its subject matter. Before her death, Bachmann published another volume of prose, the short story collection *Three Paths to the Lake*, which seems to be part of the “Ways of Death” cycle, since its characters appear also in both *Malina* and the cycle’s unfinished novels. In 1978, four volumes of Bachmann’s collected works appeared, including the mostly completed novel *The Book of Franza*, the novel fragment *Requiem for Fanny Goldmann*, and some longer fragments whose position in the larger cycle is not clear. The *Werke* also contain Bachmann’s essays from the 1950s and 1960s. From these various writings it is possible to conclude a great deal about her purposes for the “Ways of Death” in general and *Malina* in

particular, why these were subjects that concerned Bachmann from the time she began writing, and why, most specifically, the struggle to find a narrative voice to tell the “Ways of Death” realized itself in a text that took the shape of *Malina*.

Trained as a philosopher at the University of Vienna by Viktor Kraft, one of the last of the grand old men of logical positivism (*GuI* 82), Bachmann explored her concern with the possibilities of language from her student days onward. From the beginning, however, her examination of language was an idiosyncratic one, more akin to the concerns of present-day poststructuralism than to mainstream logical positivism, as her two 1950s essay on Ludwig Wittgenstein show. For what interests Bachmann most about Wittgenstein is not his analysis of what language *can* say, but what it can't: “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.” For Wittgenstein, a mystical appropriation of the world is also possible which does not participate in the limitations of language: “There is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical” (*Tractatus* 149, 187). What Bachmann finds in Wittgenstein is the possibility of a response to the world which transcends the categories of occidental reason, as she quite explicitly indicates in a radio essay:

FIRST SPEAKER: Does Wittgenstein not in fact come to the same conclusion as Pascal? Let's hear what the author of the *Pensées* said three hundred years before him: “The last step of reason is the recognition that there is an infinitude of things that surpass it.”

SECOND SPEAKER: Wittgenstein took this last step of reason. He who says like Wittgenstein: “God does not reveal himself in the world” says also implicitly “Veru tu es deus absconditus.” For about what should one keep silent if not about that beyond limits—about the hidden god, about the ethical and aesthetic as mystical experiences of the heart which take place in the unsayable. (*W* 3: 120)

Moreover, Bachmann pursues this line of thought in Wittgenstein's work into his later *Philosophical Investigations*, where she identifies his project as an attempt to abolish the language of philosophy, understood as a system of abstract categories, and substitute for it some other way of speaking which is closer to the texture of daily life: “It is Wittgenstein's conviction that philosophy has to be brought to rest by us so that it is no longer tormented by questions which place *it itself* in question, and he believed that we can silence the problems if our language functions well and sensibly, if it lives and breathes in use. Only where language, which is a form of life, is taken out of use, where it runs dry—and that happens, in his opinion, when it is used philosophically, in the usual sense—do problems come about. These problems are not to be solved but rather to be got-

ten rid of" (*W* 4: 124). Using metaphors which will emerge again in the "Ways of Death," Bachmann argues that Wittgenstein's philosophy will undertake a healing of the sickness that philosophical problems now represent: "And since language is a labyrinth of ways—as he terms it at another point—philosophy must take up the struggle against the bewitching of our understanding through language. Philosophy must destroy castles in the air and reveal the basis of language, it must be like a therapy, for philosophical problems are sicknesses which have to be healed. It's not a solution but a cure that he calls for" (*W* 4: 124). The implications of what Bachmann hints at here are far-reaching: she points towards fundamental and inherent defects of our present language (which is to say, of the entire mode of thought that we know), which her choice of metaphor allies with the human body or psyche ("therapy," "sickness") and which can be overcome only through some transformation in the present condition of language/philosophy—that is, of present human categories of thought.

But Bachmann's essays also identify ways of speaking already outside the categories of Western reason. Particularly interesting is her essay on Georg Groddeck, to whom her short story "Eyes to Wonder" in *Three Paths to the Lake* is dedicated. Groddeck, a psychoanalyst slightly older than Freud and loosely allied with him, originated the term "It" ("Es" in German, "Id" in English translations of Freud), which represented for him the speech of the body. For Groddeck, Bachmann explains, a physical symptom "is a production, like an artistic one, and sickness means something. It wants to say something, it says it by its particular way of appearing, running its course, and disappearing or ending fatally. It says what the sick person doesn't understand, although it's his most particular expression." Passionately, Bachmann speaks of Groddeck's recognition of the power of the It over the relatively powerless ego: "The *It* is a word he uses for lack of better, it's not a thing in itself but is supposed to mean something's there, it's there and stronger and much stronger than the ego, for the ego can't even intentionally intervene in breathing, in digestion, in blood circulation, the ego is a mask, a pretension with which all of us go about—and we are ruled by the *It*, the *It* does that, and it speaks through sickness in symbols" (*W* 4: 352). Important here are Bachmann's insistence that human desire cannot be contained, though its needs refuse the categories which the ego has accepted, and her allying of the speech (the attempt to signify) of Groddeck's It to artistic productions, where that which the ego had not wanted to say or known it was saying can break through into signifying material and speak itself behind the back, against the will, of the signifying subject.

Finally, a variety of Bachmann's essays from this earlier period as well as

several short stories and her radio play “The Good God of Manhattan” address head on the role of Eros as source both of resistance to this social order and of the possible articulation of some alternative to it. The subversive power of Eros is also associated with the mysticism on which she had touched in the Wittgenstein essay, a mode of articulation beyond the borders of language. The influence of Critical Theory is apparent here, not simply Herbert Marcuse but also Ernst Bloch: love is a concrete utopia that points toward some future social order less hostile to human happiness. To understand the relevance of these utopian love affairs for the “Ways of Death,” however, it is also necessary to recognize that they are antisocial, contravening fundamental social taboos, and that this dimension of the revolt of desire is exactly what constitutes their utopianism.

Bachmann’s radio essay on Marcel Proust, whom she terms a “positivist and mystic” (*W* 4: 180), concentrates mainly on the theme of homosexuality in his work: “The latent revolt of the individual against society, nature against morality, led him to the conception of the ‘homme traqué,’ the hounded, surrounded human being of whom the invert is only an especially clear example” (*W* 4: 160). As Bachmann explains it, the love of Musil’s Ulrich for his sister Agathe more clearly still elaborates a utopian alternative with explicit social relevance. This love is an alternative, ecstatic, quasi-mystical condition of mind which, though not itself applicable to a changed social order, fulfills its function in negating and disrupting the present dominant order: “It’s true that the ‘other condition’ leads from society into absolute freedom, but now Ulrich knows that the utopia of this other life makes no prescriptions for the practice of life and, for a life in society, has to be replaced by the utopia of the given social condition—Musil calls it that of the ‘inductive attitude.’ But both utopias bring about the replacement of closed ideologies with open ones” (*W* 4: 27). Moreover—and this is of major importance for the “Ways of Death”—for Bachmann the order of thought that Ulrich’s ecstasy opposes, those closed ideologies, has a direct and causal connection to war, a term which here includes not just the national conflicts of the twentieth century, but the general state of contemporary society: “Not only the case of Kakania has shown that thinking in closed ideologies leads directly to war, and the permanent war of faith is still the order of the day” (*W* 4: 27). A variety of Bachmann’s earlier creative writings also locate a basic resistance to the dominant order of thought in love, so that to pursue this love would be almost to foment revolution, to change the world utterly: “A Step towards Gomorrah,” “A Wildermuth,” “Undine Goes” from *The Thirtieth Year*. But though with the exception of “A Step towards Gomorrah” these loves are taboo only in that they are illicit, what is important to notice with respect to the particular relevance of

these stories to the “Ways of Death” is that the promise of satisfaction for which desire longs is embodied in women. In “The Good God of Manhattan,” love is “another state of being” and “crossing a boundary” (“GG” 182), which Jan, the man, cannot sustain. He retreats to a corner bar, “lapsed. Routine stretched its hand out to him for a moment” (“GG” 96). Jennifer, the woman, keeps the faith and is blown sky-high by the Good God to reestablish his divine, patriarchal normality.

It is not clear (nor does it matter much) whether a coherent theory underlies these various concerns of Bachmann’s earlier writing—though it is hard to believe that this erudite woman, with her particular interests in philosophy, psychology, and language, did not follow the latest developments in European thought in the 1960s and 1970s. In any case, that theory exists now (a theory that addresses the problem of coherence and incoherence) and can be used to explain the conjuncture of interests that meet in the “Ways of Death.” For even the most superficial reading of Bachmann’s late prose should make clear who is being killed in these various ways (and also that “death” can be the death of the spirit as well as of the body): women. Recent feminist theory, drawing particularly on the work of Derrida and Lacan, argues that the oppression of women is structured into the fundamental categories of our thought, which must be transformed if women are to achieve an autonomous subjectivity of their own. This order, as Derrida argues, is logocentric, predicated on the assertion of a logos, a central term or presence-to-itself (whose name has varied historically: God, essence, substance, consciousness, man, etc.) against which all other terms are measured. The laws of logocentricity which structure all our thought are learned through the child’s appropriation of language and constitute its fundamental categories. But as Lacanian psychoanalysis maintains, through this entry into language infants are also constituted as gendered human beings: to take on language means to accede to the channeling of infant desire into socially appropriate expressions and to assume one’s proper place in the gendered order. For women, this means to accept both the preeminence of the phallus, Lacan’s “transcendental signifier,” and the “fact” of their own castration. So long as they fail to revolt against this order, women logically and in fact will be associated with the negative term of a logocentric and phallogocentric order: object, nature, other, absence, silence, lack. Derrida’s endeavor is of course to deconstruct self-identity, presence-to-itself, by showing that it was never that which it asserted itself to be. Bachmann’s intent in the “Ways of Death” and particularly *Malina*, I would like to argue here, is a similar one. This work, with which she struggled for so long, shows that the destruction of women—though it be a

destruction they themselves accept—is a necessary consequence of the order in which they live. But even as they are destroyed, they speak, cry out, rebel: their desire will not be completely contained. The current women's movement barely existed when Bachmann died in 1973, and she can conceive women only as victims. Perhaps we are further than that today—but it is important that we know what she has to tell us.

The dilemma that Bachmann confronts and represents in *Malina* involves women's place in the symbolic order. How can it be possible for her, a woman, to write about women when exactly what she wishes to assert makes her own position as woman wielding the pen impossible? This awareness of oneself as a contradiction in terms traces its way through *Malina* in recurrent phrases which express both extraordinary pain and perseverance: "Those who have to live a Why can endure almost any How," and, most poignantly, in view of Bachmann's own death by fire, "Avec ma main brulée, j'écris sur la nature du feu" (with my burned hand, I write of the nature of fire). Damaged herself, she will insist on overcoming her injuries to write of their causes. But what voice does she assume? Monique Wittig, in her introduction to *The Lesbian Body*, addressed this problem of the lack of a female "I" in our language, pointing out that subjectivity is generically human, which is to say male, in Western thought:

"I" [*Je*] as a generic feminine subject can only enter by force into a language which is foreign to it, for all that is human [masculine] is foreign to it, the human not being feminine grammatically speaking but he [*il*] or they [*ils*]. "I" [*Je*] conceals the sexual differences of the verbal persons while specifying them in verbal interchange. "I" [*Je*] obliterates the fact that *elle* or *elles* are submerged in *il* or *ils*, i.e. that the feminine persons are complementary to the masculine persons. The feminine "I" [*Je*] who is speaking can fortunately forget this difference and assume indifferently the masculine language. But the "I" [*Je*] who writes is driven back to her specific experience as subject. The "I" [*Je*] who writes is alien to her own writing at every word because this "I" [*Je*] uses a language alien to her; this "I" [*Je*] experiences what is alien to her since this "I" [*Je*] cannot be "un écrivain." If, in writing *je*, I adopt this language, this *je* cannot do so. *Je* is the symbol of the lived, rending experience which is m/y writing, of this cutting in two which throughout literature is the exercise of a language which does not constitute m/e as subject. *Je* poses the ideological and historic question of feminine subjects. (x)

Wittig drew attention to her problem by orthographic splitting; Bachmann's solution is analogous, as we will see.

Moreover, if another writing is necessary even to begin to examine the possibility of the female articulation of subjectivity, it is clear that, for us,



another, different, reading will be entailed as well—as feminist critics, most brilliantly Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, have begun to argue. For, Gilbert and Gubar point out, what traditional scholarship regards as the strangeness of women’s writing may result both from their own difficulty in writing with a male “I” and from the necessity to transform male narrative to fit the forms of female lives:

They [women writers] may have attempted to transcend their anxiety of authorship by revising male genres, using them to record their own dreams and their own stories in disguise. Such writers, therefore, both participated in and . . . “swerved” from the central sequences of male literary history, enacting a uniquely female process of revision that necessarily caused them to seem “odd.” . . . [W]omen . . . produced literary works that are in some sense palimpsestic, works whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible, (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning. (*Madwoman* 73)

No doubt, many scholarly difficulties with Bachmann’s writing result from the attempt to understand it in terms of exactly those categories that she is trying to subvert. Cited in the center of Bachmann’s novel is the Ibsen play which also gives its title to Adrienne Rich’s famous essay on female creativity. Rich’s essay begins: “Ibsen’s *When We Dead Awaken* is a play about the use that the male artist and thinker—in the process of creating culture as we know it—has made of women, in his life and in his work, and about a woman’s slow struggling awakening to the use to which her life has been put.” Women in the “Ways of Death” rarely awaken to an understanding of the male order (though they often cry out in their sleep), but a feminist reading of Bachmann’s late works could be part of our awakening. Rich continues:

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name—and therefore live—afresh. (“When” 34–35).

This, evidently, is part of Bachmann’s purpose in *Malina*.

To begin this strange book is already to be put off balance. The “Malina” of the title appears to be the first name of a woman but is identified in the initial cast of characters as the last name of a man. (There are in fact plenty of last-name Malinas in the Vienna phone book, yet it is clear that this confusion is intentional.) The “I,” whose female identity emerges only slowly, has no name at all, though she shares some qualities with Bachmann herself: “born in Klagenfurt.” But Malina too has some characteristics which, ironically transformed, are reminiscent of Bachmann: “Author of an apocrypha no longer available in bookstores, but which sold a few copies in the late fifties.” Apocrypha: writings of doubtful authenticity or authorship. Malina’s occupation puts him in his place once and for all: “employed in the Austrian Army Museum,” to preside over the relics and mementos of past wars, of an empire and way of life which has already succumbed to history (*Malina* 1). (Elsewhere in the novel the “I” remarks of Vienna: “I am very glad to live here, because from this point on the planet where nothing more is happening, a confrontation with the world is all the more frightening, here one is neither self-righteous nor self-satisfied, as this is not some protected island, but a haven of decay, wherever you go there is decay, decay everywhere, right before our eyes, and not just the decay of yesterday’s empire, but today’s as well” [*Malina* 59].)

Though Malina is presented as an independent character and continues to be elaborated as one throughout the novel, it is clear early on that there is something odd about his relationship to the “I”: “For years my relationship with Malina consisted of awkward meetings, absolute follies and the biggest possible misunderstandings—I mean of course much greater misunderstandings than with other people. Certainly I was *subordinate* to him from the beginning, and I must have known early on that he was destined to be my doom, that Malina’s place was already occupied by Malina even before he entered my life” (*Malina* 5). Bachmann has made clear enough in a number of interviews that Malina is the double of the “I” (though, she says, the reader need not necessarily grasp the relationship to appreciate the novel) and that he represents male subjectivity, a position that a woman must occupy, a guise that she must assume, according to the rules of this social order, if she is to possess any subjectivity at all. It does not make sense within a Freudian paradigm to assert, as Walter Helmut Fritz does, that Malina is sometimes a superego for the “I” (24); among other things, he is far too nice to her. To be quite clear: Malina is the persona that women must assume when they enter the project world; they must become the genderless (that is to say, male), liberal, bourgeois subject, suppressing their female qualities. Malina is the voice in which Bachmann mostly narrates, the only

voice available to professional and academic women, and the voice in which I am writing this essay, a borrowed voice, not our own.

Now it is apparent that the invention of Malina solves a good many problems for both Bachmann and the “I.” In the voice of Malina, Bachmann can narrate the rest of the “Ways of Death” in a form apparently coherent, realistic, and accessible—as various reviewers (e.g., Wirsing) remarked with relief of *Three Paths to the Lake*. If Malina does not break with the categories of the order he depicts, he nonetheless gives account of the tragedies it occasions with kindness and compassion. Bachmann’s fondness for her figure is evident in the Toni Kienlechner interview: “There is an important place in the book for me where the ‘I’ says that Malina is not out for the demasking that we know from literature, that x-ray glance at people which humiliates them, that Malina does not look through people but looks at them, that he’s fair to everyone—for otherwise irony can easily lead to diminishing people” (Kienlechner 101). But though Malina moves in the direction of a nineteenth-century narrator, the moral burden of what he has to tell us is none the weaker for that; it is only that we must read the moral out of his narratives. In drafts for the figure of Malina, Bachmann makes his moral purpose clear. Observing, for instance, the wreckage of a civilization at the Frankfurt Book Fair, Malina thunders his wrath like an Old Testament prophet:

You hear, I obey an old language and old concepts, I turn back like all people who gaze at what has happened and are turned to stone, and perhaps an angel will tell you in time, don’t look back, and then you won’t see Frankfurt consumed in smoke and brimstone, as I see it consumed today and twice every year, for vengeance has come. Not my vengeance, for I have come to tell and not to judge, but judgment haunts all the stories, and lamentation in the smoke when it rises to heaven and is told. (*TP* 1: 364)

Malina tells; we judge.

For the female “I” in Bachmann’s novel, Malina is also a convenient figure, a kind of reality principle. He is the one who pays the bills, remembers appointments, keeps her affairs in order. He is also the calm and soothing voice of male reason, who comforts her when she awakens in terror from her nightmares. What would we do without him, especially in the middle of the night? It is foolishness, nonsense, forget it and go back to sleep. (Or, at least as often, the voice of a sovereign male reason which, in a sober and distanced way, tries to analyze the psychological motives for the terror which emerges in the dreams: “I’ll get to the point. Why is your ring missing? Did you ever wear a ring? Or course you

didn't" (*Malina* 144). Lina, the cleaning lady, who is a further splitting off from Malina, is also a useful figure; she is clean and orderly and can move furniture all by herself, that autonomous, if subservient, superwoman: "Men! gnädige Frau, we don't need any men for that!" (*Malina* 75).

But there are also disadvantages when a woman assumes a male persona, something like the "double consciousness" of black people which W. E. B. Du Bois described: we know who we are seen to be; we know what we assert ourselves to be; we have some idea of who we are—and those are not the same thing. The tension involved in holding together these disparate parts of the personality is difficult to sustain. What a fortune-teller reads out of the palm of the "I" is no surprise to her:

She said that at first glance it shows an incredible tension, it's really not a picture of one person but of two people standing in extreme opposition to one another, it must mean that I am constantly apt to be torn in two; with configurations like these, if all the dates I had given were accurate. I asked hopefully: The torn man, the torn woman, right? If they were separated it would be livable, maintained Frau Novak, but scarcely the way it is, furthermore male and female, reason and feeling, productivity and self-destruction also appear in an unusual manner. I must have made a mistake with my dates, since she liked me right away, I'm such a natural woman, she likes natural people. (*Malina* 163)

Of course she is a natural woman, hanging on despite the fact that this tension has become second nature to us. But an even more critical disadvantage to asserting (and believing) ourselves to be generically human and not specifically female is that we have no access to the female side of ourselves. Subsumed in the male, we do not attend to it and cannot tell about it. It is in good part because Malina exists, as a dimension of the "I" to which she clings, that she has no narrative voice, as she sometimes recognizes: "Malina interrupts me, he is protecting me, but I think his wanting to protect me is preventing me from telling. It's Malina who isn't letting me talk [*erzählen*]" (*Malina* 175). As in Christa Wolf's story "Self-Experiment," for women to become men seems the most obvious solution to centuries of women's oppression. But it may also mean that women lose what is most important to them.

Yet to demonize men as somehow ontologically incompatible with the female is also too easy a solution. As it has been the burden of deconstruction to show, male subjectivity is not altogether unproblematic or identical with itself, either. How much more this must then be the case of a male subjectivity assumed by a woman! Examined more closely, Malina himself is a suspicious figure; perhaps

it's for this reason that he can narrate the "Ways of Death" at all. As Rainer Nägele has pointed out, "Shuffled anew, the letters of the name produce an ANIMAL which, if you cut off its tail, spiritualizes itself into an ANIMA" (38). An "animal" is hidden in Malina, a metaphor which Bachmann also pursued in her short story "The Barking," where the old woman finally rebelling in her senility against her tyrannical son is overwhelmed by the imaginary barking of the dog her son had hated (it is also interesting that in her loving topography of Vienna's Third District, the one large landmark the "I" suppresses is the Tierärztliche Hochschule [Veterinary School], right around the corner from the Ungargasse). Malina also has a female double in the novel, Maria Malina, a Viennese actress much more famous than he, her name combining the two most popular stereotypes about women, sainthood plus carnality: Maria Animal. In the drafts for the Malina figure, Maria Malina, "who on stage was a dream, an animal," is revealed—by a male narrator—to be "unassuming" in real life: "a vehemence, a silence, a sob, a smile, those stooped shoulders and big feet and her nose was rather thick, she didn't have make-up on, she had a bad complexion and too thick a nose, and she wasn't thin and wasn't fat, a medium-sized body, not unrobust, and her hair was greasy, stringy, dishwater blond, that was the Malina woman" (*TP* 1: 346–47). A woman must be a consummate artist to meet men's expectations of her, and her reality is bound to disappoint them. Maria Malina is eaten by a shark at age thirty-four—or at least this was the report given by the man with whom she had traveled to Greece, the only witness to her death. Malina has experienced "ways of death," too.

The first encounter of the "I" with Malina is also an interesting allusion to his lack of self-identity and to the possibility of suppressed psychic qualities emerging into male bourgeois consciousness which could destroy all its achievements. If Bachmann's name itself reveals the split personality to which Malina gives expression, the "Bach," fluidity of the female, channeled by the masculine "Mann," it is a "Mann"—Thomas—whose themes *Malina* varies in displaying its own problems with a threatened and dying society to which no alternative seems to offer itself. The "I" first glimpses Malina in a scene which draws upon the experiences of Gustav von Aschenbach (who shares a portion of Bachmann's name and combines the fire and water motifs that trace their way through *Malina*): she waits for a streetcar on the edge of a park (the Stadtpark, which, as I show later, represents the allure and threat of psychic nondifferentiation), boards, and looks about for Malina, who has vanished. But of course the figures are reversed here: it is Malina who represents the firm male ego boundaries which will be confirmed at the end of this work, though dissolved at the end of Mann's. Malina is first observed with a newspaper in his

hand: he has the access to the language of social communication (here somewhat debased) which Aschenbach also possesses and which is lacking in this female “I.” Moreover, this “I” will never even make it to Venice. Though it represents as for Aschenbach the promise of sensual fulfillment, the “I” must experience it as distinct and separate from herself, in the “cinema behind the Kärntnerring . . . where I first saw Venice, for two hours in extravagant colors and a lot of darkness, the oars beating the water, a melody accompanied by lights passing through the water as well, and its da-dim da-dam carried me along, all the way inside the figures, the coupled figures and their dancing. In this way I arrived in a Venice I would never see, on a clanking, windy winter day in Vienna” (*Malina* 11).

Of yet more central importance to *Malina* is the opposition, which is central to Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus*, of Beethoven and Arnold Schönberg: if Adrian Leverkühn’s masterwork, “Fausti Weheklage” is written to rescind Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, to remand that joyful affirmation of a social order, Bachmann’s “Ways of Death” cycle aims at the same intention. Across from the house where this silenced female “I” lives, Ungargasse 6, is Ungargasse 5, the Beethovenhaus, where the deaf Beethoven wrote his Ninth Symphony. Yet the central musical composition whose thematics shape Bachmann’s work is by the figure whom Mann construed as Beethoven’s negation, Schönberg. But as I explain in more detail below, the Schönberg work *Pierrot Lunaire*, on which *Malina* draws, not only negates current cultural categories like Leverkühn’s composition but also hints simultaneously at some other, utopian possibilities for human happiness.

By far the most intriguing indication that *Malina* is more than he appears to be is found in a reference to the work by Bachmann’s admirer Christa Wolf, whose writing circles about many of the same themes as Bachmann’s own. In Wolf’s *The Quest for Christa T.*, the one extended narrative which Christa T., that thwarted and utopian figure, is able to write is titled “Malina, die Himbeere” and involves a journey of a thirteen-year-old girl to Kalisch, then (in 1940) a district of Russian Poland occupied by the Nazis. The young narrator insists she is traveling to a foreign country, though her mother maintains it is German. The story breaks off with their arrival in Kalisch. “Now one ought to know why she stopped at this point,” the narrator of *Christa T.* continues. “What was to be the outcome of the Polish strawberry [*sic: Himbeere = raspberry*]*—Malina—*for which she had raised the whole magic structure, with Brockhaus 1889, the journey to a foreign country which wasn’t any such journey, her mother and herself, talking and replying . . . you asked what testimony I’ve got. Well: the tone of these pages of hers, for example. She speaks so you can see her” (Wolf, *Quest* 90).

To speak about and across borders which are not physical ones is a task of female writing, especially in a land occupied by a foreign invader, one whom Bachmann might even be inclined to define more precisely as fascist, as in Wolf's work. Christa T. couldn't write either; even the story "Malina" is unfinished, and she laments "the difficulty of saying I." Nevertheless, in Wittgensteinian terms, Christa T. does venture to cross some borders, and both the "I" of *Malina* and Malina himself come from the border, where the rigid boundaries each language sets become softened a little. This pressure on the limits of language is one of the themes and strengths of Bachmann's novel.

Yet perhaps this discussion of *Malina* has been somewhat misleading, for *Malina* is not, strictly speaking, whom the novel is about. The other and more overtly tyrannical figure in relationship to whom the "I" constitutes herself is Ivan, her lover, and it is this relationship that structures the novel: after a short introductory section, the first longer portion of the novel is called "Happy with Ivan" and gives an account of their love affair. The middle section, "The Third Man," consists mainly of her dreams of persecution, in which her father plays the major role. In the third section with its apocalyptic title "Last Things," the relationship with Ivan trails off and the disappearance of the "I" is prepared. As Bachmann pointed out in an interview, Ivan is also probably a kind of double for the "I" (*Gul* 88), which is to say, he also resides in the female psyche: he represents the tyranny of romantic love, of compulsory heterosexuality, whose laws women accept and interiorize. Like other lovers in Bachmann's works—Jan in "The Good God of Manhattan" and "You monsters named Hans!" (*TY* 177) in "Undine Goes"—Ivan is a "john," a more or less interchangeable male lover. That is why, unlike *Malina* and the "I," he is a signifier identical with his signified or, perhaps more accurately, a signifier without a signified, as the "I" remarks: "Despite all our differences, when it comes to our names *Malina* and I share the same timidity, only Ivan is completely enthused with his own name [*geht ganz und gar in seinen Namen ein*]" (*Malina* 52).

For the same reason Bachmann could assert in an interview (though what she says is not quite true), "We never learn: what did Ivan do before, what will he do later, what's going to happen at all, who is this man?" (*Gul* 88). In the final section of the novel, Bachmann makes extremely clear that for women, loving a john is a far from idyllic or utopian experience, nor does it allow women the exploration and elaboration of their own sensuality and eroticism. Men make love as suits their tastes, and their female partners must arrange themselves as best they can:

Sometimes one is lucky, but I'm sure most women are never lucky [*haben aber bestimmt nie Glück*]. What I'm talking about has nothing to do with the supposition that there are some men who are good lovers, there really aren't. That is a legend which has to be destroyed someday, at most there are men with whom it is completely hopeless and a few with whom it's not quite so hopeless. Although no one has looked for it, that is where the reason is to be found why only women always have their heads full of feelings and stories about their man or men. Such thoughts really do consume the greatest part of every woman's time. But she has to think about it, she needs to evoke feeling, to provoke feeling—and she can do this without harming herself—otherwise she could literally never bear being with a man, since every man really is sick and hardly takes any notice of her. (*Malina* 178)

“A legend” literally—love is an elaborate symbolic system, a game or dance, the responsibility for which falls on women, who nevertheless do not expect their sick male lovers to make them happy.

This illness leads to the heart of Bachmann's argument: all men are sick, and all women must come to terms with these diseased gender arrangements: “You could say the whole approach of men toward women is diseased [*krankhaft*], moreover each disease is so wholly unique that men will never be completely cured. At most it might be said of women that they are more or less marked by contaminations they have contracted by sympathizing with male suffering” (*Malina* 177). It is this sickness that Bachmann's “Ways of Death” is directed at revealing, as she has made quite clear in interviews. Thus, asked of *Malina*, “Then one should understand it as a document of contemporary existence, of human beings who are themselves destroyed by this destruction—as one of their ‘ways of death?’” she replied, “Yes, there is a correspondence between their sickness and the sickness of the world and the society” (Kienlechner 104). A closer examination of the love between Ivan and the “I” will reveal the far-reaching implications of this sickness.

It is important to notice the absences in this love affair. Love itself is rarely mentioned; never do they say “I love you.” Sex is never discussed and barely alluded to; this is not a relationship where a female subject discovers her *jouissance*. Even at the level of realism, it is obviously a miserable relationship, with the “I” steadfastly refusing to concede her own unhappiness; yet I would suspect that for most women this sexual dependency is quite convincing: of course she will not break with him, for she loves him. Or one might formulate this somewhat differently: Ivan is the presence that makes it possible to constitute reality, a “fix” which must be renewed for it to have its effect on her:



I'm thinking about Ivan.

I'm thinking about love.

About injections of reality.

About their lasting merely a few hours.

About the next, more potent injection. (*Malina* 24)

For her, Ivan is “My Mecca and my Jerusalem” (*Malina* 23); “Everything bears Ivan’s brand, from the House of Ivan” (*Malina* 13–14). In this relationship the “I” is thoroughly female: “My fräulein, we are, after all, very female,” says Ivan (*Malina* 89). But this is a femininity socially defined, offering her no more access to an authentic female voice than the assumption of Malina’s male subjectivity. Ivan is a father with two children, but he is “The Onlie Begetter” (*Malina* 59); the mother does not exist in this story. The children’s names suggest some relationship to the original differentiation which makes language possible: Belá, Andras, b-a. But Ivan has accomplished this on his own; the woman is absent and unnamed. The “I” regards Ivan’s function for her as the assurance of her entry into language: “For he has come to make consonants constant once again and comprehensible, to unlock vowels to their full resounding, to let words come over my lips once more, to solve problems and recreate connections long since disrupted, and I will not stray from him one iota” (*Malina* 15) Yet the language Ivan gives her to speak is one in which women are permitted to exist only in relationship to men and have no independent voice of their own at all.

Ivan places a variety of limits on the right and ability of the “I” to speak. The most frequent conversations reported between them are telephone calls (a *Verbindung*, connection, facilitated by the cord, always impossibly tangled, which connects her to him). At their best, the calls are banal and boring miscommunication—the “I” running gasping and desperate to answer the telephone, then maintaining, in a futile endeavor to protect herself from him, that she really has no time to talk. Usually the telephone conversations reported are not even complete sentences but completely inadequate vehicles for conveying her emotions, precodified sets of propositions: “example sentences,” “fatigue sentences,” “swearing sentences.” By the time we arrive at that last, ominous set of sentences, the self-deception as the “I” asserts that she is “happy with Ivan” is quite clear, for he directs the terms at her which men have often used to express their terror and loathing of women: “witch,” “beast [*Luder*],” “bastard [*Aas*].” But Ivan insists that she nonetheless proclaim her happiness with him; in the language that it is given her to speak, all is well between men and women. (All the books in her huge library don’t help the “I” deal with Ivan—those books are written

by men. The one book she needs is missing: a cookbook.) Ivan explicitly forbids her to continue writing the drafts of the “Ways of Death” he has found in her apartment:

In general he avoids questions, but today Ivan asks, what do these notes mean, since I’ve left a few pages lying on the armchair. Merrily [*belustigt*] he takes one and reads: DEATH STYLES [*TODESARTEN* = WAYS OF DEATH]. And from another piece of paper: Darkness in Egypt. Isn’t that your writing, didn’t you write that? Since I don’t answer, Ivan says: I don’t like it, I suspected something like this was going on, and nobody wants all these books lying around in your crypt, why isn’t there anything else, there must be other books, like EXSULTATE JUBILATE, which make you mad with joy, you’re always mad with joy yourself, so why don’t you write like that. (*Malina* 30)

And the “I” vows obediently henceforth to rejoice in and write about the bliss which this affair has brought her: “[Ivan] told me: I’m sure you’ve already understood. I don’t love anyone. Except my children, of course, but no one else. I nod, though I hadn’t known, and it’s obvious to Ivan that it should be so obvious to me. JUBILATE. Poised over an abyss, it nonetheless occurs to me how it should begin: EXSULTATE” (*Malina* 33). This “way of death” can’t be written either.

Since the “I” accepts the rules for entry into the symbolic order of compulsory heterosexuality, she constitutes herself according to the social rules of femininity even away from Ivan. There is great and painful irony in the scene in which the “I,” on her own, “fables removed from the men [*sagenweit entfernt von den Männern*],” nonetheless recreates herself as the woman the fashion industry has told her to become: “The result is a composition, a woman is to be created for a dress. In complete secrecy designs for a female are redrawn, it is like a genesis, with an aura for no one in particular. The hair must be brushed twenty times, feet anointed [*gesalbt*] and toenails painted, hair removed from the legs and armpits, the shower turned on and off, a cloud of powder floats in the bathroom, the mirror is studied, it’s always Sunday, the mirror, mirror on the wall is consulted, it might be Sunday already” (*Malina* 86). The natural, independent woman: painted, powdered, dehaired, self-created as an image for the mirror on the wall, of which a woman asks—naturally?—“Who is the fairest of them all?” As John Berger argues, since women are born into a world which men control, they are constrained to become the observers of themselves, for how they appear determines how men will treat them. Women interiorize this doubleness and constitute themselves as comprising both “surveyor and surveyed”: “The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed, female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight” (47).

Or one might theorize this scene as Susan Gubar does: such female narcissism exists for lack of other expressive possibilities. Without language, female creativity is expressed through the female body itself—though still within a referential system that predefines what those possibilities for creativity may be. The “I” thus suffers from the dis-ease of misrepresentation—though it’s the only representation she’s got. We are warned not to believe anything she maintains about herself. It’s clearly not the case that Ivan (or Ivan plus Malina) provides the solution to her problems, nor is, contrary to her assertions, the Ungargasse the home for which she has longed. For a reader sensitized to issues of sexual politics, the irony in the following passage is very strong:

The tremulous anxiety, the high tension hovering over this city and presumably everywhere has almost completely abated here [between Ungargasse 6 and 9], and schizothymia, the world’s schizoid soul, its crazy, gaping split, is healing itself imperceptibly.

The only remaining excitement is a hasty search for hairpins and stockings, a slight quiver while applying mascara and manipulating eyeshadow, using narrow brushes on the lids, or while dipping flimsy cotton puffs in light and dark powder. (*Malina* 14)

Of course it is precisely this crack in the world into which she disappears at the end; the Ungargasse is not a refuge for her after all. Before meeting Malina and Ivan, the “I” had lived in the Beatrixgasse, where she, if—à la Dante—participating in the male order, nonetheless preserved a certain virginal inaccessibility. Now she has moved around the corner to the Ungargasse, which derives its name from the penetration of (Hungarian) foreigners into Vienna. Malina lives at 6, Ivan at 9; two men, simply inversions of one another, not different in quality. The “I” is “un-gar,” unfinished, undone. Neither of these male voices permits her to express herself at all.

Yet this isn’t the complete story of the “I” (if it were, we’d have a different text: a female *Bildungsroman*, perhaps, or a Gothic love story). It is to her credit that despite Ivan’s urgings, she is not happy: she is not totally subsumed in the ideology of romantic love through which her identity had been constituted, and she does not write that book *EXSULTATE JUBILATE*. Her story speaks through her unhappiness, a sickness which moves toward madness. One is reminded of the statement by S. Weir Mitchell, cited as an epigraph to the second chapter of Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*: “The man who does not know sick women does not know women” (45). It was, after all, Weir Mitchell’s patient, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whose protagonist in *The Yellow Wallpaper*

also tries to disappear into the wall because her doctor, based on Weir Mitchell, has forbidden her to write. But what it is important to emphasize here is that the other story of the “I” *can't be told*: there is no language that this story can be told in. Like the female schizophrenics whom Luce Irigaray studied, there is no metalanguage for this dis-ease: “A woman in a state of madness does not have, for some reason, the means for elaborating a delirium. Instead of language being the medium of expression of the delirium, the latter remains within the body itself. The dominant element in feminine schizophrenia is corporal pain, the feeling of deformation or transformation of organs, etc” (74). Repressed, it must struggle to speak in spite of the proscriptions upon expression, here not so much through symptoms of the body (though this is the case elsewhere in Bachmann, for instance in “Eyes to Wonder”) as in the dreams and parapraxes which Freud indicated to be the signifying material of the repressed. But there is no coherent narrative of the “I”: to argue that there is would be to recuperate her own distress and misunderstand Bachmann’s novel. Instead, we need to look for places where the “I” *mis*-writes herself—*sich verschreibt*, as Bachmann puts it (*Gul* 98). At best, we can indicate some areas in which that which she cannot say tries nonetheless to speak.

The narrative structure of the book itself is one of those places. The central thematic concern structuring the traditional novel, the relationship of the individual to the social world, is the one that’s missing here, except for one short, funny examination of the vacation habits of the Viennese upper crust. (So inclined, Bachmann can write social satire with the best of realist novelists. But there’s an ominous undertone even here; it’s hinted that the brilliant, articulate women who oversee these social games have their dark side, too: “Antoinette is completely puzzled by every man”; “But what do you say to Christine’s hysteria” [*Malina* 103–104].) If the lack of coherent plot development or even of an identifiable narrative stance has been responsible for some of reviewers’ and scholars’ problems with the book, it’s also an assertion of the lack of coherence available to the “I.” It is interesting, too, that this is the area of the novel which Bachmann identified as closest to experimental writing proper: “What I regard as experiments with prose the reader isn’t bothered with, for my experiments land in the wastebasket—although I certainly need them. But I don’t believe they’re there to be published. In this novel, which isn’t a seamless narrative—it isn’t that at all—there are quite different elements, from the dreams to the dialogue to the musical score—like ending—I call those a no longer visible experiment with narrative possibilities” (Kienlechner 102). But one might also regard these failures of the text to constitute a seamless narrative, and even those opaque and mysteri-

ous allusions which remain resistant to interpretation, as a utopian hint—though only a hint—in the direction of another, less oppressive discourse which feminists could make use of. In this reading of the text we might explore Bachmann's suggestion with respect to the complexity of her novel, "how interconnected it is, so that there's almost no sentence which doesn't refer to another one" (*Gul* 96). This might be a logic of association and "both/and" rather than of causality and "either/or." This might be a subjectivity which does not do violence to itself by asserting its self-identity but concedes its disunity and nonsynchrony. For without (one hastens to add) giving up on reason altogether, a feminist voice, however it finally constitutes itself, will need to admit that which the binary oppositions of logocentricity haven't wished to permit within present patriarchal discourse.

"But at night, alone, is when the erratic monologues arise, the ones that last, for man [sic] is a somber being, only in the darkness is he master of himself and during the day he goes back to being a slave" (*Malina* 63). Most clearly we discover that which the "I" can't say in the middle or dream section of the novel. Bachmann told Kienlechner: "We learn nothing about the life of this 'I' or about what's happened to her—that's all in the dreams, partially concealed and partially expressed. Every conceivable kind of torture, destruction, harassment (*Gul* 97). As these are dreams, even though literary ones, we cannot expect to be able to interpret them completely; indeed, as Freud cautioned, "We must not concern ourselves with what the dream appears to tell us, whether it is intelligible or absurd, clear or confused, since it cannot possibly be the unconscious material we are in search of" (15: 114).

Nonetheless, as Bachmann suggests, not everything is concealed here, and some themes emerge which help us to understand the constraints of consciousness. The most obvious common element of these varied dreams is the father figure, who emerges again and again as the persecutor and tormentor of the "I." Bachmann has stated explicitly that this omnipotent father is the figure who is responsible for the destruction of the "I," her "murderer": "All the stories which are not included here because the 'I' is not permitted to tell anything about herself—for her *doppelgänger* forbids her to—they appear in the dreams, for instance the explanation for her destruction, for her almost having been annihilated by a prehistory brought about by this overpowerful father figure, about whom we discover that this figure is the murderer, and more precisely, the murderer whom we all have" (*Gul* 89). This is a patriarchal, an oedipal tragedy which strikes all of us. Under threat of the most terrible of punishments, the deprivation of our sexuality, we submit ourselves to the Law of the Father, which spells death to an independent desire expressing itself outside of socially prescribed channels.

From the first dream, from which I have borrowed the title of this essay, the crime for which the father is responsible emerges: its setting is “the cemetery of the murdered daughters” (*Malina* 114), and he is the perpetrator of the “ways of death.” Murder (along with lesser offenses) is accomplished in the greatest variety of ways. In the second dream she is gassed in a gas chamber; later she is transported to Siberia with other Jews (more substantiation for Bachmann’s association of patriarchy and fascism). She is frozen in ice and plunged into fire, subjected to electroshock, buried under an avalanche, electrocuted, and eaten by a crocodile. With yet clearer symbolism her dreams frequently refer to her incest with her father, a connection she regards with abhorrence, though Melanie, a recurrent figure who, analogous to Malina, is another of her doubles, is pleased enough at the advantages of the relationship. “Mela-Nie,” thinks the “I.” Her mother, who sometimes allies with the father, is a dog, “who completely submits to his thrashing” (*Malina* 124). Her father directs an opera: “My father has gone to the theater. God is a show [*Vorstellung*]” (*Malina* 118), in which she is prepared to sing a duet with a young man, yet she recognizes that “his voice is the only one audible in this duet anyway, because my father wrote the whole part for him and nothing for me of course, since I don’t have any training and am only supposed to be shown” (*Malina* 123). In various ways he denies her speech: he will not permit delivery of letters to her friends and tries to gain control of the sentences dried on her tongue as she dies of thirst. But what is constant in these dreams is her resistance to her father and her refusal to be murdered: “Now and then I lose my voice. Nevertheless I have permitted myself to live. Sometimes my voice returns and can be heard by all: I am living, I will live, I claim my right to live” (*Malina* 151–152). By the end of these dreams, the “I” (with Malina’s help) has understood that despite the apparently harmless ball scene from *War and Peace* which recurs in the dreams, what she has experienced here is only war, and the section concludes with this recognition:

MALINA: So you will never again say: War and Peace.

ME [“I”]: Never again.

It’s always war.

Here there is always violence.

Here there is always struggle.

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

If “The Third Man”—the title of this section—prevents her self-articulation like the other two, the “I” is at least left with the possibility of refusing their definition of her: “In another language I say Ne! Ne! And in many languages: No!

No! Non! Non! Nyet! Nyet! No! Ném! Nein! No! For in our language, too, I can only say no, I can't find any other word in any language" (*Malina* 115).

The waking life of the "I" is also informed by a desire to write, to articulate herself, which cannot be fulfilled. Interspersed through the first and third sections of the book are letters by the "I" which represent her attempt to take up the pen. They are mostly written "in tremendous haste and anxiety," a recurrent phrase which also characterizes, as the "I" reported in the introduction, the unity of time—"Today"—in which she is compelled to live. If the letters are completed at all, they are signed "an unknown woman." At the beginning of the novel's third section, the "I" explains that these mysterious and cryptic letters are connected to her experience of a postal crisis concerned with the nature of the "privacy of mail [*Briefgeheimnis*]." Her own meditations on the "privacy of mail" and the unmailed letters mostly written deep in the night are released by the case of the letter carrier Otto Kranewitzer in Klagenfurt who, suddenly struck by the enormity of his postal duties, was no longer able to deliver the mail. For this crisis, the "I" asserts, is one with immense existential and ontological implications:

After the Kranewitzer case I burned my letters of many years, then began writing completely different letters, mostly late at night, till eight in the morning. I didn't send all these letters, but they're the ones that concern me. Over these four, five years I must have written ten thousand letters, to myself alone, letters which contained everything. I also leave many letters unopened, in my attempt to practice privacy of mail, in my attempt to approach the height of Kranewitzer's thought, to comprehend what could be unlawful in reading a letter. (*Malina* 160).

No doubt the "privacy of mail" is illuminated by a multilingual pun, the overlapping of the two meanings of letter/lettre in English and French. For the "I" had betrayed the secret earlier in the book to her baffled and frustrated interviewer Herr Mühlbauer, saying, "I will tell you a terrible secret: language is punishment" (*Malina* 60).

Nonetheless, there are moments when, despite herself, that which the "I" is forbidden to say breaks through into her waking language as well. The "I" recognizes (and tips us off to) the parapraxes that allow the repressed to emerge in this book: "That's when I also started distorting everything I read. Instead of 'Summer Fashion Exhibition' [*Sommermode*] I would read 'Summer Fashion Execution' [*Sommormorde*]. That's only one example. I could name hundreds of others" (*Malina* 137). Thus, it seems, we are also to look at the language of this book for that which is not supposed to be there. Reading closely, one can find,

below the apparent narrative, some subterranean themes that tell a different story from the one the “I” intends. The *Pierrot Lunaire* motif to which I have already referred is one of these. The first line from the last poem of that cycle, which recurs through *Malina*—“O ancient scent from far-off days”—points in the direction of archaic reminiscences which the “I” has repressed and to which she now barely has access, having constituted herself in a different time, a present, “Today,” “a word that only suicides [of which, it appears, she is one] ought to be allowed to use” (*Malina* 2). (The dreams in contrast deny synchronism altogether: “The Time is not today. In fact, the Time no longer exists at all, because it could have been yesterday, it could have been long ago, it could be again, it could continually be, some things will never have been” [*Malina* 113]). Yet it seems that the “I” is able to resist these men at all only because of her archaic reminiscences of an original satisfaction now denied. The “I” first hears her Schönberg song sung by a “chalkwhite Pierrot . . . in a cracking voice” (*Malina* 4) in the Stadtpark, to which neither Ivan nor Malina wish to accompany her and of which she herself is afraid, for it is a place of “shadows and dark figures,” that is, a site of night and dreams: “Only in the darkness is man master of himself” (*Malina* 87). The Stadtpark also seems to be the site of an original polymorphous perversity where in the immediate postwar period illicit sex of all varieties took place: “You could hardly meet anyone who hadn’t seen everyone with someone else” (*Malina* 181).

For the “I,” the Stadtpark is associated as well with water and with the fear of drowning, from which her men in the Ungargasse save her: “I wasn’t sure of myself but am again insured [*in Sicherheit*], no longer walking past the Stadtpark at night, jittery as I walk along the walls of houses, no longer on a detour through the dark, but already a little at home, already docked safely at the Ungargasse, already safe and sound in Ungargassenland, with my head even a little out of water. Already gurgling the first sounds and sentences, already setting forth, beginning” (*Malina* 88). The “I” flees water, which may suggest to her the “oceanic feeling” before psychic differentiation and the more fluid ego boundaries of the female. Instead, she’s chosen to associate herself with Malina, whom she imagines to be a phallic hero creating order out of watery chaos, allowing, so the legend has it, Klagenfurt (a ford of lamentations?) to arise from suspiciously female swamps—Klagenfurt, the city where she was born: “but I liked him best as Saint George who slew the dragon so that my first city could be born, so that Klagenfurt could arise from the barren swamp” (*Malina* 7). Yet the *Pierrot Lunaire* motif recurs throughout the novel: in the Beatrixgasse, at a moment of despair in Vienna society; as a reprise at the end of the novel before



the “I” vanishes into the wall. That ancient scent wafts a promise of happiness which can’t be completely forgotten.

Perhaps this can help us understand the one extended narrative, running in italics through *Malina*, of the Princess of Kagran, which the “I” seems to have written and which anticipates her love affair with Ivan. The princess comes from a region near the Danube where St. George had triumphed over the floods. When the princess has to decide between the floods and the fearsome willows, she allows herself to be rescued by the stranger in the dark coat who prefigures Ivan. What other possibilities did she have, what other narrative could she have written? She has to tell this story: there is no other way for her to imagine the satisfaction of her desire. But this does not mean that her utopian vision is altogether wrong, only that it must be channeled into the language which is given her to speak. The transformation she longs for is a vision of *luxure, calme et volupté*, which nonetheless draws upon her own specifically female desire. Bernd Witte has argued this most persuasively:

Attached to the fairy tale, also characterized externally as connected by the same italics, are further fragments of a vision of a perfect society in later portions of the first chapter. “A day will come when all women have redgolden eyes, redgolden hair, and the poetry of their sex, their lineage will be recreated . . .” The return of the golden age here emanates quite obviously from women. Only several pages later, when this sentence is repeated, is the word “women” replaced by “mankind,” while the arrival of paradise is linked to the condition that “their hands will be gifted for love.” (*Kritisches*)

Counterposed to and subversive of Malina’s patriarchal subsumption of women is a feminist utopia of sensual pleasure and erotic joy. It is from this narrative that Bachmann herself read when asked for her own vision of utopia: “A day will come when people will have goldblack eyes, they will see beauty, they will be freed from dirt and from every burden, they will rise into the sky, they will dive into the sea, they will forget their calluses and their wants. A day will come, they will be free, all people will be free, even from the freedom they had intended. There shall be a greater freedom, beyond measure, a freedom to last a whole life long” (*Gal* 92).

Now what are feminists to make of this? The vision is beautiful but scarcely realizable; the patriarchal reality, terrifyingly familiar and concrete. The story the “I” tells about of Marcel, a clochard of Paris (and, it seems, a compatriot of Proust), comes to mind; like the “I,” he is one of the “wounded,” and he simply dies when a well-meaning social worker tries to redeem him “for a new life

which does not exist" (*Malina* 187). As the feminist scholar Myra Love once remarked to me, Bachmann lacked the context. But we might derive some comfort and assistance from the single vow of the "I." Having passed the *Rigorousum* (oral examination) of the University of Vienna, she swears upon its staff and, armed with this knowledge, triumphs over both the waters and her father's might: "And with a handful of sand that is my knowledge, I cross the water, and my father cannot follow me" (*Malina* 122). Perhaps we need not, like Leda, put on patriarchal knowledge with his power. Perhaps there is another and more liberating use to make of knowledge; perhaps, from within the cemetery of the murdered daughters, men's knowledge can be turned against them. Bachmann is neither the "I" nor Malina; she found a language to write the story of women without language. We know this now. "One who expresses herself completely does not cancel herself out," wrote Christa Wolf of Bachmann in 1980 in her Büchner Prize speech. "The wish for obliteration remains as a witness. Her part will not vanish" ("Shall" 10).

## READING BACHMANN IN 1981

Published in early 1981 (with a publication date of 1980) in a special issue of *Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature*, this essay is a paradigmatic example of many qualities of feminist literary scholarship around that time. As I noted in chapter 2, I believe it is also the first to apply this sort of cultural feminist analysis to Bachmann's work, an approach that would become virtually de rigueur by 1984–85, responsible for producing what Sigrid Weigel termed “the other [feminist] Ingeborg Bachmann” (“Andere” 5). As the essay's title already underlines, its approach is premised on a notion of woman as victim—all women, including the “I” of *Malina*, Bachmann herself, and (with quite a dose of self-pity) me. (The “we” of this essay—e.g., “‘We’ have to play by their rules”—is a common rhetorical gesture of the period, invoking all women's commonality. My evident identification with Bachmann and her figure, enabled by cultural feminist assumptions, is also a very common feature of Bachmann scholarship during this period.) In this essay, men's (*all* men's, or, alternatively, “Western” men's) domination over women is a phenomenon of the cultural realm where women are denied a voice and a subjectivity; thus if women (“we”) nonetheless speak, it is only because we have uneasily assumed the subject position (a term that would not have been used at that time) of men. This I then took to be the “message” of *Malina*, which—as I along with many, many other Bachmann scholars of the period insisted—can be read as an anticipation of the theory now used to explain it.

For feminists, then, the immense value of Bachmann's novel derives from its ability to delineate women's situation before the advent of the second wave of feminism and to point us (“us”) in the direction of our preeminent feminist task, the elaboration of an authentic voice for women. In the essay I understand Bachmann's lifelong concern with questions of language as her effort to grope in such a direction via her rejection (like that of the French theorists) of totalizing theories, her allegation of a connection between reason and totalitarianism, and her advocacy of possibilities of signification other than those that existing philosophical systems allow. Such possibilities are enabled by Eros, non-normative sexuality, the body, or the unconscious. The essay draws upon French poststructuralist theory to shore up its cultural feminist approach (discerning no incompatibilities at all between the two methods): women, I maintain, accommodate themselves to the patriarchal system both because they must yield to the strictures of compulsory heterosexuality and because they must subject themselves to the law of the phallus to enter the symbolic order. The struggle between men's attempts to contain female subjectivity (and the language in which it would be expressed) and women's efforts at deconstruction/destruction of the male philo-

sophical/cultural/linguistic order is, I allege, the war of which *Malina* speaks. The experimental quality of *Malina* derives from Bachmann's endeavor to probe the limits of language as she represents this bellicose contest. Her texts are thus shown to manifest precisely the kind of feminist politics that were most en vogue in the U.S. women's movement of the time, and Bachmann proves herself a woman writer worthy of adulation by feminists and supremely fit to enter the feminist pantheon of German literature.

The cultural/French feminist approach proved very satisfying to feminist literary scholars and Bachmann fans, since it revealed the limitations of the male critics who had earlier responded negatively to Bachmann's texts because, it now appeared, they were simply not theoretically au courant. Conversely, this reading of Bachmann's texts provided powerful support for the cultural feminist tendencies that had mostly dominated the West German women's movement from its outset, allowing that direction of feminist analysis now to be substantiated by vanguard theory. Within West (and possibly even East) German feminism, Bachmann early took on the role of iconic figure akin to that played by Virginia Woolf (or possibly a combination of Woolf and Sylvia Plath) within Anglo-American feminism. I am inclined to believe that the immense prestige of Bachmann's work within German feminism and the apparently perfect congruence between her works and the cultural feminist theory of the early 1980s provided a powerful substantiation for the cultural feminist approach within Germany, helping it to maintain its legitimacy there long after it had been drawn into question in Britain and the United States.

To be sure, even in its heyday, cultural feminism was never without its feminist critics in the United States. I discern in this essay no effort at all to distance myself from the theoretical paradigm elaborated by cultural feminists or French feminists in 1981. But (to come to my own defense for a moment) in the same year I also formulated (in "The Female Aesthetic and German Women's Writing," one of the first feminist articles published by *German Quarterly*, thanks to Ruth Klüger Angress, then *GQ*'s editor) a critique of some of the major limitations of that approach:

As the [French feminist] analysis has been received outside of France, it has intersected with and reinforced certain "essentialist" tendencies in German (and American) feminism which argue that the historical facts of women's difference are ontological qualities instead. Likewise, female subjectivity is taken to be capable of articulating itself fully in its radical otherness outside of male discourse when feminist women only open their mouths. . . . Thus, what spoke in the many autobiographical accounts of recent German feminism was at best a woman no more than the inversion of male categories, subjective in the sense of private, emotional, irrational, and receptive. No doubt there is already something liberating in women's daring to objectivate in writing female experiences which have never been so expressed before. But to assume that a pristine woman exists underneath

female socialization, only silenced but not fundamentally shaped by her social experience, has a retarding effect for feminism, for it ignores the enormous political and personal changes which feminists must still undertake. ("Trends" 64)

I am pleased to discover that over two decades ago I was already convinced of the importance of historical analysis and of praxis (a holdover, no doubt, from my earlier training in historical materialism). But like many other feminists of the period, even in this relatively critical account of flaws in the feminism of the early 1980s, I was not then able to raise the kinds of objections to cultural feminism that would emerge over the course of the coming decade: that in fact no basis exists on which to postulate the commonality of the very different kinds of women in the world; that to comprehend women's situation gender was certainly a necessary yet always also a far from sufficient category; that women cannot be perceived as universal victims but are always implicated in the social circumstances of which they are part and may quite willingly contribute to the perpetuation of the oppression of others (including other women), though they may be subordinated themselves. Only later in the decade would such insights begin to inform the analyses of feminist literary scholars—including my own.