

Poetry after Auschwitz: Tracing Trauma in Ingeborg Bachmann's Poetic Work

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Kulturkritik findet sich auf der letzten Stufe der Dialektik von Kultur und Barbarei gegenüber: nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch, und das frisst auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es unmöglich ward, heute Gedichte zu schreiben.

Theodor W. Adorno¹

When Theodor Adorno famously proclaimed in 1949 that writing poetry after Auschwitz was nothing less than barbaric, his future friend and colleague Ingeborg Bachmann was just embarking on an illustrious poetic career. Soon to become the diva of postwar German lyric, she would prove that poetry after Auschwitz was not only possible, but could attain, precisely through its historical vantage point, a uniquely new lyrical tone through the uncanny nature of her meta-phorical juxtapositions, the stark discordances of an avant-garde pessimism interlaced with the lyricism of her utopian imagery. As the leading critic and Bachmann scholar, Sigrid Weigel has posited that such a lyric was entirely new in the postwar literary landscape: “eine Lyrik, die weder Pathosformeln noch den Traditionsbezug auf die klassische Moderne scheute und dabei ein Bewußtsein zum Ausdruck brachte, das sich als Synthese von Schuld- und Opferbewußtsein darstellt.”² Through its dual perspective of both the victimized and the victimizers, a perspective that ultimately conflates the work of mourning into a collective endeavor, Bachmann's poetry—specifically her early poetry—remains unique.

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In this respect, Bachmann's lyric differs from that of her close friend, Holocaust survivor Paul Celan, insofar as his poetry works through his own personal loss and suffering; it thus remains subjectively bound to the victim's perspective. Yet as I shall be arguing here, this will increasingly distinguish the tenor of Bachmann's own lyrical voice. Hence it loses the objectified distance of her early poetry which mourns a loss much more ethereal in quality, lamenting especially the moral abyss into which the German (and by extension the Austrian) culture and its literary tradition had fallen. Indeed, this so-called "Stunde Null" resonates in sublimated form through a great number of her early poems. In her first poetry cycle, *Die gestundete Zeit* (1953), the title itself contains a veiled reference to the moral debt that the zero hour brought with it. So too does the war-torn wasteland prevalent in many of these poems form the backdrop against which her subjective voice of disappointment in a world rife in human suffering stands in relief. In this sense, Adorno's notion of the "barbaric" may be seen to permeate Bachmann's poetry not so much in the sense that his pronouncement is a call to abolish the writing of poetry altogether, but as a reminder that post-Holocaust poetry—in particular post-Holocaust *German* poetry—will always already be haunted by its specters. This is certainly the way in which a number of Bachmann scholars have approached the theme of the Holocaust in her work by attempting to seek a "Begründung eines 'Schreibens nach Auschwitz'"³ in it. However, one has yet to place her "nicht Schreiben nach Auschwitz," that is, her cessation of writing poetry in the early sixties, into this very context. This article attempts to explain Bachmann's conscious abdication of poetry in Adorno's terms.

An important aspect of Bachmann's early lyric, despite the specter of war and fascism so discernable in it, is that Auschwitz and the Holocaust are rarely thematized *per se*. Rather, Bachmann inscribes the Nazi horrors from a detached, formally distanced point of view and shrouds them in an almost mystified allegorical guise. So well concealed were these allusions from an immediate postwar audience that the initial reception of her poetry entirely overlooked—or rather, subconsciously avoided—Bachmann's own *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, i.e., her coming to terms with the Nazi past that so clearly informs them.⁴ Not until the eighties did the historical and political dimension of her poetry take center stage, influenced no doubt by the concurrent wave of feminist criticism that dealt mainly with the much more extroverted political engagement of her prose work. Hence, the conspicuous silence with which Bachmann surrounds the unspeakable event of the Holocaust in her early poetry reflects the general public's suppressed speech about it, a tendency that Bachmann shares with other (German-speaking) authors of the immediate postwar period. The event was simply too traumatic to face head-on and as such, too ineffable to put into words. Thus, while Bachmann's early lyric essentially revolves around the problem of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, it does so in a "language of silence."⁵

This silence is broken *nachträglich*, as it were, with the 2000 publication of unfinished poems from Bachmann's estate in a volume entitled *Ich weiß keine bessere Welt* after one of the poems in the collection.⁶ For these poems—many of them poem fragments—confront the trauma of the Holocaust in ways not articulated in her published poetic work to date. They are, rather, reminiscent of her later prose through the crass imminence of Holocaust imagery and her subjective stylization into one of its victims. Written mostly between 1962 and 1964 following her traumatic break from the Swiss author Max Frisch, they represent her waning attempt to write poetry before “relocating herself,” as she herself called it,⁷ in the prose medium in order to devote her energies entirely to the narrative texts of her *Todesarten* project.

Following Bachmann's own exegesis on the poet's problematic existence in her *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*, Bachmann scholarship generally views her turn away from the lyric in terms of a Chandos-like “Sprachkrise.”⁸ Her reasons for ceasing to write poetry stem from her “Abwendung vom Ästhetizismus”—so Bachmann's explanation of Hoffmannsthal's “unerwarteten Abwendung [. . .] von den reinen zauberischen Gedichten seiner frühen Jahre.”⁹ I propose to view Bachmann's own rejection of aestheticism and indeed, her own surprising turn away from the sublimely poetic language that characterizes her early lyric in a more political light, namely as a final resignation into silence in the interminable wake of Nazi barbarism.

The poems in *Ich weiss keine bessere Welt*, many of them written in the “trauma city” Berlin—more on this shortly—document Bachmann's realization about the limits of poetic expression in a post-Holocaust world. That she chose not to finish and release these poems for publication demonstrates her very struggle to give voice to the “unspeakable” both of a historicized past and of a personalized present, of her flagging attempt to reconcile subjective experience with the objective distance so characteristic of her poetic style. Her renunciation of poetry thus coincides with a full realization of the trauma that was—and is—Auschwitz, a trauma that will find its full expression in her *Todesarten* texts. In an act of belated awareness, she confirms Adorno's Auschwitz dictum, and strangely, at the very time when Adorno recanted it in 1966: ¹⁰ “Das perennierende Leiden hat soviel Recht auf Ausdruck wie der Gemarterte zu brüllen; darum mag falsch gewesen sein, nach Auschwitz ließe sich kein Gedicht mehr schreiben.”¹¹ Fifteen years later, then, the positions of Adorno and Bachmann appear to change places. Bachmann's renunciation of poetry in favor of prose becomes—*nachträglich*—a necessary consequence of Adorno's dictum.

In discussing the significance of the city Berlin as a site of trauma in Bachmann's oeuvre, Sigrid Weigel has already drawn attention to this “Phänomen der Nachträglichkeit.”¹² She refers to “vergessene Szenen aus der Vergangenheit, denen nachträglich, auf Grund späterer Erlebnisse, ihre traumatische Bedeutung verliehen wird, eine Bedeutung, die erst durch den Aufenthalt an

einem historischen Symptomschauplatz wahrnehmbar und lesbar wird.”¹³ Of these forgotten scenes, which Weigel refers to as “Urszenen einer *Autorbiographie*,”¹⁴ one stands out in particular: Bachmann’s memory of the arrival of Nazi troops marching into her hometown of Klagenfurt when she twelve years old. Decades later Bachmann recalls the scene as “etwas so Entsetzliches, dass mit diesem Tag meine Erinnerung anfängt.”¹⁵ This much discussed reminiscence, which Bachmann first made public in a 1971 interview,¹⁶ has been criticized precisely because of its *Nachträglichkeit*, i.e., that Bachmann retroactively contrived the memory as constitutive of her authorial persona.¹⁷ Once one, however, understands her delayed reminiscence in psychoanalytic terms of trauma formation, then her deferred recognition of the event becomes the very characteristic of a traumatized subject.

Hence the development of her poetry — indeed, of her work as a whole — adheres to a pathology of trauma in that a violent psychic wound, experienced at the time only latently, remains for the most part buried at its origin and reemerges years later, triggered by a second traumatic event that recalls the initial trauma into consciousness. Bachmann’s encounter with Nazi fascism comprises the first event in which, as Weigel states, “Dunkelstellen in der individuellen Erinnerung mit Bildern aus dem kollektiven Gedächtnis überblendet [werden]” (317). The second event is, I contend, Bachmann’s traumatic separation from Max Frisch that caused her mental breakdown in the early sixties and which led to her hospital stays in Zürich and — most traumatic for her — in Berlin. As a good number of the poems in *Ich weiß keine bessere Welt* document, these experiences take on a fascist dimension, her lyrical I assuming the persona of a “Versuchs-kaninchen” reminiscent of the cruel and torturous experimentation by Nazi doctors. What therefore appears from a more distanced, third-person perspective through the female protagonist in *Das Buch Franza* as “Spätschäden weiblicher Versuchsofper” (the research project on female concentration camp victims that Franza’s husband Jordan undertakes), takes on the highly personalized form of a first-person lyrical I in these unpublished poems. This second traumatic event, then, reverses the relationship between the private and collective memory of the first, to refer back to Weigel’s statement regarding the conflation of “individueller Dunkelstellen” and “kollektives Gedächtnis.” For in the second trauma, the dark sites of a collective past — the “Urszene” of her authorial persona — are overshadowed by personal memories in ways that obstruct her writing of poetry altogether.

In order to trace the etiology of trauma as manifested in the development of Holocaust representations in Bachmann’s lyric work, I shall take a close look at three poems from the beginning, middle, and end of her lyrical period: 1) *Früher Mittag*, one of the poems with which she debuted at the since famous 1952 meeting of the *Gruppe ‘47* in Niendorf, published a year later in her first poetry collection, *Die gestundete Zeit*; 2) *Exil*, first published separately in Milo Dor’s 1957 anthology, *Botteghe Oscure*, and 3) *Nach vielen*

Jahren (ca. 1963) from the posthumous collection *Ich weiß keine bessere Welt* discussed above. What we can observe in Bachmann's poetry is the following paradoxical development: the further we move away in time from the end of the war, the more pessimistic her poetry becomes and the more forceful her references to the Holocaust. While these events remain enshrouded in silence in her early poetry and as such repressed from full consciousness, her lyrical voice evolves into an increasingly traumatized realization of the horrors through a projective identification with the victims. This transference identification becomes so strong that the distinction between self and other breaks down entirely in what the intellectual historian Dominick LaCapra has termed "secondary traumatization and surrogate victimage."¹⁸ Comparable to actual Holocaust survivors who have taken their lives long after the event, her identity—in this case, her authorial lyric identity—is finally placed into question to the point of shattering it.¹⁹

I begin my analysis with the free-verse poem *Früher Mittag*, which Bachmann composed shortly after her first trip to Germany in 1951. Belonging to one of her better-known poems from *Die gestundete Zeit* (due in part to the attention Bertolt Brecht paid it),²⁰ it is also the one from this first collection in which Holocaust imagery is most immediately recognizable. Rather than the more veiled references to the Nazi past as in other poems from this early period, here time and place—seven years later under Germany's blackened skies—appear unambiguously transparent. Peter Beicken appropriately refers to the poem as "eine poetische Trauerarbeit" and likens it to Celan's *Todesfuge*.²¹ Yet in stark contrast to the explicit violence of Celan's poem, Bachmann's *Früher Mittag* depicts a peaceful landscape in which a hushed silence surrounding the event envelops the poem, personified at the poem's conclusion in the ghostly form of "das Unsägliche" as it steals over the land:

Früher Mittag

Still grünt die Linde im eröffneten Sommer,
weit aus den Städten gerückt, flirrt
der mattglänzende Tagmond. Schon ist Mittag,
schon regt sich im Brunnen der Strahl,
schon hebt sich unter den Scherben
Des Märchenvogels geschundener Flügel,
Und die vom Steinwurf entstellte Hand
Sinkt ins erwachende Korn.

Wo Deutschlands Himmel die Erde schwärzt,
sucht sein enthaupteter Engel ein Grab für den Haß
und reicht dir die Schüssel des Herzens.

Eine Handvoll Schmerz verliert sich über den Hügel.

Sieben Jahre später
fällt es dir wieder ein,
am Brunnen vor dem Tore,
blick nicht zu tief hinein,
die Augen gehen dir über.

Sieben Jahre später,
in einem Totenhaus
trinken die Henker von gestern
den goldenen Becher aus.
die Augen täten dir sinken.

Schon ist Mittag, in der Asche
krümmt sich das Eisen, auf den Dorn
ist die Fahne gehißt, und auf den Felsen
uralten Traums bleibt fortan
der Adler geschmiedet.

Nur die Hoffnung kauert erblindet im Licht.

Lös ihr die Fessel, führ sie
die Halde herab, leg ihr
die Hand auf das Aug, daß sie
kein Schatten versengt!

Wo Deutschlands Erde den Himmel schwärzt,
Sucht die Wolke nach Worten und füllt den Krater mit Schweigen,
Eh sie der Sommer im schütterten Regen vernimmt.

Das Unsägliche geht, leise gesagt, übers Land:
Schon ist Mittag.

The poem's locus is the countryside, "weit aus den Städten gerückt," a serene yet scarred countryside reminiscent of Claude Lanzmann's haunted landscapes in his epic film *Shoah*. For already in the third line of the poem, the serenity of this bucolic scene is compromised by the shadow that, symbolically, the "mattglänzende Tagmond" casts over it; furthermore, by the "battered wing of the fairy-tale bird—"des Märchenvogels geschundener Flügel"—as it lifts itself up from under the shards; and also, by the deformed hand—"die vom Steinwurf entstellte Hand"—in the last line of this first stanza, which brings human agency to the eerie peacefulness of what was once clearly a site of destruction.

The second stanza leaves no mistake about the exact geographical location of that destructive site and the reason it came to be one: “Wo Deutschlands Himmel die Erde schwärzt/sucht sein enthaupteter Engel ein Grab für den Haß.” As Sigrid Weigel has noted, such a precise geographical reference to the Nazi genocide is atypical of Bachmann’s early poetry;²² most of the poems remain situated in an unnamed meta-landscape much like in the first stanza—allusions to the Holocaust are vaguely discernible but often carry surplus meanings. A good example of this is in the last lines of the first stanza, where the ancient practice of stoning conflates the persecution under National Socialism with that of Biblical times. A specific, recent historical event is thus placed into a much broader religious and ethical framework that encompasses universal human suffering, symbolized also by the beheaded angel in line 10.

The seven-year time interval of the fourth and fifth stanzas, which refer at once to the postwar years (i.e., from 1945 to the date that the poem was written in 1952) and to the Hitler years from 1938 to 1945, may be placed into this broadened historical context. And even the Hitler years are rendered ambiguous. For one, they allude to the seven-year Austrian *Anschluß*²³ that informs the unconscious substrata of the poem: the traumatic event of the Nazi takeover that Bachmann recalls years later. But the years also refer to an event that commentators of the poem have thus far overlooked, namely to the seven-year period of the Nazis’ overt pogrom against the Jews that began with the infamous *Reichskristallnacht* on November 9, 1938, to which the poem alludes by way of its reference to stoning and shards in the first stanza. Hence, the act of stoning, read against the backdrop of the ancient Biblical practice, serves both as a Biblical metaphor for the persecution of the Jews and also as an allusion to a specific historical event. On this “night of broken glass,” 190 German synagogues were burned to the ground, 8000 Jewish stores were pillaged and destroyed, and over 100 people were killed. In the poem, the seven years of Nazi terror that began on this fateful night merge imperceptibly with the seven years that follow. For “yesterday’s hangmen” of the next stanza—“die Henker von gestern”—addresses the failure of a genuine *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* since they—the perpetrators—unabashedly “drink the golden goblet dry” (an allusion to Goethe’s poem, *Der König in Thule*, to which I shall return); that is, they continue to enjoy privileges in what was once a house of death. Hence, your eyes would sink in shame and guilt—“die Augen täten dir sinken.” The conditional tense indicates a contingency: *if* you looked, you *would* see that many of those involved in the unspeakable crimes of Auschwitz—the quintessential *Totenhaus*—remain at large. But the theme of the poem is precisely that you must avert your gaze because the sight is too traumatic.

The fact that scholarship on the poem remains divided as to whether the seven years refer to the time before 1945 (that is, to the *Anschluß*, as do Bürger and Achberger)²⁴ or after 1945 (for example, Oelmann,²⁵ Höller,²⁶ and Barsch²⁷), without an eye for the purposeful conflation of the two time

periods,²⁸ addresses the very problem regarding the transition from fascism to the postwar years that underlies the poem: that the so-called “Stunde Null” in terms of a new beginning, of a complete break in continuity with the past, did not actually take place.²⁹ This is signified by the ambiguously twilight noon hour.³⁰ The implicit passing from zero to twelve—from midnight to noon—represents the alacrity of Germany’s political and economic upswing, the so-called *Wirtschaftswunder* that has come to define the country’s restoration years. This “High Noon”³¹ has effectively eclipsed the zero hour, and one could read the image in line 9, “Wo Deutschland’s Himmel die Erde schwärzt,” which evokes the image of a total eclipse of the sun, in this way. The chiasmic inversion of the line in the penultimate stanza—“Wo Deutschlands Erde den Himmel schwärzt”—Germany’s earth now blackening the sky, expresses what I posit is the poem’s implicit inversion and ultimate conflation of midnight and noon: the supposed *Kahlschlag* of the “zero hour” (midnight) is *aufgehoben* or annulled by Germany’s basking in a kind of Nietzschean “great noon” of its quick recovery, the horrific crimes of its past all too readily forgotten.

There can be little question that Bachmann’s use of the noonday image is “an intertextual reworking of Nietzsche’s trope of ‘der große Mittag’ in *Also Sprach Zarathustra*,” to follow Leslie Morris, who places this Nietzschean correspondance at the center of her reading of *Früher Mittag*.³² Indeed, a conflation of midnight and noon into the image of a “großer Mittag” represents a key trope in Nietzsche’s book. Quoting Zarathustra’s words in “Das trunkene Lied”—“Eben ward meine Welt vollkommen, Mitternacht ist auch Mittag;”—Morris suggests that noon as well as midnight mark “a complete absence of shadows” and “as such, noon can be emblematic of the moment where the past has disappeared, or where the past is not traceable.”³³ Morris reads Bachmann’s noon metaphor in line with Nietzsche’s transvaluation of midnight in terms of a transitional trope in which the cause and effect of history are reversed and the past ultimately blotted out in anticipation of what “lies beyond” a new beginning.³⁴

While I agree with Morris’s *reading* of Nietzsche’s “großer Mittag” in Bachmann’s poem, let me suggest a more subversive *rewriting* on Bachmann’s part (activating here the reader/writer opposition with which Morris herself works and which draws on Sabine Gözl’s reading strategy of Bachmann’s poetry).³⁵ For while Morris’s observations are certainly correct in that both noon and midnight cast no shadow and hence may be seen as emblematic of an untraceable past in the poem, *Früher Mittag* is, after all, about none other than a dark cloud casting its shadow over a distinctly traceable past. The poem is constructed around the very tension between a (Nietzschean) shadowless past and a past literally engulfed by shadows, hence making the poem a “Reading in the Twilight,” to follow Gözl, in quite a literal sense.³⁶ In this context, the recent book by the Lacanian critic Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two*, who also argues for the importance of a

split reading of Nietzsche, specifically of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, is especially telling. There Zupančič argues that the figure of midday represents the privileged metaphor in Nietzsche's thought: "Nietzsche invents and uses this theme [of midday] in order to provide a figure for the idea of a new beginning, the idea of an event after which nothing will be as before."³⁷ Emblematic of his *Übermensch*, it signifies a zenith and breaking point where animal and man, man and superman, part ways, marking the death of one era and the birth of another.³⁸ Bachmann, I contend, deploys Nietzsche's noontide metaphor in an ironic (anachronistic) inversion: the Shoah represents the event after which nothing will ever again be as before, not, however, in the Nietzschean sense of a highpoint, but precisely its opposite, of an absolute low point in human civilization. Rather than ushering in the sublime new era of the superman (which, ominously, had the Nazis won their war, could even be read in terms of the sublime new era of the supposed Arian super-race), this event represents a rupture with the past insofar as it marks the beginning of a morally bankrupt era. In counterpoint to Nietzsche's figure of the shortest shadow, Bachmann's noon casts the longest one: "Wo Deutschlands Himmel die Erde schwärzt." This is indeed a shadow that figuratively engulfs the entire Earth.

A similar "Symbolumkehrung" is operative throughout the poem. Christa Bürger has already pointed this out, calling attention to a number of figurative inversions, including the inverted shadow/sun symbolism detailed above: "das Eisen, das sich in der Asche (nicht der Glut) krümmt, der Schatten, der (statt der Sonne) versengt, der Adler der (statt Prometheus) an den Felsen geschmiedet ist."³⁹ Bürger rightly questions if such a systematic "Umkehrung des Bildes [. . .] nicht zu einer Entleerung des Bildes und damit letztlich zur Zerstörung des Symbols führen muß."⁴⁰ I would agree that it does, but this should not be seen in critical terms; rather, such a de(con)struction of the poetic symbol and trope—or "Prozess der Entsymbolisierung," as Marianne Schuller has argued⁴¹—is a purposeful strategy on Bachmann's part that implicates the "Entleerung" and "Zerstörung" (to use here Bürger's terms) of the very culture that produced them. As has often been pointed out, one of these tropes is the "Brunnen vor dem Tore" in the third line of the fourth stanza, which refers verbatim to the first line of the Wilhelm Müller's, *Der Lindendbaum*, set to music by Schubert in a well-known song from his *Winterreise* cycle. The linden tree is, in turn, the poem's introductory subject: "Stillt günt die Linde im eröffneten Sommer." The golden goblet from Goethe's *König in Thule*, Gretchen's song in *Faust* from which Bachmann also cites several verses verbatim, is another familiar trope that Bachmann recycles and (by appropriating it to the "Henker von gestern") inverts. While Bachmann, then, carries forth the German lyrical tradition by deploying familiar poetic images from readily recognizable poems and songs, she simultaneously exposes their emptiness in the face of unspeakable atrocity and as such, places these images under erasure.

An important aspect of the poem regards its sustained present tense throughout, while nonetheless enveloping all three temporal levels: past, present, and future are each prominent in their own way. The past is thus not rendered as completed but as continuing into the present. Indeed, it is *re-presented* as memory, or rather, as a tension between remembering and forgetting: “Sieben Jahre später/fällt es dir wieder ein.” Central to the poem is thus the remembrance of a past that is too difficult to face: “blick nicht zu tief hinein/die Augen gehen dir über.” The “Brunnen” or well into which one should not look too deeply figures here unmistakably as a symbol for the unconscious. *Früher Mittag* may thus be read as embodying—latently—the very structure of traumatic recall: the creation of a psychic wound, suppressed into the deep well of the unconsciousness, that intermittently surfaces—“presents itself”—in the form of an unbearable, “unspeakable” event.

Somber as the main tenor of the poem is, a glimmer of hope nonetheless breaks through, especially by way of the allegorical embodiment of hope in the single verse of the seventh stanza: “Nur die Hoffnung kauert erblindet im Licht.” Such a utopian moment constitutes a salient feature of Bachmann’s early poetry, as does, in the following stanza, the speaker’s sudden shift into the imperative mood in a direct address to the reader: “Lös ihr die Fessel / führ sie die Halde herab / leg ihr die Hand auf das Aug / daß sie kein Schatzen versengt!” The image of shielding hope’s eyes from the brutality “of the light which blinds her,” implies—when read together with the oxymoronic metaphor of the “scorching shadow” at the end of the stanza—that the light in question is to be understood as a fire. Even before the term was coined, then, we have here an allusion to the Holocaust in its original sense of a massive destruction by fire. This is underscored by the blackened skies of the following stanza, calling forth the image of an endless stream of dark clouds emanating from the crematoria. The ominous cloud is then brought into direct relationship with the language of silence: “die Wolke [such]t nach Worten und füllt den Krater mit Schweigen.” The last one-verse stanza concludes with the image of “the unspeakable” that one could easily imagine taking the form of the black cloud in the previous stanza, slowly on the move and casting its extensive shadow: “Das Unsägliche geht, leise gesagt, übers Land: schon ist Mittag.” The unspeakable is hence declared the very subject of the poem, a barely audible whisper that hushes up an atrocious past, repressed from Germany’s consciousness by the highly ambiguous “great noon” of its revival.

The metaphoric rendering of (the German) language in the image of a dark cloud also appears in Bachmann’s later poem *Exil*. Though written in 1957 only five years after *Früher Mittag* and a full ten years before her last published poems (including the well-known *Böhmen liegt am Meer*), it is often cited as an example of her late lyric because of its radically pessimistic tone. Yet the similarities between *Exil* and *Früher Mittag* are apparent; for example,

the “greening linden trees” and “golden goblets” in *Früher Mittag* parallel the “greening land” and “golden cities” in *Exil*. But these poetic signifiers that draw on a familiar lyrical tradition have in the latter poem receded far into the background. The much more salient differences between the two poems rely on the change in voice and perspective. *Früher Mittag* maintains an objective distance to history as lived experience; the speaker of the poem emerges only by identification with the second-person addressee “Du” (e.g., “die Augen gehen dir über;” “Lös ihr die Fessel”). *Exil*, by contrast, features a first-person speaker who identifies fully with a victimized historical subject, namely as an allegorical dead man walking:

Exil

Ein Toter bin ich der wandelt
gemeldet nirgends mehr
unbekannt im Reich des Präfekten
überzählig in den goldenen Städten
und im grünenden Land

abgetan lange schon
und mit nichts bedacht

Nur mit Wind mit Zeit und mit Klang

der ich unter Menschen nicht leben kann

Ich mit der deutschen Sprache
dieser Wolke um mich
die ich halte als Haus
treibe durch alle Sprachen

O wie sie sich verfinstert
die dunklen die Regentöne
nur die wenigen fallen

In hellere Zonen trägt dann sie den Toten hinauf

Bachmann originally entitled the poem “Der ewige Jude.”⁴² That she broadened the title’s connotation to encompass the existential condition of the outcast in general, thereby veiling the reference to the Nazi past, is once again characteristic of her poetological method of privileging the universal over the particular. Yet, discreet but unmistakable references surface within the poem: the word “Reich” in the third line of first stanza is a clear allusion to the language of the Third Reich, a motif which is then expanded in the fifth stanza: “Ich mit der deutschen Sprache / dieser Wolke um mich / die ich halte als

Haus." As Hans Höller comments in comparing the metaphor of a "language cloud" in *Früher Mittag* with that in *Exil*: "das Dichter-Ich hat sich ganz in diesen dunklen Wolkenschatten zurückgezogen. Das traditionelle Motiv des exilierten Dichters ist nun zum Bild vom Exil des Dichters im Post-Holocaust geworden."⁴³ The German language—however tainted and "verfinstert"—nonetheless serves as the only spiritual home for the exiled German-Jewish poet who has quite literally been forced into the existence of the legendary wandering Jew. But even the German language seems to offer little hope of refuge. In the last analysis, it is not only the "darkened" German language, but language in general ("diese Wolke um mich, die ich [. . .] treibe durch alle Sprachen") from which Bachmann's speaker feels exiled. For the attempt to find a sense of community in any other human tongue proves in vain as well: "der ich unter Menschen nicht leben kann."

Bachmann's metaphor of house-holding with language ("diese Wolke [. . .] die ich halte als Haus") alludes unmistakably to Heidegger's notion of language as "das Haus des Seins," as Oelmann and others have already pointed out.⁴⁴ Bachmann, who wrote her dissertation on *Die kritische Aufnahme der Existenzphilosophie Martin Heideggers* from the hindsight of Heidegger's seduction by National Socialism, however short-lived, distances herself from the problematic aspects of his language philosophy.⁴⁵ Much like her reworking of Nietzsche's "großer Mittag," Bachmann turns Heidegger's "house of being" on its head. For what Bachmann's *Exil* renders as a troublesome, uncanny locus—uncanny in the ambiguous sense of "unheimlich"—Heidegger describes as sublimely "heimlich," exalting the domestication of language in which poets and thinkers, like himself, act as its "housekeepers":

Die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins. In ihrer Behausung wohnt der Mensch. Die Denkenden und Dichtenden sind die Wächter dieser Behausung. Ihr Wachen ist das Vollbringen der Offenbarkeit des Seins, insofern sie diese durch ihr Sagen zur Sprache bringen und in der Sprache aufbewahren.⁴⁶

Insofar as Bachmann's gloomy house of language becomes not a locus of *Sein* but of *Nicht-Sein*, a mournful house of the dead, she subverts the Heideggerian trope of language as "Haus des Seins" and of the poet as "Wächter dieser Behausung." The exiled German-Jewish writer with whom Bachmann's speaker identifies becomes but a specter for the victims of the Shoah, for all those who can no longer bring "ihr Sagen zur Sprache;" in other words, for all those whose brutal murder has forced them into a grave of silence. The traumatic re-experiencing of the event hence carries with it such a "collapse of witnessing," as Dori Laub calls it, insofar as such witnessing becomes itself an impossibility.⁴⁷

It has often been noted that *Exil* abstains from using punctuation, an anomaly in Bachmann's poetry (only two further poems refrain from it, *Reklame* and *Schatten Rosen Schatten*). Perhaps the poem's theme regarding

the limits of language may account for Bachmann's decision: the conventional linguistic rules prove useless in view of language's inability to establish meaningful communication in the corruptible "Reich der Präfekten" and "goldenen Städten" from which the lyrical I feels so estranged and dejected. Cultural critic George Steiner's powerful indictment regarding the corruptibility of language in the face of the Nazi death camps comes to mind here:

Languages have great reserves of life. They can absorb masses of hysteria, illiteracy, and cheapness. [. . .] But there comes a breaking point. Use a language to conceive, organize, and justify Belsen; use it to make out specifications for gas ovens; use it to dehumanize man during twelve years of calculated bestiality. Something will happen to it. Make of words what Hitler and Goebbels and the hundred thousand *Untersturmführer* made: conveyors of terror and falsehood. Something will happen to the words. Something of the lies and sadism will settle in the marrow of the language.⁴⁸

Bachmann's *Exil* shares the same radical indictment and alienation from (the German) language. Only with the wind, time, and sound—"nur mit Wind mit Zeit und mit Klang"—can the lyrical I find communion, giving the speaker of the poem an elemental, almost cosmic quality. The lexeme "Klang" corresponds to the "Regentöne" of the last stanza; these "rain tones" or sounds connote musical notes falling like rain from the dark cloud of (the German) language, a metaphor that expresses the utopian quality Bachmann gives music as a universal human language beyond the corruptibility of the spoken word. Her essay "Die wunderliche Musik," written the same year as the poem *Exil* in 1957, and especially her later essay "Musik und Dichtung" (1959–60) champion the redemptive power of music as "die letzte Sprache aller Menschen nach dem Turmbau."

A utopian moment is, then, present in *Exil* as well, to return to my comparison with *Früher Mittag*; however, the poem's ghostlike speaker, "der Tote," finds deliverance not on earth but in the "hellere Zonen" of the heavens—a metaphor with a discernibly Christian flavor of rising from the dead into a redemptive hereafter. The poem articulates, in essence, a longing for death—a utopia quite literally not of this world.

Both *Früher Mittag* and *Exil* may be read as allegories of traumatic loss in that they mourn a loss both real and symbolic: the real victims of the Shoah on the one hand, and the German language as symbolic victim on the other. *Exil* more specifically mourns a lost poetic heritage in real terms of those who were actually forced into exile and in symbolic terms of a self-imposed exile "within"—what has come to be known as *innere Emigration*. By once again conflating the real historical condition of the German-Jewish poet forced into exile with that of an outcast from the so-called human community of language in a figurative sense—a community in which language functioned in the service of inhumane, barbaric ends—Bachmann's poem turns the condition of

exile in the sense of the lost common ground of language into a permanent state of being. As Heinrich Böll states in his reminiscences of Bachmann, her own personal sense of exile may well find its origin in the childhood trauma of the Nazi takeover when he suggests that on this date “an einem zwölfjährigen Mädchen, das Inge genannt wird, Heimatvertreibung stattgefunden hat.”⁴⁹ In this sense, *Exil* can be read as a personal document of a lost homeland that has, from the onset, marked her literary persona.

Regarding the *Trauerarbeit* at work in the two poems, there is, however, a significant difference. *Früher Mittag* may be seen to represent what Freud, in his seminal essay “Mourning and Melancholia,” places into the realm of mourning, or normal grief work, while *Exil* exhibits symptoms typical of melancholia. The latter is a pathological condition of mourning characterized by the subject’s identification with the lost object and subsequent withdrawal from the world. Particularly the ambivalence towards the lost object that marks melancholia makes itself felt in *Exil* through the speaker’s strong identification with the German language (“Ich mit der deutschen Sprache [. . .] die ich halte als Haus”) but also alienation therefrom (“oh, wie sie sich verfinstert”). As Freud states, “In melancholia, countless separate struggles are carried out over the object, in which hate and love contend with each other.”⁵⁰ Yet even *Früher Mittag*, though it appears to describe a successful process of mourning by severing the attachment to the lost object—manifested in the objectified position of the speaker between the perspective of victim and perpetrator—nonetheless exhibits melancholic aspects that anticipate the severely depressive tenor of her later poems and of which *Exil* is already symptomatic. For an important feature of melancholia is the repression of traumatic memories from consciousness that eventually leads the subject on the kind of closed, narcissistic path represented in *Exil*.

In *Früher Mittag*, the need to silence the atrocities of the recent past expresses the obstruction of such a memory. *Nachträglichkeit* is hence a significant aspect of the memory blockage at work in the poem that inevitably turns mourning into melancholia. One could thus say that the suppression of “das Unsägliche” in *Früher Mittag* takes the form of a melancholic “Toter” in the later poem.

Such a delayed, melancholic awareness is even more prominent in the last poem under consideration here. The very first line of the poem, “Nach vielen Jahren” (as I will title the poem after its first line here, not to be confused with the earlier poem *Nach vielen Jahren* from Bachmann’s second collection, *Anrufung des großen Bären*), places this deferred recognition into relief. Its theme of *Nachträglichkeit* stands out even more through the repetition of the same verse with its added emphasis at the beginning of the second stanza: “Nach vielen Jahren erst, alles / gewußt.” Composed some five to seven years after *Exil*, it dates from about the same time as Bachmann’s renowned *Keine Delikatessen*

of 1963, as do the rest of the poems from *Ich weiß keine bessere Welt*. The volume ignited a heated controversy over the decision of the heirs to release these (as some critics contend, scandalous) pieces that Bachmann never authorized for publication—poems and poem fragments of a highly personal nature that document the depth of her despair following her traumatic break from Max Frisch. Yet, the very fact that Bachmann did not destroy them as she is reputed to have done with some of her other work suggests, as the prominent FAZ reviewer Reinhart Baumgart argues, that she wanted them saved for posterity.⁵¹ What detractors of the volume, Peter Hamm leading the way, find especially objectionable is the author's (perceived) wailful tone and in particular, her heavy-handed stylization into a Holocaust victim.⁵² The late poetry of Sylvia Plath very likely influenced Bachmann in this respect (especially Plath's famous *Daddy*), for which *Nach vielen Jahren*, which also calls forth traumatic images similar to those in *The Bell Jar*,⁵³ serves as exemplary:

Nach vielen Jahren

Nach vielen Jahren
 nach viel erfahrenem Unrecht,
 beispiellosen Verbrechen rundum,
 und Unrecht, vor dem nach Recht
 schreien sinnlos wird.

Nach vielen Jahren erst, alles
 gewußt, alles erfahren,
 alles bekannt, geordnet, gebucht,
 jetzt erst geh ich da, lieg ich da,
 von Stromstößen geschüttelt,
 zitternd über das ganze Segeltuch
 ganz Haut, nach keinem Ermessen,
 in meinem Zelt Einsamkeit,
 heimgesucht von jeder Nadelspritze,
 jeder Würgspur, jedem Druckmal,
 ganz ein Körper, auf dem die Geschichte
 und nicht die eigene, ausgetragen wird,
 mit zerrautem Haar und Schreien, die
 am Bellevue die Polizei dem Krankenwagen
 übergibt, auf Tragbahnen geschnallt, im Regen,
 von Spritzen betäubt, von Spritzen
 ins Wachen geholt, ins Begreifen,
 was doch niemand begreift.

Wie soll einer allein soviel erliden können,
 soviele Deportationen, soviel Staub, sooft hinabgestoßen
 sooft gehäutet, lebendig verbrannt, sooft

geschunden, erschossen, vergast, wie soll einer
sich hinhalten in eine Raserei
die ihm fremd ist und der heult über eine erschlagene Fliege.

Soll ich aufhören, da zu sein, damit dies aufhört.
soll ich die Qual mir abkürzen, mit 50 Nembutal,
soll ich, da ich niemand in die Hände falle,
aus allen Händen fallen, die morden

Desperate, shrill, almost hysterical in tone, the poem is composed like so many others in the volume in a style that one could best describe as traumatic realism. The poem works through Bachmann's own experience as a psychiatric patient, specifically, her treatment in Berlin's Martin-Luther-Krankenhaus as alluded to by way of reference to Bellevue in the second stanza.⁵⁴ It depicts the experience of shock therapy in a psychiatric ward (cf. Plath's *Bell Jar*), of being transported on a stretcher in pouring rain, strapped down and numbed by tranquilizers. This horrific experience is set against the backdrop of trauma on a grand, historical scale, specifically, of Nazi torture and abuse. In no other Bachmann poem do we find such direct and crass references to the Holocaust—to deportations and gassings—as here in the third stanza. No attempt is made to disguise the horrors in poetic language, i.e., to give them the aesthetic veneer so characteristic of her earlier poems. In contrast to *Früher Mittag*, for example, which inscribes the Nazi past from a distanced perspective divorced from personal experience, here a first-person speaker subjectifies her own history in brutally immediate terms. Even the poem *Exil* with its first-person masculine speaker—"ein Toter bin ich der wandelt"—seems distanced and contrived in comparison. And while the lyrical I of *Exil* identifies itself on a metaphoric axis with the victims of the Shoah, as I argue above, such a spiritual, metaphoric identification gives way in *Nach vielen Jahren* to a real, physical identification that appropriates the others' suffering—if not the others' history—as her own. Their murderous history is carried out specifically on her body: "ganz Körper, auf dem die Geschichte / und nicht die eigne, ausgetragen wird" (lines 16–17). The body—a pure tortured, traumatized body—becomes itself a political site, whereby death represents, similar to the poem *Exil*, a type of salvation.

We seem to be very close indeed to the kind of trauma that defines Jacques Lacan's register of the real, encompassing the pure materiality of existence. The repeated reference to skin as "Fleisch" in the poems from *Ich weiß keine bessere Welt* emphasizes this "real," material dimension of being,⁵⁵ also present in this poem through the emphasis on "ganz Haut [. . .] ganz ein Körper" as detailed above. The Lacanian real is also the realm of psychosis in which the symbolic is foreclosed. So too does *Nach vielen Jahren* appear to resist the symbolic in a poetological sense through its absence of metaphor in comparison to Bachmann's earlier poetry.

Here a significant distinction between this poem and the earlier *Früher Mittag* becomes apparent, namely the different manifestations of Freudian repetition in each, *Früher Mittag* adhering much more to the notion of “Wiederkehr” while *Nach vielen Jahren* incorporates rather Freudian “Wiederholung.” Lacan juxtaposes these two concepts as representative of the symbolic and real registers respectively, “Wiederkehr” expressing “a repetition of the repressed as symptom or signifier,”⁵⁶ what Lacan terms the *automaton*, while “Wiederholung” entails a compulsive or “traumatic repetition” (51) as an “encounter with the real” (53), what Lacan terms the *tuché*.⁵⁷ Insofar as *Früher Mittag* uses repetition primarily by reinscribing former canonical poems into her own, hence (subversively) duplicating a poetic tradition, it remains situated on the symbolic level of “Wiederkehr” qua *automaton*. The repetitions of *Nach vielen Jahren*, on the other hand, work on a much more immediate plane, incorporating a ritually compulsive element into the poem by way of the linked repetition of specific words: “Nach vielen Jahren . . . nach vielen . . . Nach vielen Jahren erst . . . alles gewusst, alles erfahren, alles bekannt . . . jetzt erst geh ich da, lieg ich da, von jeder Nadelspritze, jeder Würdspur, jedem Druckmal, . . . von Spritzen betäubt, von Spritzen ins Wachen geholt, ins Begreifen . . . Wie soll einer . . . soviel . . . soviele . . . soviel . . . sooft, sooft . . . sooft . . . sooft . . . wie soll einer . . . Soll ich . . . soll ich . . . soll ich . . .” One is reminded of the compulsively repetitive tenor of Paul Celan’s *Todesfuge*, in which the repetitions of its first stanza may be extracted as follows: “Schwarze Milch der Früher wir trinken sie abends . . . wir trinken sie . . . wir trinken sie . . . wir trinken und trinken / wir schaufeln . . . der schreibt / der schreibt . . . er schreibt . . . er pfeift . . . er pfeift . . . er befiehlt . . .” Much like Bachmann’s *Nach vielen Jahren*, Celan’s poem is marked by a what one could call traumatic repetition and hence emblematic of a Lacanian return of the real.

Bachmann seems indeed to be setting foot in what she refers to in her second *Frankfurter Vorlesung*, “Über Gedichte,” as “ein neues Gelände”—this in reference to the late poetry of Paul Celan—breaking new ground precisely through the complete disappearance of a metaphorical dimension:

Die Metaphern sind völlig verschwunden, die Worte haben jede Verkleidung, Verhüllung abgelegt, kein Wort fliegt mehr einem anderen zu, berauscht ein anderes. Nach einer schmerzlichen Wendung, einer äußerst harten Überprüfung der Bezüge von Wort und Welt, kommt es zu neuen Definitionen. [Die Gedichte. . .] sind unbequem, abtastend, verlässlich, so verlässlich im Benennen, daß es heißen muß, bis hierher und nicht weiter.⁵⁸

Although the use of metaphor has not entirely disappeared from the poems in *Ich weiß keine bessere Welt*, this type of “new” poetic language can be said to characterize them in that they clearly privilege metonymy over metaphor.⁵⁹ And even with the metaphors Bachmann crafts, she very often distances herself precisely from their poetic aestheticism. The melancholic poem that

begins with the line, “Mein Gedichte sind mir abhanden gekommen,” contains a good example of this when she laments that “eine gepfefferte Metapher müßte einem einfallen,”⁶⁰ thereby implying, in the self-reflexive act of crafting this brilliant metaphor, that she has relinquished doing so. The published poem *Keine Delikatessen*, often mistakenly viewed as her final one, is of course programmatic for this kind of “Absage an den Ästhetizismus.” Its paradoxical stance in relation to the power of metaphor is most obvious when she asks: “Soll ich eine Metapher austaffieren mit einer Mandelblüte?”⁶¹ By carrying out what she calls into question, namely by using metaphor to attain the sublime poetic voice she so seriously calls into question, she at once affirms the aesthetic potential of poetic language while renouncing her capacity—or rather her will (hence the privileged modal “sollen” in the poem)—to continue composing it. The chiasmic inversion and implicit self-destruction of symbols and metaphors that we have already encountered in *Früher Mittag* is rendered explicit here.

Thus, in regard to her own poetic voice as opposed to the metaphor-emptied poetry of the late Celan, Bachmann may well have come to the conclusion that such a complete absence of figurative language, while successful in Celan’s poetry, did not sustain her own lyrical voice. This would explain her decision to abandon the genre. Without metaphor, her poetry loses its richness and resonance. With it, the intrinsic symbolic quality of language—and accordingly, the logocentric signifying system as such—is “authorized” in a way that Bachmann resists and wants to subvert. And how closely this delayed realization is tied up with Adorno’s pronouncement about the barbarism of writing poetry after Auschwitz is obvious in the second *Frankfurter Vorlesung*, “Über Gedichte” (1960), from which I have been quoting. For there Bachmann addresses the “Schuldfragen in der Kunst,” which she, as she insists, “engstirnig [. . .] derart in den Vordergrund rück[t]” by referring to Gottfried Benn and Ezra Pound as prime examples of poets led astray by aestheticism. She concludes “daß es für jene beiden Dichter, und sie sind Dichter, daran ist kein Zweifel, nur ein Schritt war aus dem reinen Kunsthimmel zur Anbiederung mit der Barbarei.”⁶² Whether consciously or unconsciously, Bachmann alludes here to Adorno’s dictum, implicating that her own renunciation of poetry was indeed influenced by it.

Regarding the poem *Nach vielen Jahren* along with the others in the collection, we must remember that Bachmann purposely left them behind as fragments, unfinished. One might view them as so-called “Bruchstücke einer Poetik,” motivated by a conscious decision to turn her poetry into the very heap of shards she so often uses as a metaphor to describe the post-Holocaust poetic landscape. That the trauma of the event finally caught up with her makes her case symptomatic in yet another way: the self-shattering of her poetic persona—quintessentially expressed in the last line of *Keine Delikatessen*, “mein Teil, er soll verloren gehen”—may be seen as

representative of Holocaust survivors who, many years after their trauma, take their own lives in quiet desperation. Foremost among these is of course her intimate friend Paul Celan, whose transference relationship with Bachmann in regard to the survivor experience should not be underestimated. But also other “survivor” writers such as Jean Améry, with whom Bachmann steps into an intertextual dialogue in *Drei Wege zum See*, helped construct Bachmann’s own survivor persona, and one may include here other survivors who appear to have succumbed to their traumata long after the experiential event as well, such as Primo Levi, Tadeusz Borowski, or Sarah Kofmann. They may all be seen as victims of deferred trauma. I will conclude with the well-known line from Bachmann’s “Prinzessin von Kagran,” the fairy tale embedded into the first chapter of *Malina*, when her legendary character laments, in an unmistakable illusion to Paul Celan’s suicide by drowning in 1970: “Er ist auf dem Transport im Fluß ertrunken.” The critic Wolfgang Emmerich has heralded this Bachmann line as “einen der großen Sätze der deutschen Literatur seit 1945. [. . .] Ein von den Schrecken der Epoche gezeichnetes Menschenleben wird in einem einzigen kurzen lakonischen Satz zusammengefaßt.”⁶³ Just as significant in Bachmann’s sentence is its emphasis on the phenomenon of *Nachträglichkeit*; and so too does the continuation of the line, “er war mein Leben,” indicate her complete identification with his Holocaust victimhood. The extent to which Bachmann’s surrogate victimhood promoted her increasing fall into silence is perhaps best illustrated by her reaction upon her first visit to Auschwitz in May of 1973, following which she said in her interview with Karol Sauerland, “Es gibt da nicht mehr zu sagen. Es ist wirklich. Es macht einen sprachlos.”⁶⁴ Her statement eerily foreshadows the absolute silence into which she would soon fall when on October 17 of the same year she would die as a result of a fire that she herself caused with a cigarette accidentally, or “zufällig,” to use the highly ambivalent and philosophically charged term from her essay, “Ein Ort für Zufälle,” not five months after her Auschwitz visit.

¹Theodor Adorno, “Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft,” written and first presented in 1949, later published in 1951. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 10.1. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980).

²Sigrid Weigel, *Ingeborg Bachmann. Hinterlassenschaften unter Wahrung des Briefgeheimnisses*. (Wien: Zsolnay, 1999): 237.

³Monika Albrecht quoting Dirk Göttsche, *Bachmann Handbuch*. Ed. Monika Albrecht and Dirk Göttsche. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002): 256. See, i.e., Hans-Ulrich Thamer, “Nationalsozialismus und Nachkriegsgesellschaft: Geschichtliche Erfahrung bei Ingeborg Bachmann und der öffentliche Umgang mit der NS-Zeit in Deutschland. *Ingeborg Bachmann. Neue Beiträge zu ihrem Werk*. Ed., Dirk Göttsche und Hubert Ohl. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1993).

⁴See Hans Höller, “Die gestundete Zeit.” *Bachmann-Handbuch. Leben—Werk—Wirkung*. Ed. Monika Albrecht and Dirk Göttsche. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002): 57–58.

⁵George Steiner, in his important work of 1958, *Language and Silence, Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman*. (New York: Atheneum, 1972), was the first to address the phenomenon of silence in the face of the Holocaust by what he calls, in a position reminiscent

of Adorno's Auschwitz dictum, a "retreat from the word." "The world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason. To speak of the unspeakable is to risk the survival of language as creator and bearer of humane rational truth" (123). More recently, Ernestine Schlant's *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust*. (New York: Routledge, 1999) analyzes the conspicuous avoidance of the Holocaust by postwar German authors in an attempt to demonstrate how their work reflects the lack of Germany's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* at large. I would contend that Bachmann very consciously inscribes a discourse of silence into her work and hence does not strictly fall into the culpable type of silence Schlant identifies and analyzes. Since Schlant's study deals however only with German authors, the Austrian Bachmann is not among those she treats.

⁶Ingeborg Bachmann, *Ich weiß keine bessere Welt. Unveröffentlichte Gedichte*. Ed. Isolde Moser, Heinz Bachmann, Christian Moser. (München: Piper, 2000).

⁷In a 1960 interview with Walter Höllerer reprinted in *Ingeborg Bachmann. Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden: Gespräche und Interviews*. Ed. Christine Koschel und Inge von Weidenbaum. (München: Piper, 1983): 38.

⁸See, i.e., Christa Bürger, "'Ich und Wir': Ingeborg Bachmanns Austritt aus der ästhetischen Moderne." *Text und Kritik: Ingeborg Bachmann*. Ed. Heinz L. Arnold. (München: Piper, 1984): 19–21. Also: Karen Achberger, *Understanding Ingeborg Bachmann*. (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1995): 20.

⁹*Ingeborg Bachmann. Werke*. Ed. Christine Koschel, Inge von Weidenbaum, and Clemens Münster, vol. 4. (München: Piper, 1978): 188.

¹⁰Adorno's recantation was no doubt inspired by Celan's poetry, perhaps even by Bachmann's poetry, with which he was also familiar.

¹¹Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973): 355.

¹²Weigel, *Hinterlassenschaften*, 378.

¹³Weigel, *Hinterlassenschaften*, 378.

¹⁴So the title of a subchapter in Weigel, *Hinterlassenschaften*, 312–22.

¹⁵Bachmann, *Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden. Gespräche und Interviews*, 111.

¹⁶Bachmann made this statement in an interview for the popular woman's magazine *Brigitte*. I agree with Monika Albrecht, who comments: "Warum Bachmann eine der wichtigsten Aussagen zu diesem Thema [Nationalsozialismus] nicht an prominenter Stelle, etwa in ihrem *Zeit*—Interview zum Erscheinen des Romans *Malina* im Frühjahr 1971, sondern ausgerechnet gegenüber einer nicht gerade auf ein literarisch-intellektuelles Publikum zielende "Frauenzeitschrift" machte, sei dahingestellt." *Bachmann Handbuch*. Ed. Monika Albrecht and Dirk Göttsche. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002): 237.

¹⁷Conflicting reports exist regarding the veracity of Bachmann's claim to have witnessed the Nazis marching into Klagenfurt. Some sources hold that Bachmann was in the hospital on this date, which, it seems to me, would make the arrival of the Nazis all the more traumatic if she was in fact confined to a hospital bed, whether the "Brüllen, Singen und Marschieren" (*Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden*, 111) was within her earshot or not. Recent reports however claim that Bachmann was out of town on this March 12, 1938.

¹⁸LaCapra, *History in Transit*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004): 76.

¹⁹Cf. LaCapra's position regarding the trauma of Holocaust victims, in which their ruptured memory places "identity into question to the point of shattering it." *History and Memory After Auschwitz*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998): 9.

²⁰Bachmann, a great admirer of Brecht, reputedly sent him a copy of her *Gestundete Zeit*, of which he however was on the whole critical. According to Gerhard Wolf who has documented Brecht's response to Bachmann's poetry, only the two middle stanzas of *Früher Mittag* beginning with "Nach sieben Jahren" found the author's approval since these are the only verses that he underlined. "An einem kleinen Nachmittage. Brecht liest Bachmann." *Der dunkle Schatten, dem ich schon seit Anfang folge. Ingeborg Bachmann—Vorschläge zu einer neuen Lektüre des Werks*. Ed. Hans Höller. (Wien: Löcker, 1982): 125–72.

²¹Beicken, *Ingeborg Bachmann*. (München: Beck, 1988) 87–88.

²²Weigel, *Hinterlassenschaften*, 240.

²³As does, for example, Karen Achberger, *Understanding Ingeborg Bachmann* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1995), and Christa Bürger, "Ich und Wir: Ingeborg Bachmanns

Austritt aus der ästhetischen Moderne." *Ingeborg Bachmann*. (München: Edition Text + Kritik, 1984): "Die Märchenzahl Sieben evoziert die Jahre, die Österreich unter dem Faschismus gelebt hat" (10). Within the context of this mythical time frame, in connection with Bachmann's use of the term "das Unsägliche" at the end of the poem, Bürger also criticizes Bachmann for what she sees as Bachmann's problematic, ambivalent stance in the poem vis-à-vis Nazi fascism: "wir stehen vor einer Dissonanz von Thema und Kunstmitteln, die [. . .] auf ein verdecktes Problem verweisen muß: die ambivalente Haltung gegenüber der Aufarbeitung der faschistischen Vergangenheit. Das Thema, sieben Jahre Faschismus in Österreich, wird pathetisch überlagert durch eine im surrealistischen Sinn beinahe unkontrollierte Bilderflut, die die historische Zeit in eine mystische hinüberspielt" (12).

²⁴See note 12 above.

²⁵Ute Maria Oelmann, *Deutsche poetologische Lyrik nach 1945: Ingeborg Bachmann, Günter Eich, Paul Celan*. (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1980). "Daraufhin werden Gegenwart und Vergangenheit zeitlich fixiert: die Gegenwart ist 'sieben Jahre später' als die Vergangenheit, 1952 und 1945 dürften die Daten sein" (64).

²⁶Hans Höller, *Ingeborg Bachmann*. (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1989). "Seine [des Lesers] Fähigkeit zur Trauer ist angesprochen: als Erinnerung des Geschehenen 'sieben Jahre später [. . .]' und als Einsicht, daß die nach 1945 erwarteten Veränderung sich nicht durchsetzen konnten—'Sieben Jahre später [. . .]'" (25).

²⁷Kurt Barsch explicitly takes issue with Bürger's reading of the time reference: "Dies meint nach der gültigen 'Zeitrechnung' nicht 'sieben Jahre Faschismus in Österreich' (Bürger 1984, 12), sondern exakt den historischen Moment der Entstehung des Gedichts 'sieben Jahre' nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg: 1952" (53).

²⁸While Johann Sonnleitner's reads the two lines "sieben Jahre später" as referring to both the time before and after 1945, he places no importance in the conflation of these two time periods: "Die 'sieben Jahre' in dem oben als Parallelstelle zitierten Prosatext [see below] sind auf die nazistische Diktatur in Österreich zu beziehen [. . .]. 'Die Henker von gestern' sind aber sieben Jahre später noch immer am Werk; diese Zeitspanne umfaßt nun unmißverständlich die Nachkriegszeit von 1945 bis 1952." "Ingeborg Bachmanns Gedicht *Früher Mittag*." *In die Mulde meiner Stummheit leg ein Wort: Interpretationen zur Lyrik Ingeborg Bachmanns*. Ed. Primus-Heinz Kucher and Luigi Reitani. (Wien: Böhlau, 2000): 115.

²⁹Stephen Brockmann, *German Literary Culture at the Zero Hour* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004): 1.

³⁰Cf. also Leslie Morris, who emphasizes the ambiguity of the time reference as "neither day nor night." "*Ich suche ein unschuldiges Land*": *Reading History in the Poetry of Ingeborg Bachmann* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1992): 22. Yet she too reads the seven-year time interval as unequivocally referring to "sieben Jahre später" which "place it most clearly in 1952" (25). Hence, her reading creates a tension between historical determinacy and temporal indeterminacy, as also implicated by her critique of Peter Beicken's tendency (following Christa Bürger) to read the poem as a "poetische Trauerarbeit" rather than as a harsh indictment of the past as Morris suggests. I would argue that both perspectives are present, which Morris herself implies by reading the poem as Bachmann's own nostalgic rewriting of German Classicism.

³¹Höller, *Ingeborg Bachmann*, 25.

³²Morris, "*Ich suche ein unschuldiges Land*," 25–26. A further poem that activates (and inverts) Nietzsche's noontime trope is Bachmann's "Themen und Variation," also from her first collection *Die Gestundete Zeit*, as Sabine Gözl has worked out in her extensive deconstructive reading of the poem in *The Split Scene of Reading: Nietzsche/Derrida/Kafka/Bachmann*. (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1998): 76–111.

³³Morris, "*Ich suche ein unschuldiges Land*," 26.

³⁴Morris, "*Ich suche ein unschuldiges Land*," 26.

³⁵Sabine Gözl understands Bachmann's poems as "concerned with the power of reading as they are with the indeterminacy of writing," hence reversing the traditional writer-reader hierarchy by making them conscious readings of a tradition they aim to critique. As such, Gözl contends quite rightly that "[t]heir sense is established only relationally and intertextually," whereby Gözl too uses Bachmann's trope 'twilight' from her poem *Im Zwielicht* as paradigmatic for such a splitting and inversion of the writer/reader position, "Reading in the Twilight: A Poem by Ingeborg Bachmann." *New German Critique* 47 (1989): 31. My own readings of Bachmann's poems

continue in Gözl's intertextual "readerly" vein by also adding (like Morris) a concrete historical dimension to them. This, however, does not render them any less "writerly," in Roland Barthes sense of the readerly/writerly opposition, in that they are highly conscious of their opposition to traditional "readerly" texts whose problematic "meaning" they aim to deconstruct.

³⁶See note above.

³⁷Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2003): 26.

³⁸At the conclusion of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the prophets last words evoke the "great" noon hour: "Dies ist mein Morgen, mein Tag hebt an: herauf nun, herauf, du großer Mittag!" Also, the first part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* ends with an appeal to noon. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. [1885]. Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. (New York: Penguin, 1961).

³⁹Bürger, "Ich und Wir," 10.

⁴⁰Bürger, "Ich und Wir," 10.

⁴¹Schuller's "Entsymbolisierung" refers to Bachmann's late prose, specifically *Der Fall Franza*, "Wider der Bedeutungswahn. Zum Verfahren der Dekomposition in *Der Fall Franza*," *Ingeborg Bachmann*. Ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold. (München: Edition Text + Kritik, 1984). Gözl expands on Schuller's reading by showing how such a desymbolisation process takes place in her analysis of the poem *Im Zwielficht*, "Reading in the Twilight," 30–52.

⁴²Weigel, *Hinterlassenschaften*, 242.

⁴³Hans Höller, *Ingeborg Bachmann*. (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2001): 60.

⁴⁴Oelmann (42) rightly reads Bachmann's allusion to Heidegger's "Haus der Sprache" in terms of a critique of the philosopher's position and takes issue with those who cite Bachmann's use of Heidegger uncritically.

⁴⁵Cf. Oelmann, *Deutsche poetologische Lyrik nach 1945*, 42.

⁴⁶Martin Heidegger, "Brief über den Humanismus." *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*. (Bern: Francke, 1954).

⁴⁷"Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle." Ed. Cathy Caruth, *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995): 10.

⁴⁸George Steiner, *The Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature and The Inhuman*. (New York: Atheneum): 101.

⁴⁹Qtd. in Höller, *Ingeborg Bachmann*, 18.

⁵⁰Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia." *Standard Edition*. Vol. 14, 256.

⁵¹"Ingeborg Bachmann. Pro von Reinhart Baumgart." *Die Zeit* 41/2000. <www.zeit.de/archiv/2000/41/200041_1-bachmann-pro.xml>.

⁵²"Ingeborg Bachmann. Contra von Peter Hamm." *Die Zeit* 41/2000. <www.zeit.de/archiv/2000/41/200041_1-bachmann-pro.xml>.

⁵³Bachmann wrote a respectful review of Plath's novel (which however remained an unfinished fragment) in response to the author's suicide. Bachmann does not consider Plath to be, as she calls it, "etwas Neues [. . .], sie hat weder die englische Sprache zertrümmert noch zum Auf-erstehen gebracht." (*Werke*, IV, 259). This is hence clearly what Bachmann challenges herself to achieve. Yet despite Bachmann's moderate praise of Plath, I would still contend that she stood (unconsciously) under her influence as a writer who was like herself "in der Hölle" (ebd.).

⁵⁴Bellevue is a castle in the heart of Berlin. According to Höller's excellent little rororo biography, Bachmann underwent treatment [near Bellevue] in the Martin-Luther-Krankenhaus as well as in clinics in Zürich, St. Moritz, and Baden-Baden. Sigrid Weigel's detailed chronology at the end of her Bachmann monograph includes the approximate dates for these, although Bachmann's apparently most traumatic clinical experience in Berlin is missing from Weigel's chronology. Nonetheless, Weigel's chapter "Trauma Berlin" refers indirectly to this clinical stay, which also designates the traumatic "Ort" of Bachmann's Büchner-Preis-Rede, "Ein Ort für Zufälle."

⁵⁵I.e., in *Abschied*, which begins, "Das Fleisch, das gut mit mir gealtert ist" (37); in *Das Strafgesetzbuch Gaspars Stampa*, "Daß keiner dieser Tode, und kein zerfetztes Fleisch, zufassen noch ein Hirn, das nicht begreifen kann" (121); and also in *Auflösung*, "man betastet und wird betastet, verläßt sich darauf daß dieses Fleisch hungrig ist," (168) *Ich weiß keine bessere Welt*.

⁵⁶Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1996): 136.

⁵⁷*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981).

⁵⁸Bachmann, *Werke*, vol. 4, 216.

⁵⁹“Mein Zelt Einsamkeit” and “ganz Segeltuch / ganz Haut” in the middle of the second stanza are the only examples of figurative language in the poem.

⁶⁰Bachmann, *Ich weiß keine bessere Welt*, 11.

⁶¹Bachmann, *Werke*, vol. 1, 173.

⁶²Bachmann, *Werke*, vol. 4, 206.

⁶³Emmerich, “Begegnung und Verfehlung.” *Sinn und Form* 2 (1996): 283.

⁶⁴Bachmann, *Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden. Gespräche und Interviews*, 142.