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## The Nightmares in Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina*: Autobiographical Traces, Aesthetic Transformations and Ethics

### Abstract

The female protagonist's nightmares in Ingeborg Bachmann's novel *Malina* are particularly haunting in their focus on the confrontation of female victim and male perpetrator, as well as their transgression of the customary separation between the personal and the political. This essay draws on the publication of the Bachmann-Frisch correspondence and on Bachmann's dream notations while in therapy to explore how autobiographical experiences were aesthetically transformed so as to show the narrator-protagonist making ethical claims about women's position in patriarchal societies.

**Keywords:** Ingeborg Bachmann, nightmares, aesthetics and ethics, patriarchy, autobiographical experiences

### I. Position and Function of the Nightmares within the Structure of the Novel

The middle chapter in Ingeborg Bachmann's novel *Malina*<sup>1</sup> depicts one of the most haunting collections of nightmares in literature. Outstanding already by their sheer mass and concentration, thirty-five nightmares are narrated by the nameless female first-person dreamer and are clearly separated from the rest of the novel. They all portray the dreamer's persecution, torture, denigration and rape by a figure she calls her father. The dream narratives are so haunting that readers will find it difficult to read them without pausing to recover from the brutality with which the female victim is treated in these nightmares.

While the portrayal of male violence against a woman, and moreover the incestuous father-daughter constellation, is, on the face of it, sensationalist and taboo-breaking, the way Bachmann approaches this topic is also hermetic and demanding on the reader. Bachmann is perhaps the most densely intertextual and intermedial author of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in German literature, and allusions both to contemporary writers<sup>2</sup>

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1 Ingeborg Bachmann: *Malina*. Frankfurt/M. 1971. References to this German edition are quoted as M. See also Ingeborg Bachmann: *Malina: A Novel*. Trans. by Philip Boehm, with an afterword by Mark Anderson. Teaneck 1990. I would like to thank David Hill, Judith McAlister-Hermann, Juliet Wigmore and the editorial board of *literatur für leser:innen* for helpful and inspiring comments on a first draft of this essay.

2 The writer alluded to and quoted in *Malina* who has been most examined in secondary literature on Bachmann's novel is probably Paul Celan.

and to the canon of Western literature,<sup>3</sup> to music,<sup>4</sup> art,<sup>5</sup> psychology<sup>6</sup> and philosophy<sup>7</sup> abound in her work.

Given all these cultural references in Bachmann's novel, it is often argued that the father figure in the dreams stands for individual and social manifestations of violence against women as well as for historical forms of violence like the Holocaust,<sup>8</sup> that the novel shows a link between personal and historical social experiences of violence. In this evaluation critics closely follow Bachmann's own interpretation. She said in an interview:

[...] wo fängt der Faschismus an. Er fängt nicht an mit den ersten Bomben, die geworfen werden, er fängt nicht an mit dem Terror, über den man schreiben kann, in jeder Zeitung. Er fängt an in Beziehungen zwischen Menschen. Der Faschismus ist das erste in der Beziehung zwischen einem Mann und einer Frau [...].<sup>9</sup>

In this article I want to question the equation of patriarchy with fascism which Bachmann alleged by pursuing a currently unfashionable approach: I want to explore if and how autobiographical experiences are aesthetically transformed to make ethical claims for the narrator-protagonist's subjective experiences extending into the historical realm. In the first of her Frankfurt Poetics Lectures, Bachmann herself polemicalised against all the "isms" in literary scholarship and put writers and their work centre stage. She justified this by referring to writers' interest in the documents of other writers: "Nicht zuletzt haben die Schriftsteller selber immer das größte Interesse bewiesen für die Zeugnisse anderer Schriftsteller, für Tagebücher, Arbeitsbücher, Briefwechsel und die theoretischen Mitteilungen [...]."<sup>10</sup> In the last few years, several

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- 3 See the illuminating chapter on Bachmann's Dante reception read against the Auschwitz discourse in 1960s Germany by Tabea C. Kretschmann: "Ein Buch über die Hölle" – Auschwitz-Diskurs und Dante-Rezeption in Ingeborg Bachmanns Roman *Malina*. In: *Schreiben gegen Krieg und Gewalt. Ingeborg Bachmann und die deutschsprachige Literatur 1945–1980*. Ed. by Dirk Göttsche/Franziska Meyer/Claudia Glunz/Thomas F. Schneider. Göttingen 2006 (= Schriften des Erich Maria Remarque-Archivs, vol. 19), pp. 81–100.
  - 4 See Karen R. Achberger: *Understanding Ingeborg Bachmann*. Columbia 1995. Achberger analyses musical allusions to Mozart, Beethoven, Offenbach, Weber, Wagner and Schönberg (mediated via Thomas Mann) in *Malina*. See esp. pp. 105–129. With regard to Bachmann's more theoretical reflections on music and literature see the essay by Beate Willma: "Am Starkstrom Gegenwart". Postwar Musical Aesthetics in Ingeborg Bachmann's *Musik und Dichtung*. In: *Schreiben gegen Krieg und Gewalt*, pp. 35–48.
  - 5 See Verena Timmerer-Maier: *Wohnen in "Goyas letztem Raum". Eine intermediale Poetik des Entsetzens. Die Zitierung von Goyas Pinturas Negras in Ingeborg Bachmanns Roman Malina*. Exeter 2012.
  - 6 See Christine Steinhoff: *Ingeborg Bachmanns Poetologie des Traumes*. Würzburg 2008. Steinhoff analyses both allusions to Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung, esp. pp. 63–66, 119–126.
  - 7 See among others Sabine I. Gözl: Taking Exception. Toward a Critique of Violence with Benjamin and Bachmann. In: *Schreiben gegen Krieg und Gewalt. Ingeborg Bachmann und die deutschsprachige Literatur 1945–1980*, pp. 23–34. Bachmann's personal acquaintance with Theodor W. Adorno and Hannah Arendt as well as her PhD thesis on Heidegger and her essay on Wittgenstein further indicate the wide range of her philosophical interests.
  - 8 See Steinhoff: *Ingeborg Bachmanns Poetologie des Traumes*, p. 225: "In *Malina* fungiert das Traumkapitel als Textzentrum, das die Ursachen der auf der Rahmenebene gezeigten Verstörung der Ich-Figur durch einen Reigen geträumter ‚Todesarten‘ expliziert sowie generalisiert und schließlich in die Kernaussage des Romans, ‚Es ist der ewige Krieg‘ (III, 236), ausmündet. [...] In einer Re-Interpretation des Welttheatertopos wird das Leben als grausames Schauspiel vorgestellt, bei dem die Menschen als bloße Marionetten figurieren und ein faschistoid-patriarchalischer Spielplan immer wieder zur Aufführung gelangt."
  - 9 See Ingeborg Bachmann: *Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden. Gespräche und Interviews*. Ed. by Christine Koschel/Inge von Weidenbaum. Munich, Zurich 1991, p. 144.
  - 10 Ingeborg Bachmann: *Frankfurter Vorlesungen: Probleme zeitgenössischer Dichtung*. In: Id.: *Werke*. Vol. 4. Ed. by Christine Koschel/Inge von Weidenbaum/Clemens Münster. Munich, Zurich 1982 (1978), pp. 181–271, here p. 182.

volumes of correspondence and notations by Bachmann have been published for the first time. Thus, new material has become available which makes it possible for me to take my cue from Bachmann's poetics lecture and examine *Malina* in the light of documents relating to its composition. For this paper I will draw in particular on the correspondence between Bachmann and Max Frisch,<sup>11</sup> on Bachmann's autobiographical dream notations,<sup>12</sup> and on the correspondence between Bachmann and Paul Celan.<sup>13</sup>

But first I want to sketch out how the dream chapter links with the other two chapters of the novel. Bachmann's novel *Malina* is set in contemporary Vienna and narrated by a female first-person narrator who remains nameless but shares with the author eye and hair colour (at least the author's hair colour at the time of the publication of the novel) as well as place of birth and profession (a writer). Yet while the author lived in Vienna during her studies and in the early 1950s, she subsequently spent most of her time abroad. The "I" of the novel is thus deliberately positioned on the edge between autobiography and fiction.<sup>14</sup> Each of the three chapters is centred around the narrator's relationship to a male figure: first, the younger lover Ivan; then the brutal father figure in the dream chapter; and finally, the cryptic, calm and rational Malina who is left behind at the end of the novel, arguably as the narrator's male alter ego, after the female self has disappeared into a crack in the wall.

The first chapter, "Glücklich mit Ivan" (M, p. 25), narrates the rise and fall of a love affair from the point of view of a woman who regards love as salvation from the ills of the world, and in particular from her own past experiences of being hurt. The chapter oscillates in tone between utopian hope regarding the healing power of love between the narrator and Ivan on the one hand (intertextual references to the poetry of both Paul Celan and Ingeborg Bachmann as well as to early Romanticism evoke a high poetic tone and seriousness), and irony on the other hand, conveying the narrator's growing awareness that her notion of love is not shared by Ivan. This ambiguity of the narrative voice draws attention to the gap between ideal and reality of the relationship between "I" and Ivan from the very beginning, but lets the reader puzzle over whether the narrator has just matched noble ideals to the wrong person or whether these ideals themselves are to be rejected as false.

11 Ingeborg Bachmann/Max Frisch: "Wir haben es nicht gut gemacht." *Der Briefwechsel. Mit Briefen von Verwandten, Freunden und Bekannten*. Ed. by Hans Höller [a.o.]. Coordination: Barbara Wiedemann. Munich, Berlin, Zurich 2022. Henceforth quoted as *Briefwechsel*.

12 Ingeborg Bachmann: "Male oscuro". *Aufzeichnungen aus der Zeit der Krankheit. Traumnotate, Briefe, Brief- und Redenentwürfe*. Ed. by Isolde Schiffermüller/Gabriella Pelloni. Munich, Berlin, Zurich 2017. (Ingeborg Bachmann: *Werke und Briefe*. Salzburger Bachmann Edition. Ed. by Hans Höller/Irene Fußl. Berlin 2017.) Henceforth quoted as *Male oscuro*.

13 Ingeborg Bachmann/Paul Celan: *Herzzeit. Briefwechsel*. Frankfurt/M. 2008. References to the Bachmann/Celan correspondence are henceforth presented parenthetically in the main text using the abbreviation "B/C".

14 See Heike Hendrix: *Ingeborg Bachmanns "Todesarten"-Zyklus: Eine Abrechnung mit der Zeit*. Würzburg 2005, pp. 108–109, who lists further analogies between author and fictional figure in respect of working titles of their writings and work experiences. See also Laura Vordermayer: *Literarische Traumnotate. Untersuchungen zu Georges Perec, Ingeborg Bachmann, William S. Burroughs und Michel Butor*. Würzburg 2022 (= Cultural Dream Studies/Kulturwissenschaftliche Traum-Studien/Études culturelles sur le rêve, vol. 8), p. 236. Vordermayer argues that the identity of author, narrator and protagonist in name (constitutive of the autobiographical pact) is not in place in *Malina*. Yet, Vordermayer notes that fiction is disrupted again and again by autobiographical references which she calls "Faktualitätssignale[], die die Rezeptionshaltung informierter Lesender dem Roman als einem fiktionalen Text gegenüber immer wieder irritieren, aber [...] nicht grundsätzlich aufheben". (ibid.)

The narrator's disillusionment with Ivan towards the end of the first chapter is followed by the haunting darkness of the nightmares in the second chapter. Here, brutal attacks against the female dreamer, against her physical, sexual, emotional, professional identity are depicted. The relentless succession of violent nightmares is only briefly interrupted by eight discussions about them between the dreamer and a cryptic figure called Malina. Malina presses the dreamer to analyse who her father is, thus assuming a position of omniscience and authority towards the dreaming self and indicating that the father figure in her dreams is a construct rather than a realistic concrete figure.

The final chapter, "Von letzten Dingen" (M, p. 249) is partially narrated in a comic mode, speaking tongue-in-cheek of such things as the conflicts of conscience of a postal worker, the sickness of all men in relation to women and their sexual fetishes. This chapter hides its serious centre under a fool's cap. It also gives a continuation of the discussion between the narrator and the eponymous Malina, in a lighter mode than in the dream chapter, before the female subject disappears into a crack in the wall. Since the novel ends with the sentence "Es war Mord" (M, p. 356), the reader is charged with making sense of who killed the female self, and the dream chapter is central for working this out. I will argue in this essay that the excessive stylisation of victimhood in Bachmann's female protagonist runs counter to gaining new insights into the origins and possible continuations of fascism and that the victimisation of the narrator protagonist originates more from psychological than historical causes.

## II. Nightmares, Aesthetics and Autobiographical Sources

The title of the middle chapter, "Der dritte Mann" (M, p. 181), alludes to Carol Reed's film noir of the same title (1949, screenplay by Graham Greene), set in post-war Vienna. This film offers two important clues for making sense of the nightmares. First, the film's protagonist Holly Martins eventually learns that his best friend Harry Lime was not the good person he took him for. Rather, he was a ruthless profiteer who caused the death of many people, and particularly children, with his diluted penicillin. Like charming Harry Lime, who had appeared to be so amiable to his friend and to his lover (as well as to her cat!), the dreamer's father and the father substitutes she had loved or remembered in the first chapter of the novel reveal in the narrator's nightmares an aspect she had overlooked in her waking life: their ruthless destructiveness. Both the fictional figure Malina and the chapter title thus point to the fact that the dreams need to be deciphered, that they hide a deeper truth. The father figure in the nightmares is not simply the father of the novel's first-person narrator, let alone the father of its author.<sup>15</sup> Rather, he embodies first and foremost the deception of appearances: the dark reality behind a benign-looking surface.

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**15** See the reading of the dream chapter as a symptom of the author's incest trauma by Audrone B. Willeke: "Father Wants to Tear Out My Tongue": Daughters Confront Incestuous Fathers in Postwar German Literature. In: *German Life and Letters* 55/2002, pp. 100–116, here p. 110. Recently there has been a rebuttal of the incest hypothesis by Douglas Atkinson: Death Styles: The Language of Trauma and the Trauma of Language in Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina*. In: *Twentieth-Century Literature* 66/2020, no. 1, pp. 103–124. Atkinson argues convincingly against earlier readings equating the father figure in Bachmann's novel with the author's own father. But he comes up with an unlikely abstraction as the murderer concealed behind the nightmares'

Second, Lime was not the victim of a fatal traffic accident, as Martins had been told. Instead, Lime himself turns out to have been the elusive third man who helped to carry away the body of the person deliberately killed and buried as Harry Lime. But while in the film the unmasking of Harry Lime as evil goes hand in hand with his role reversal from apparent victim (of a traffic accident) to perpetrator, in Bachmann's novel these two revelations are split up and projected onto two diametrically opposed positions: The formerly revered father figure is finally recognised by the dreamer as evil. But this insight then leads to a reversal of the roles of victim and perpetrator in Bachmann's novel with regard to the victimized daughter. It necessitates a third position, beside the victim-dreamer and her perpetrator-father. This is the split between the female dreamer and her male alter ego Malina. At the end of the novel, Malina assumes a position that is similar to that of the third man in the film who helps to carry away the corpse which is falsely passed off as Harry Lime. For it is Malina who arranges for the remains of the novel's narrator to disappear in the final chapter. It is he who denies on the phone to Ivan that she ever existed. Rather than being two embodied persons, the narrator and Malina are the female and the male aspects of one and the same person. This leads to the conclusion that the male persona is the only one capable of surviving in patriarchal society, i.e. that patriarchy is so deadly for women that their feminine selves cannot survive in it.

In the most extensive analysis of dreams in Bachmann's work, Christine Steinhoff argues, with good reason, against the assumption of an earlier critic,<sup>16</sup> that the novel's dreams are directly based on the author's dreams:

Falls Bachmann eigene Träume verarbeitet hat, sind diese nicht, wie etwa Riedel meint, als „unverfälschte Niederschriften“ in den Text eingegangen. Die Vorstufen belegen eine intensive Arbeit nicht nur am sprachlichen Ausdruck, sondern auch am Trauminhalt: Handlungselemente werden hinzugefügt, umgestellt und entfernt. Zu dieser Konstruktionsarbeit gehört möglicherweise auch die bewußte Anverwandlung der Traumphänomenologie Freuds. Die Übereinstimmungen mit dem Freudschen Katalog der Traummerkmale sind jedenfalls erheblich.<sup>17</sup>

However, the posthumous publication, in 2017, of dream notations made by Bachmann during therapy, has shown that some of the nightmares in *Malina* are based more closely on the author's own dreams during a particularly traumatic period of her life than had been previously thought in relation to this hermetic, philosophical, elusive, high-art novel. A close relationship between the author's life and the fictional representation of the nameless first-person narrator in *Malina* was also unexpected, given Bachmann's castigating of male authors for exploiting their female partner's intimate

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father figure, namely the German language: "I would argue that the father figure is instead a reference to the form of language that is used in this section: namely, the patriarchal discourse of power and abuse, torture and destruction. Rather than fixating on the ghastly figure of the father as an actual, physically embodied character, we would do better to read this section as tracing the wounds inflicted on language—that is, as depicting the phanopoetic onslaught that language undergoes through its attempts at articulating the atrocities of the Holocaust." (p. 119). Atkinson anthropomorphises the German language, but, perhaps with unintended irony, at the point of its alleged death: "Bachmann's *Malina*, with its violent and visceral dissection of the decomposing, fetid body of the German language" (p. 121). Atkinson says nothing about the comic aspects in the final chapter of *Malina*.

**16** See Ingrid Riedel: Traum und Legende in Ingeborg Bachmanns *Malina*. In: *Psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Literaturinterpretation*. Ed. by Winfried Kudzus/Bernd Urban. Darmstadt 1981, pp. 178–207.

**17** Steinhoff: *Ingeborg Bachmanns Poetologie des Traumes*, p. 119.

life in their professional publications (see the satirical exposure of men's literary and scientific exploitation of their female partners' lives in Bachmann's story *Das Gebell*,<sup>18</sup> in the posthumously published fragments *Der Fall Franza*<sup>19</sup> and *Requiem für Fanny Goldmann*<sup>20</sup>). Most of Bachmann's autobiographical dream notations, as published in *Male oscuro*, feature Max Frisch, her partner of four years, after their separation in 1962. Some of her dreams are also about a father figure, much to her surprise (see *Male oscuro*, pp. 44–45), since she considers herself as having had a normal childhood, without familial violence, abuse or incest which all play such a harrowing role in these nightmares. Bachmann introduced several of her dream notations into her novel, but she cut, augmented and changed her dream notations to fit her new purpose, as Steinhoff had already presciently argued before the publication of Bachmann's factual dream notations, and as has been subsequently shown by Ricarda Schmidt and Laura Vordermayer.<sup>21</sup> The most obvious of the changes is the elimination of the name of Frisch in all the dreams in *Malina* and its replacement by "my father". Thus, the personal concrete context which gave rise to the original dreams is edited out in favour of a generalized anti-patriarchal stance. Vordermayer has examined the transformations from autobiographical dream notations to nightmares in the novel in detail and concludes that the dreams in *Malina* "sind ohne Referenz auf Bachmanns Biographie lesbar".<sup>22</sup> While I agree that dreams in the novel can indeed be read without reference to Bachmann's biography, I would argue that biographical knowledge enhances the appreciation of how autobiographical experience is transformed into fiction and thus allows a sharper focus on analysing ethical claims made via aesthetic forms which surpass the autobiographical experience. Vordermayer identifies two functions of the autobiographical references to the author in Bachmann's novel: to ironize images of Bachmann circulating in the public, and to reflect on the preconditions of the production of literature, i.e. the author's experience of reality.<sup>23</sup> In *Malina* the narrator herself voices the dilemma between wanting to preserve privacy and making a public statement in literature thus: "Ich möchte das Briefgeheimnis wahren. Aber ich möchte auch etwas hinterlassen." (M, p. 345)

In 2022, nearly 50 years after Bachmann's death, further autobiographical material became available; the "Briefgeheimnis" the narrator was referring to in the fictional context of the novel was lifted with regard to Bachmann, the author, when the private correspondence between Bachmann and Frisch was published. It offers a painful insight into the trauma Bachmann suffered in this relationship. This essay seeks to draw

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18 Ingeborg Bachmann: *Das Gebell*. In: Id.: *Werke*. Vol. 2. Ed. by Christine Koschel/Inge von Weidenbaum/Clemens Münster. Munich, Zurich <sup>2</sup>1982 (1978), pp. 373–393.

19 Ingeborg Bachmann: *Der Fall Franza*. In: Id.: *Werke*. Vol. 3. Ed. by Christine Koschel/Inge von Weidenbaum/Clemens Münster. Munich, Zurich <sup>2</sup>1982 (1978), pp. 339–482.

20 Ingeborg Bachmann: *Requiem für Fanny Goldmann*. In: Id.: *Werke*. Vol. 3. Ed. by Christine Koschel/Inge von Weidenbaum/Clemens Münster. Munich, Zurich <sup>2</sup>1982 (1978), pp. 483–524.

21 See Ricarda Schmidt: *Ideal, Conflict, Destruction. Lovers' Dreams in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries (Wieland's *Don Sylvio*, Hoffmann's *Elixiere*, Bachmann's *Malina*)*. In: *Historizing the Dream/Le rêve du point de vue historique*. Ed. by Bernard Dieterle/Manfred Engel. Würzburg 2019, pp. 409–440, here pp. 430–435. See in particular Schmidt's analysis of how Bachmann transforms her own silencing of men in her opera libretto to silencing of the female victim in *Malina*. See also Laura Vordermayer: *Literarische Traumnotate*, pp. 185–246.

22 Vordermayer: *Literarische Traumnotate*, p. 235.

23 See *ibid.*, p. 237.



on the letters between Bachmann and Frisch in particular in order to gain a deeper understanding of how personal trauma was transformed into fictional nightmares in the second chapter of *Malina* and to what effect.<sup>24</sup>

Nightmares are fearful dreams, typically in image sequences of persecution, flight, catastrophe, existential threat, personal shaming. They commonly embody enormous taboo breaking and are a frequent response to the experience of emotional trauma.<sup>25</sup>

I will start with contextualising the imagery used in the first two dreams in the dream chapter of *Malina* with Bachmann's description of her life in letters to Max Frisch. Then I will draw further links from the lived experience conveyed in Bachmann's letters to other hitherto cryptic elements of the dream chapter.

## II.1 First Dream

Ein großes Fenster geht auf, größer als alle Fenster, die ich gesehen habe, aber nicht auf den Hof unseres Hauses in der Ungargasse, sondern auf ein düsteres Wolkenfeld. Unter den Wolken könnte ein See liegen. Ein Verdacht kommt mir, welcher See es sein könnte. Aber er ist jetzt nicht mehr zugefroren, es ist nicht mehr Freinacht, und die gefühlvollen Männergesangsvereine, die einmal auf dem Eis, mitten im See standen, sind verschwunden. Und den See, der nicht zu sehen ist, säumen die vielen Friedhöfe. Keine Kreuze stehen darauf, aber über jedem Grab wölkt es sich stark und finster; die Gräber, die Tafeln mit den Inschriften sind kaum zu erkennen. Mein Vater steht neben mir und zieht seine Hand von meiner Schulter zurück, denn der Totengräber ist zu uns getreten. Mein Vater sieht befehlend den alten Mann an, der Totengräber wendet sich furchtsam, nach diesem Blick meines Vaters, zu mir. Er will reden, bewegt aber nur lange stumm die Lippen, und ich höre erst seinen letzten Satz:

Das ist der Friedhof der ermordeten Töchter.

Er hätte es mir nicht sagen dürfen, und ich weine bitterlich. (M, pp. 181–182)

By the size of the window that is opening, this dream symbolically promises to convey an unusually large insight into the world: it is the largest window the dreaming subject has ever seen. The prospect from that window is at first sombre and vague (a gloomy field of clouds). Yet, the dreaming subject has a suspicion of what could lie underneath the clouds, namely a lake. The lake in turn triggers memories of an exceptional time when that same lake was frozen. A perusal of Bachmann's letters to her partner Max Frisch suggests the inspiration for that fictional dream image might have come from a historical climatic anomaly which coincided with things of enormous emotional significance for Bachmann. The dream image of the frozen lake appears to have been stimulated by the famously cold European winter in February 1963, and particularly

**24** Of course, the experience with Max Frisch is not the only autobiographical element which has found a place in the story of the female self in *Malina*. A ring once given to her by the father figure is demanded back from the dreamer in M, pp. 193 and 223. See the treatment of the demand of a ring to be returned between Celan and Bachmann in a draft of Bachmann's response to a similar demand by Paul Celan in B/C, p. 20. Other motifs adopted from the Bachmann/Celan letters into *Malina* are the Vienna Stadtpark with a blossoming tree (Paulownia) B/C, p. 9 and M, p. 203, and the word "Facile" B/C, p. 86 and M, p. 203.

**25** See Michael Wiegand/Flora von Sprei/Hans Förstl (eds.): *Schlaf & Traum. Neurobiologie, Psychologie, Therapie*. Stuttgart 2006; see also Ernest Hartmann: *Dreams and Nightmares: The Origin and Meaning of Dreams*. Cambridge 2001. Hartmann has investigated dreams after trauma and argues that they "seem to be picturing or contextualizing the emotional state of the dreamer" (Hartmann: *Dreams and Nightmares*, p. 25); rather than reflecting the trauma one to one, they provide "a metaphor explaining the emotional state of the dreamer" (ibid., p. 164). See also an author whose book was in Bachmann's personal library: Max Prinz zu Löwenstein: *Was bedeutet mein Traum? Traumweisheit und Traumdeutung. Nach altchaldäischen, ägyptischen, persischen und chinesischen Quellwerken und aufgrund neuzeitlicher astrologischer Forschungen zusammengestellt. Kartenbeilagen. Mit mehr als 800 Traumauslegungen*. Zurich, Vienna 1935.

the frozen Lake Zurich. In her letter to Max Frisch of 3 February 1963, Bachmann paints the following scene of the frozen lake which she could see from the window of her home:

die Menschen, auch Greise, stürmen den See, und draussen flattern die Menschen, teils spazierend, teils eislaufend, zu Tausenden wirklich auf dem Eis, bis weithin, wie Pinguine, und alle freuen sich närrisch und sind ausser Rand und Band. Es gibt überall »Eisfeste«, Beleuchtung wie an italienischen Stränden, Buden mit warmen Getränken auf dem Eis, Schlittschuhvermietung. Es ist so masslos komisch, und ich höre, alle Zürcher Städter brechen auf übers Eis, kommen in die Ortschaften, dort profitieren die Wirtschaften, weil endlich alles voll von Begeisterten und Halberforenen ist.

Wenn der See wirklich noch den ganzen Feber zubleibt, dann habe ich sogar noch eine Chance, ein Eisfest zu erleben oder auch loszumarschieren nach Wädenswil. Man wird wirklich angesteckt, schon wenn man aus dem Fenster schaut, – vor dem Langenbaum spielt heute eine Hockeymannschaft und im Hintergrund sind malerisch die Pinguine zu Fuss unterwegs. Du würdest Dich totlachen.<sup>26</sup>

While lots of people milling about on a frozen lake seem to evoke a cheerful genre scene, such as readers are familiar with from Christmas cards, or a Breughel painting, the cheery surface of Bachmann's letter masks deep trauma – and it has quite a long pre-history.

In May 1962, Bachmann had told Frisch of her love for another man (the affair, however, soon petered out). After quarrels and living apart, Frisch in turn then started an affair in September and told Bachmann about it during her visit in Rome in October, leading to their physical separation, but they continued to exchange letters. In January and February of 1963, Max Frisch and his new partner were in the US to attend rehearsals and premieres of Frisch's plays *Andorra* and *Biedermann und die Brandstifter*. While they were staying in Marlene Dietrich's New York apartment, Bachmann underwent a hysterectomy in Zurich on 26 January 1963. The date of this operation is mentioned twice in the dream chapter without its significance becoming obvious, though the date is cryptically linked in both dreams to a child: "26. Jänner" (M, pp. 225 und 238). The location of her operation, Gloriosastrasse, Zurich, which Bachmann had told Frisch in letters and telegrams five times (see *Briefwechsel*, pp. 368, 380, 382, 383, 389), is referred to in a later dream in which the dreamer's father has imprisoned her. It features as a traumatic place in which she experienced a drug-induced brain fog: „Einige [Sätze] sind nur zu sehen, andere nur zu hören, wie in der Gloriosastraße, nach der ersten Morphininjektion.“ (M, p. 240)

The significance of this date and place would have sent a concealed message to Frisch and a few close friends, but their associations have remained hidden from the general reader until the publication of Bachmann's letters. There are also other dates which marked milestones in Bachmann's relationship with Frisch and which are cryptically mentioned in the novel as dates when an unspecified injury hit the narrator. There is, in the final chapter of the novel, the four times repeated reference to 3 July 1958 and "an einem so vergangenen 3. Juli" (M, pp. 267–269). It is the date when Frisch and Bachmann first met in Paris and started a relationship. It is a date which they celebrated in the years of being a couple (he sent her roses, see *Briefwechsel*, p. 114, letter 78, dated 3 July 1959). While nothing concrete about Frisch is mentioned in the context of 3 July 1958 in the novel, the first-person narrator's evaluation of that day as "ein leerer oder ausgeraubter Tag, an dem ich

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<sup>26</sup> *Briefwechsel*, p. 402, emphasis in the original.

älter geworden bin, an dem ich mich nicht gewehrt habe und etwas geschehen ließ“ (M, p. 268) presents her as a victim of exploitation from the very beginning of their relationship. The date and its evaluation were certainly intended as a message to Max Frisch, and possibly also to close family and friends who knew about their relationship. Another cryptic date is 31 May (mentioned four times, M, p. 153) – it might refer to the date she and Max Frisch separated after she had told him that she loved another man (see *Briefwechsel*, pp. 251–268, letters 143–151). In a later dream in which the father figure has returned from Russia with Zariza Melanie, Melanie calls the father her “Bär” (M, p. 220) – oddly the same term of endearment Bachmann herself used in her letters to Max Frisch (see *Briefwechsel*, p. 180, letter 103 of 13/11/1960; as well as *Briefwechsel*, p. 281, letter 158 of 3/8/1962 and a variation, “Bäregesicht” in *Briefwechsel*, p. 298, letter 167 of 28/9/1962).

Thus, Bachmann has hidden her autobiographical content in plain sight, as it were: decipherable only to those in the know, rather than passing on gossip to everybody. Her hysterectomy – the date and place of which, on 26 January (1963) in Gloriosastrasse, are cryptically alluded to in different nightmares and in piecemeal fashion – was one doctors had advised Bachmann to agree to, but which was not considered as essential. Above all, she kept the nature of her operation a secret from Frisch<sup>27</sup> and told him not to come and see her before and immediately after her operation.<sup>28</sup> In February 1963, she was recovering from her hysterectomy, alone in Ueticon on the shores of Lake Zurich, in a house she had once shared with Max Frisch. In a desperate attempt to keep in touch with Frisch, both before and after her operation, she sent him several letters and telegrams full of good wishes for the premieres of his plays in New York and unsolicited advice for his health (a mild flu!). She made light of her own medical problems which she never identified and sent ‘cheerful’ letters about her convalescence, such as the ‘Frozen Lake’ letter quoted above – in order to ‘protect’ Frisch from her own predicament and leave him free for his work, as she told him subsequently in her letter of 24 February 1963 (see *Briefwechsel*, pp. 414–415, letter 229). But she expected him to read between the lines and immediately phone or write in response to any of her communications. Once one is aware of this context, the cheerful scene quoted from Bachmann’s letter of merrymaking on the frozen lake is easily recognizable as a frantic covering up of her double trauma: of both her difficult medical condition after such major surgery at so young an age, and of her losing Frisch to another woman. The latent juxtaposition in many of Bachmann’s letters to Frisch between her own unspoken reality (traumatic operation and subsequent descent into mental and physical illness, loneliness) on the one hand, and on the other hand her being

**27** See Bachmann’s cryptic way of referring to her operation: “heut war ich beim Arzt, es ist also folgend im grossen und ganzen: es ist keine Krankheit, aber auch keine wirkliche Rückkehr zur ‚Normalität‘, allerdings ist da eine Merkwürdigkeit, die noch beobachtet werden muss und eine geringe Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass ich im Lauf der nächsten Zeit Babies kriege. [...] Er denkt, ich sollte mich dann am besten operieren lassen, weil das, was in Wien gemacht wurde, nicht sehr gut war, und mir noch allerhand zu schaffen machen könnte. Es ist keine schwere Operation.” (*Briefwechsel*, pp. 295–296, letter 165, dated 17–18 September 1962). Frisch in turn complains in his letter of 6 January 1963 about being kept in the dark (*Briefwechsel*, p. 362, letter 201).

**28** Bachmann told Frisch not to come and see her on 24 January 1963 (*Briefwechsel*, p. 390, letter 210) and on 4 February (*Briefwechsel*, p. 404, letter 222). The first time Bachmann asks Frisch to visit her is on 15 February 1963 (*Briefwechsel*, p. 412, letter 228).

a real or imaginary witness to the happiness of others (watching from her sick bed the public enjoyments on the frozen Zurich lake as well as imagining Max Frisch and his new partner in New York enjoying themselves without her) is intense and gives her expressions of care for Frisch's minor ailment something forced and false. The knowledge that Frisch and his partner were living in the glamorous apartment of Marlene Dietrich led Bachmann to the bizarre request that Frisch draw a floorplan of the flat for her, including all pieces of furniture (see *Briefwechsel*, p. 412, letter 228, dated 14/15 February 1963). An autobiographical dream notation elaborates: "ich muß wissen, wie es in der Park Avenue aussieht, wo das Bett steht, ob es ein Doppelbett ist etc." (*Male oscuro*, p. 18). The juxtaposition between the jollity others partake in (physically visible from the house on Lake Zurich as well as intensely imagined in Marlene Dietrich's flat in New York) and her own internal silenced trauma seem to have marked the frozen lake as an emotional cypher for Bachmann. Its importance is emphasised as the frozen lake features not only in the opening dream, but it is also mentioned in two other dreams (M, pp. 187, 207). In her letter, Bachmann's description of those enjoying themselves on the frozen lake comprises people of both genders: human beings, very old people, Zurich city folk, a hockey team, all of them resembling penguins. Bachmann even hypothetically envisages herself joining the jollity on the frozen lake on her recovery. In the literary transformation of this memory, however, the people on the lake are narrowed down to male choirs which are condescendingly dubbed as "sentimental" (gefühlvoll), thus associating the frozen lake with masculinity *performing* emotions. In the nightmare chapter of the novel, masculinity is presented as cold and hard like the frozen lake itself. The association of masculinity with ice and snow is further elaborated in other nightmares which make these two manifestations of coldness into forms of torturous deaths devised by the father figure for the daughter: At temperatures of -50 degrees Celsius, icy water is poured over the daughter and her lover for her father to enjoy the contortions of their bodies in pain (see M, pp. 219–221), and in another dream the father deliberately triggers an avalanche and buries the dreamer underneath it (see M, pp. 224–225).

Adjacent to the frozen lake, the opening dream situates the "Friedhof der ermordeten Töchter" (M, p. 182; see variations of this motif also in other dreams: M, pp. 207, 229). This is a motif *not* contained in Bachmann's letters to Frisch, but a variation thereof is to be found in *Male oscuro*: A dream notation dated 9 November 1965 tells of a dream Bachmann had in which M. Frisch beats Frau Oellers [his new partner] and then a dog (see *Male oscuro*, pp. 40–41), before the dreaming subject tells Frisch that he has made her ill. The dream is reproduced almost verbatim in *Malina* (M, pp. 197–198), but with M. Frisch being renamed "my father" and Frau Oellers being renamed Melanie. The autobiographical dream notation has an addition at the end: "Der Friedhof: wo die Töchter [liegen, die] Selbstmord begangen haben" (*Male oscuro*, p. 41). It is unclear whether this sentence forms part of the dream notation or is a comment on it. This dream notation conveys three things: Bachmann's projection of the emotional pain Frisch had caused her to feel onto him as the exercise of physical violence on his part, her identification of Frisch as the cause of her illness as well as her view that male violence and female victimhood is a widespread social pattern. The changes from "Frisch" to "my Father" and from suicide in the autobiographical dream notation to murder in the novel foreground women even more strongly as

victims. Women's participation in their own victimisation is less visible in this fictional victim/perpetrator dichotomy.<sup>29</sup> I would thus argue that an understanding of the process of shaping fictional nightmares out of autobiographical experiences contributes to a deeper understanding of the aesthetic effect of the fictional nightmares, which Laura Vordermayer has identified:

In *Malina* kommt dem Traum letztlich eine entlarvende Funktion zu: Als Täuschung erweist sich die Wachrealität, wie das Ich sie im ersten Kapitel noch wahrgenommen hat. Die gewonnene Erkenntnis bezieht sich dabei nicht allein auf Leben und Erfahrungen der Ich-Figur, sondern erfasst über den Bereich des Individuellen heraus [sic] gesamtgesellschaftliche Problematiken.<sup>30</sup>

However, while in the nightmare chapter the fictional first-person narrator of *Malina* gains insights into her own self-deception as depicted in chapter one, I propose we should *not* look at these dreams as expressing a truth beyond language, but regard them to be as deceptive for the reader as waking reality had been to the protagonist in the first chapter of the novel. For the dream imagery with its Gothic overtones constructs a stark dichotomy between masculinity on the one hand, and femininity on the other hand without allowing for nuances in positionality on either side. The gender-neutral climatic event of the frozen lake is aesthetically associated with masculinity and with a domineering father figure (i.e. coldness and hardness). Emotions are enacted as mere sentimentalised performances by a male choir on the ice. Femininity is associated with victimhood on a mass scale: among the many cemeteries along the shore of the lake, there is one devoted exclusively to murdered daughters. The dreamer whose father withdraws his hand from her shoulder is thus marked as one of many women who lack not only paternal protection, but who were murdered by the person they loved. Even before the first individual violent act in these nightmares is depicted, the female dreamer thus conveys an atmosphere of threat, violence and murder on a mass scale. She paints a scenario of male perpetrator and female victim in stark black and white tones, where every gesture of the father figure is configured

**29** Hendrix critically notices "die überzogene, moralisch zweifelhafte Opferstilisierung" (Hendrix: *Ingeborg Bachmanns "Todesarten"-Zyklus: Eine Abrechnung mit der Zeit*, p. 157) which characterises Bachmann's late prose and in particular the equation of her fictional female figures with the historical victims of national socialism. While Hendrix regards this as a compensation of a feeling of guilt, she nevertheless concludes that Bachmann achieved in her work a valid and new analysis "eines geistigen Prinzips, dem Phänomen 'Faschismus'" (ibid., p. 207). See on the topic of Bachmann's presentation of fascism also Irene Heidelberger-Leonard: *Ingeborg Bachmanns Todesarten-Zyklus und das Thema Auschwitz*. In: *Kritische Wege der Landnahme. Ingeborg Bachmann im Blickfeld der neunziger Jahre. Londoner Symposium 1993 zum 20. Todestag der Dichterin (17.10.1973)*. Ed. by Robert Pichl/Alexander Stillmark. Vienna 1994, pp. 113–124, here pp. 114, 122–123. After an initial question mark behind the equation of women in patriarchy and Jews in the holocaust, Heidelberger-Leonard values Bachmann's *Todesarten* cycle positively as "Krieg gegen das Vergessen. Literatur wird hier nicht nur zu Gedächtnis, sie wird auch zu einer Instanz, die Gedächtnis weckt" (Heidelberger-Leonard: *Ingeborg Bachmanns Todesarten-Zyklus*, p. 123). The most sophisticated consideration of the binary opposition in Bachmann's *Malina* is advanced by Erica Swales: *Die Falle binärer Oppositionen*. In: *Kritische Wege der Landnahme. Ingeborg Bachmann im Blickfeld der neunziger Jahre. Londoner Symposium 1993 zum 20. Todestag der Dichterin (17.10.1973)*. Ed. by Robert Pichl/Alexander Stillmark. Vienna 1994, pp. 67–79, here p. 78: "Bachmann situiert ihren Text zwischen einer wahren, im Hysterischen aufscheinenden Vision und einem bewußt klischeehaften Diskurs des Hysterischen. [...] So gelesen, weist die brüchige Poesie des Märchens in *Malina* daraufhin, daß sich das utopische Element nicht als absolute Opposition vom dystopischen Diskurs dieser Welt abheben kann." However, Swales concentrates on the fragility of the positive terms of the binary oppositions in Bachmann's prose, not on the alleged insight afforded by the negative terms of the binary opposition.

**30** Vordermayer: *Literarische Traumnote*, p. 235.

as a threat to the life of the female dreamer. The father stands for all fathers, for patriarchy, the daughter for all women.

## II.2 Second Dream

Die Kammer ist groß und dunkel, nein, ein Saal ist es, mit schmutzigen Wänden, es könnte im Hohenstaufenschloß in Apulien sein. Denn es gibt keine Fenster und keine Türen. Mein Vater hat mich eingeschlossen, und ich will ihn fragen, was er vorhat mit mir, aber es fehlt mir wieder der Mut, ihn zu fragen, und ich schaue mich noch einmal um, denn eine Tür muß es geben, eine einzige Tür, damit ich ins Freie kann, aber ich begreife schon, da gibt es nichts, keine Öffnung, jetzt keine Öffnungen mehr, denn an allen sind schwarze Schläuche angebracht, angeklebt rings um die Mauern, wie riesige angesetzte Bluteigel, die etwas aus den Wänden herausaugen wollen. Warum habe ich die Schläuche nicht schon früher bemerkt, denn sie müssen von Anfang an dagewesen sein! Ich war so blind im Halbdunkel und bin die Wände entlanggetappt, um meinen Vater nicht aus den Augen zu verlieren, um die Tür zu finden mit ihm, aber nun finde ich ihn und sage: Die Tür, zeig mir die Tür. Mein Vater nimmt ruhig einen ersten Schlauch von der Wand ab, ich sehe ein rundes Loch, durch das es hereinbläst, und ich ducke mich, mein Vater geht weiter, nimmt einen Schlauch nach dem anderen ab, und eh ich schreien kann, atme ich schon das Gas ein, immer mehr Gas. Ich bin in der Gaskammer, das ist sie, die größte Gaskammer der Welt, und ich bin allein darin. Man wehrt sich nicht im Gas. Mein Vater ist verschwunden, er hat gewußt, wo die Türe ist und hat sie mir nicht gezeigt, und während ich sterbe, stirbt mein Wunsch, ihn noch einmal zu sehen und ihm das Eine zu sagen. Mein Vater, sage ich ihm, der nicht mehr da ist, ich hätte dich nicht verraten, ich hätte es niemand gesagt. Man wehrt sich hier nicht. (M, pp. 182–183)

In this dream, the gas pipes unambiguously evoke the Holocaust. This is a dream in which philosemitism is evoked *not* as a “Liebesrede”<sup>31</sup> of a non-Jewish person for a Jew (thus the interpretation of chapter one of *Malina* by Stefanie Leuenberger<sup>32</sup>), but as a desire to be like a Jew. Georg Braungart and Philipp Theisohn define philosemitism as a desire which directs its rhetorical energy “weniger darauf, das Andere sich gleichzumachen, als vielmehr selbst ein Anderer werden zu können, hinüberzugehen, geliebt und anerkannt zu werden”.<sup>33</sup> In this case the personal suffering of the narrator/protagonist in a patriarchal society is transposed from the individual and psychological experience to that of the historical murder of Jews in the Holocaust. It is not the historical treatment of the Jews which is at the centre of this dream, but the enlargement of the suffering of the protagonist. This illustrates the complexity and the problematics of philosemitism which Braungart and Theisohn have explored:

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31 Georg Braungart/Philipp Theisohn: Die überspringende Rede. Philosemitismus als literarischer Diskurs. In: *Philosemitismus. Rhetorik, Poetik, Diskursgeschichte*. Ed. by Georg Braungart/Philipp Theisohn. Paderborn 2017, pp. 9–28, here p. 25.

32 See Stefanie Leuenberger: *Ich kann dort nicht atmen, wo du mich hinstellst*. Philosemitismus in Ingeborg Bachmanns *Malina*. In: *Philosemitismus. Rhetorik, Poetik, Diskursgeschichte*, pp. 357–377. In reading Ivan as the desired Jewish object of the narrator’s love, Leuenberger relies on two textual aspects: 1) The meeting between the narrator and Ivan is symbolically marked by a bunch of “Türkenbund” in a florist’s shop window which intertextually references the Jewish poet Paul Celan (pp. 366–367). However, there are no further markers of Ivan’s Jewishness than the intertextual reference to Celan. 2) Leuenberger reads the narrator’s double Malina’s job in the national army museum as making him the “Vertreter des offiziellen österreichischen Nachkriegs-Geschichtsnarrativs” (p. 362) of denying Austrian implication in National Socialist atrocities, while the narrator is attempting to bring the dark side of Austrian history to light, i.e. Austria not as Hitler’s victim, but as participating in fascism. In reading the two conflicting aspects of one person as primarily embodying conflicting historical narratives of Austrian history, Leuenberger neglects the gendered characters of the narrator and her double. She also misses the narrator’s insistence that Malina comes later (“du bist nach mir gekommen, du kannst nicht vor mir dagewesen sein, du bist überhaupt erst denkbar nach mir” (M, p. 260)), which would not fit with the primacy of the official Austrian post-war historical narrative allegedly embodied by Malina.

33 Braungart/Theisohn: Die überspringende Rede, p. 10.

Der Philosemitismus steht grundsätzlich im Verdacht, in der übersteigerten Hinwendung zum Judentum dieses gerade nicht verstehen zu wollen, sondern für sich schon längst verstanden und identifiziert zu haben. Sein Fluchtpunkt ist hierbei die imaginäre, nicht zwingend chiliastische Einheit von Juden und Nichtjuden, sein Anliegen somit die Transgression auf das Feld des Judentums, das er zugleich aber eben auch als solches abgegrenzt sehen will. (Denn sonst wäre es ja nicht begehrenswert.)<sup>34</sup>

The dream hyperbolizes the dreamer's emotional experience of a threat to her life by means of the excessive size-number ratio: She is in the largest gas chamber of the world, yet alone. However, her suffering is not caused by a criminal political regime, but by a father whom she loves, who locked her in, could have saved her, yet decided to let her perish. The inhalation of the gas prevents her from shouting for help, and she dies without fighting back (the German verb "sich wehren" connotes to defend oneself against an attack and attack in return, i.e. to fight back, resist). Her lack of resistance is mentioned twice, and both times the indefinite pronoun "man", meaning "one" or "you" is used to express a generalisation of her situation. First the gas, then her location would make resistance impossible for anyone. Nevertheless, even while dying, she is in a double-bind situation in relation to her father. While claiming that her wish to see him and to say something to him is dying with her, she acts against this professed denial of love for her father and confirms to her now absent father that she would not have betrayed him. Here, the historical lack of political action against the dictatorship of a murderous regime is projected onto an individual psychological situation in which love for the perpetrator makes resistance impossible for the victim. Jewish victims of the holocaust are not likely to recognise their political and judicial lack of power against Nazi perpetrators in this psychodrama. Gassing as a mere metaphor in the powerplay between men and women lends this dream image a moral weight of condemnation which, in a nation descended from the historical perpetrators of the holocaust, is difficult to reject. But the holocaust image does not contribute to shining light on the many different ways in which women in patriarchal societies are being oppressed and disadvantaged. Nor does the holocaust image seem appropriate to convey a woman's sense of being left alone in a difficult situation by a (former) lover. Instead, it lends weight to an individual's sense of betrayal by projecting it onto a historical atrocity. Victimhood is given historical moral dignity via the identification of the position of woman and Jews: "Die philosemitische Rede begehrt in jedem Fall das Opfer, weil sie dessen Standpunkt begehrt. (Was nicht bedeutet, dass sie zwingend Opfer *sein* will; aber zumindest Opfer *gewesen sein* will sie eigentlich immer.)"<sup>35</sup> This dream does not convey anything new about the Jewish victims of the Holocaust or particularly about the murder via gas. The point of the dream is rather the dreamer's imaginary identification with the victims of the gas chambers.

### III. Bachmann's Use of Language in Her Letters to Frisch

It is interesting to note that Holocaust imagery of persecution and murder is not pre-figured in Bachmann's autobiographical dream notations published in *Male oscuro*. There is only one dream in *Male oscuro* which mentions the name of a man who

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 17.



had some connection to the Holocaust: “Fritz Ertel” (*Male oscuro*, p. 37) who had taken part in the erection and maintenance of gas chambers and crematoria in Auschwitz-Birkenau 1941–1944. But no violent acts are reported in that dream, just his name is given by a man whom the dreamer could not see. Moreover, this dream has not been adopted for *Malina*. However, from Bachmann’s letters to Frisch, two aspects might offer further insight into the genesis of the use of holocaust imagery in the dream chapter of the novel:

### III.1 Submission

There is a pattern of Bachmann expressing submission as the only possibility for her in the relationship to Frisch: complete submission, standing below or behind him, setting him higher than herself are the terms she uses (and he objects to):

“ich war Dir vollkommen ergeben” (*Briefwechsel*, p. 107, letter 77, dated 1 July 1959)

“ich habe nur ganz selten das Gefühl der Gleichberechtigung, der gleichen Stufen zwischen uns. Ich stehe von Anfang an etwas unter Dir oder hinter Dir, Du hast es bestimmt nicht gewollt und ich auch nicht” (*Briefwechsel*, p. 132, letter 83, dated 10 July 1959)

“setze ich [Dich] immer höher und dann wundere ich mich, wenn ich die Folgen zu spüren bekomme und finde es ungeheuerlich, was Du mit mir machst. Aber im Grunde habe ich Dir das eingeräumt. Sonst wäre es auch nicht möglich, denn Du bist sicher kein Tyrann, ich habe ihn nur aufgeweckt in Dir.” (*Briefwechsel*, p. 133, letter 83, dated 10 July 1959)

Furthermore, Bachmann’s sense that her perceived rejection by Frisch is augmented by the many previous rejections she has suffered, hints at the compression of several people and events into the dream chapter’s monstrous father figure:

Du musst, um meine Betroffenheit zu verstehen, auch wissen, dass ich immer abgewiesen worden bin, es gehört sehr viel Mut dazu, sich das einzugestehen, die Wahrheit darüber zu erkennen, weil wir alle, Männer und Frauen, trotz gelegentlicher Einsichten, darüber zu keiner Einsicht kommen wollen, uns für begehrenswert halten müssen, für liebenswert, um uns mit der Liebe einlassen zu können, ja mit der Welt überhaupt. Ich weiss aber, dass ich nie Zutritt gefunden habe, dass man immer erleichtert war, wenn ich gegangen bin, dass niemand ein Leben [mit] mir haben wollte. Es braucht mich niemand.

Und wir wollen uns nicht täuschen. Du brauchst mich auch nicht [...]. (*Briefwechsel*, p. 147, letter 88, dated 12 July 1959)

When she complains that Frisch does not inform her in detail about his new life with Marianne Oellers, she expresses “Angst, Dir nicht genügend gesagt zu haben, welcher Art meine Unterwerfung ist” (*Briefwechsel*, p. 320, letter 179, dated 13 November 1962), namely that she wants only *his* happiness, and partake in it, even if with another woman. Bachmann’s repeated offers of her “Unterwerfung” in her correspondence with Frisch read as if she expects rewards for ‘good behaviour’ in return. When that reward fails to materialise, a second mechanism sets in: her perception of an intention to annihilate her on the part of the person who denies her the expected reward and recognition.

### III.2 Perceived Intention of Others Towards Her: Annihilation

In her letters Bachmann employs metaphors for what she perceives as Frisch’s intentions towards her which were used during the holocaust for the murderous intention of the Nazis towards the Jews, namely “vernichten” (to destroy, annihilate, crush) and “auslöschen” (to wipe out, extinguish, erase). She uses these terms for mainly rather



mundane actions, such as Frisch not writing to her as often as she believes her own considerate behaviour deserves.

After having suffered from what she believes is an absence of tenderness in Frisch's letters to her, she responds to a little more friendliness from him by articulating her perception of his past hostile intentions towards her:

Dein Brief von heute morgen war wirklich zum erstenmal freundlich, ganz von fern, und mir war, als hörte ich Dich mit mir reden, als kämst Du wirklich nach Rom, um gut zu mir [zu] sein, und nicht um mich zu vernichten. (*Briefwechsel*, p. 142, letter 87, dated 11 July 1959; emphasis RS)

Bachmann left Rome in October 1962 to allow Frisch the freedom to decide about his new relationship, and she encouraged Frisch's new partner Marianne Oellers to stay with him in Rome. Furthermore, she gave Frisch permission for his new partner to stay in their shared flat – in rather melodramatic form, by telegram on 6 November 1962. But she reproaches Frisch bitterly for not responding to each letter and telegram of hers while he is with his new partner in their shared flat in Rome. She calls his silence about the new relationship an act of extinction of her:

Ich wollte nur, weil ich mich so verhalten habe, nicht *ausgelöscht* sein, nicht fallengelassen werden, spüren, dass ich auch noch da bin. Ich habe die ganzen Abende bis in den Morgen auf dem grünen Liegestuhl zugebracht vor dem Telefon und habe gedacht, es müsse, es müsse einfach läuten. Du musst doch gewusst haben, dass ich hier allein bin und niemanden habe, mit niemand sprechen kann und nur Euch habe und meine Anteilnahme an Euch. (*Briefwechsel*, pp. 316–17, letter 179, dated 13 November 1962; emphasis RS)

The disappointment of her hope to participate in the new relationship of Frisch and Oellers via letters and telephone calls from Frisch she refers to as “das *Inferno* der letzten Tage” (*Briefwechsel*, p. 318, letter 179, dated 13 November 1962; emphasis RS).

#### IV. Malina – Male *alter ego* and Safe Haven during the Holocaust

While the understanding of the meaning of the name Malina had long been restricted to the Polish word for raspberry, in recent years Sandra Boihmane<sup>36</sup> and Alexandra Kurmann discovered a connection to the holocaust. Kurmann writes:

As a result of recent translations of a number of scholarly texts from the Hebrew concerning the experience of Ashkenazi Jews during World War II, the discovery has been made that the original meaning of the eponym relates to the provision of safe havens during the war years. [...] For reasons of security, malina was a code word in “ghetto language,” a secret expression known only to those inside of the community who had need of such spaces of exclusion.<sup>37</sup>

Kurmann argues convincingly that Bachmann could have known this meaning, both due to her personal relationships with holocaust survivors and her reading on the subject. This would fit in with the argument advanced here: that in the dream chapter Bachmann uses holocaust imagery to both abstract from her personal intimate experiences and to lend weight to them, to claim social significance for them.

<sup>36</sup> Sandra Boihmane: *Malina – Versteck der Sprache: Die Chiffre ‘Malina’ in Ingeborg Bachmanns Werk und in Zeugnissen von Zeitzeuginnen*. Berlin 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Alexandra Kurmann: *What Is Malina? Decoding Ingeborg Bachmann's Poetics of Secrecy*. In: *Women in German Yearbook* 32/2016, pp. 76–94, here pp. 76–77 and 80.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, the brutal violence in the nightmare chapter was often read as an anticipation in literary form of a social analysis of patriarchal structures, an illustration of the claim Bachmann made in an interview that fascism begins in the personal relationships between men and women,<sup>38</sup> that the virus crime hasn't disappeared.<sup>39</sup> However, the equation of fascism with patriarchy, of masculinity with fascist perpetrators, and femininity with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, while intensifying the sense of one woman's suffering, does not pay sufficient attention to the specifics of different perpetrators and victims in different historical situations. It maps an individual's perception of psychological conflict in personal relationships onto the experience of physical annihilation on a mass scale in organised politics. It conflates one short historical period in a few countries with the many permutations of patriarchy which stretch over millennia across the globe.

Against the identification of women's position in patriarchal societies with that of colonised people or the mass murder of the Jews in the Holocaust, critical voices began to be raised.<sup>40</sup> I believe the analysis of the Bachmann-Frisch letters and Bachmann's autobiographical dream notations against the dream chapter in the novel *Malina* throws light on how and why this particular form of aestheticization of personal experiences occurred. Stephanie Bird succinctly points to the problematics of the equation of women and Jews in the imagery of the dream chapter:

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**38** See Bachmann: *Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden*, p. 144.

**39** See Ingeborg Bachmann: Vorrede. In: Id.: *Werke*. Vol. 3. Ed. by Christine Koschel/Inge von Weidenbaum/Clemens Münster. Munich, Zurich <sup>2</sup>1982 (1978), p. 341: "Es ist mir und wahrscheinlich auch Ihnen oft durch den Kopf gegangen, wohin das Virus Verbrechen gegangen ist – es kann doch nicht vor zwanzig Jahren plötzlich aus unserer Welt verschwunden sein, bloß weil hier Mord nicht mehr ausgezeichnet, verlangt, mit Orden bedacht und unterstützt wird. Die Massaker sind zwar vorbei, die Mörder noch unter uns [...]." See the early scholarship on Bachmann which reads Bachmann's novel affirmatively as anticipating feminist theory on patriarchal structures: Ellen Summerfield: *Ingeborg Bachmann. Die Auflösung der Figur in ihrem Roman "Malina"*. Bonn 1976, p. 24; Robert Steiger: "*Malina*": *Versuch einer Interpretation des Romans von Ingeborg Bachmann*. Heidelberg 1978, pp. 190–199; Sara Lennox: In the Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters: *Malina*. In: *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature* 5/1980, no. 1, pp. 75–105, reprinted in: Id.: *Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters: Feminism, History, and Ingeborg Bachmann*. Amherst 2006, pp. 91–115; Christa Gürtler: *Schreiben Frauen anders? Untersuchungen zu Ingeborg Bachmann und Barbara Frischmuth*. Stuttgart 1985; Hans Höller: *Ingeborg Bachmann. Das Werk. Von den frühesten Gedichten bis zum "Todesarten"-Zyklus*. Frankfurt/M. <sup>2</sup>1993 (1987); Gudrun Kohn-Wächter: *Das Verschwinden in der Wand: Destruktive Moderne und Widerspruch eines weiblichen Ich in Ingeborg Bachmanns Roman "Malina"*. Stuttgart 1992; Karen R. Achberger: *Understanding Ingeborg Bachmann* emphasises the extra-linguistic means of the narrator's access to the truth via music, dreams and fantasies; Sigrid Weigel: *Ingeborg Bachmann. Hinterlassenschaften unter Wahrung des Briefgeheimnisses*. Vienna 1999.

**40** See Gisela Brinker-Gabler: Andere Begegnung: Begegnung mit dem/n Anderen zwischen Aneignung und Enteignung. In: *Seminar. A Journal of Germanic Studies* 29/1993, no. 2, pp. 95–105, here pp. 97–98 on Bachmann's *Der Fall Franza*; Sabina Kienlechner: Dichter in der deutschen Wüste. In: *Sinn und Form* 2/2000, pp. 195–212; Christina Kanz: Psychologie, Psychoanalyse und Psychiatrie in Bachmanns Werk. In: *Bachmann-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*. Ed. by Monika Albrecht/Dirk Götttsche. Stuttgart 2002, pp. 223–236; Stephanie Bird: *Women Writers and National Identity: Bachmann, Duden, Özdamar*. Cambridge 2003; Herbert Uerlings: "*Ich bin von niedriger Rasse*": (Post-)Kolonialismus und Geschlechterdifferenz in der deutschen Literatur. Cologne 2006; Hans Höller: Staunend lesen. Sprache und Ich als Elemente einer kritischen Kulturwissenschaft im Werk Ingeborg Bachmanns. In: *Topographien einer Künstlerpersönlichkeit. Neue Annäherungen an das Werk Ingeborg Bachmanns*. Ed. by Barbara Agnese/Robert Pichl. Würzburg 2009, pp. 113–123; Monika Albrecht: "Man muss überhaupt ein Buch auf verschiedene Arten lesen können". Ingeborg Bachmann: Historischer Kontext, "biographical turn" und kritisches Korrektiv zum Thema Max Frisch. In: *Transkulturelle Hermeneutik I. Vorträge auf Einladung des Walter Benjamin Lehrstuhls für deutsch-jüdische Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft an der Hebräischen Universität in Jerusalem*. Ed. by Michael Fisch/Christoph Schmidt. Berlin 2020, pp. 47–100.

The direct identification of the oppression of women in patriarchy with the persecution of the Jews is a worrying feature in the book. Not only is the oppression of women generalized in the process, with no account taken of socio-economic, ethnic or historical differences between women; but the fundamental difference between the successful and acclaimed female writer and the disenfranchised, disempowered and eventually gassed or brutally murdered Jew is also obscured.<sup>41</sup>

Bird argues that the novel shows short-comings in both the female narrator's way of responding to experience and in that of her male alter ego Malina's,<sup>42</sup> and that it thus distances the reader from the text. However, my analysis of the relationship between autobiographical dream notations and personal letters on the one hand and the published novel *Malina* on the other hand has shown that Bachmann not only used Nazi metaphors of victimisation in her personal correspondence for her perception of other people's treatment of herself, but she also purposefully abstracted from concrete interpersonal conflicts to a fictional representation of conflicts in dreams where race and gender re-enforce rigid victim-perpetrator dichotomies. While Bachmann's autobiographical dream notations are violent and shocking, the Nazi imagery is not contained in them. Rather, that is the result of a conscious decision of the writer to shape her material in that way in order to present her female narrator as an innocent victim of patriarchal violence which, in turn, is presented as a continuation of fascism. The Nazi imagery of the nightmares has thus more a moral than an analytical function. The final sentence of the novel, "Es war Mord" (M, p. 356), insists on mapping the novel's inter- and intrapersonal gender conflicts as a crime scene and thus charges the reader with identifying the culprit in the conflict portrayed. It transposes what happened in the fictionalised nightmares in the middle chapter of the novel to the frame narrative. Here it acquires symbolic, rather than realistic, meaning. It confirms the victim-perpetrator dichotomy as the novel's main insight suggested to the reader – and it deserves to have its validity probed and questioned.

## V. Conclusion

In the 1970s and 1980s the transposition of individual female experiences towards a claim about social structures, via the images of nightmares in Bachmann's novel, was welcomed as an advancement in theorising women's position in society via literary means and merging the personal with a wider historical perspective. Since then, feminist theory has argued that the position of femininity in society is inflected by multiple factors (depending not just on sex, but also on race, class, sexual orientation, education, professional position, geography, political allegiance, historical context and many

<sup>41</sup> Bird: *Women Writers and National Identity*, p. 90.

<sup>42</sup> See Bird: *Women Writers and National Identity*, pp. 86–87: "The question which it is still important to address is why the book is written from the perspective of the female and in the first person, if her perspective is not to be read as privileged. I would suggest that the text itself thereby places the reader into the very position of perceiving the two modes of responding to experience and of conceiving of the subject at once. On the one hand the first-person narrator elicits reader identification with the protagonist and her suffering; on the other hand the reader is in his or her role as reader distanced from the text and concerned to comprehend it. Consequently the reader shares the same internal conflict which the text is depicting, and is left with a sense of tension and ambiguity. Yet it is Bachmann's portrayal of unresolvable ambiguities which is fundamental to the creative momentum in which the search for change and utopia lies. In the text's refusal to provide resolution, either emotional or theoretical, the arguments of feminism continue to be thoroughly questioned."

others). I would suggest that the dreams in *Malina* do not give a convincing “Parabel ubiquitärer Gewalt”.<sup>43</sup> Rather, they give a vivid picture of an individual fictional character’s complex inner life. In *Malina*, inter- and intrapersonal conflicts are projected as dream scenarios onto historical atrocities. The effect of perceiving an identity between the personal and the historical is achieved via imagery, not via the analysis of lived experience or the correlation of personal experiences with historical facts.

In Bachmann’s *Malina* the dreams’ isolation from everyday experience, their condensation into one single chapter, their mushrooming in number, their repetition of the scenario male perpetrator-female victim, the familiarisation of the victim-perpetrator constellation in the father-daughter personas as well as the Holocaust ‘stage sets’ and Malina’s insistence on a hidden meaning of the narrator’s dreams – all these features make a claim for the social significance of the subject’s dreams, for them revealing a hitherto hidden truth about the dreaming subject’s experiences and society at large.

I would argue, however, that rather than anticipating in fiction a theoretically valid insight into the social structures of patriarchy in post-war Austria, these nightmares show how the author was aiming to transform a personal trauma into art. What Bachmann expressed in her letters to Frisch in the metaphors of submission, annihilation and extinction as well as inferno, regarding her perception of the dynamics in their relationship, she transforms into a nightmare action in the dream chapter of her novel. She employs well-known Nazi tropes like the gas chamber or barbed wire as the stage setting of the narrator’s dreams. By abstracting from herself and Frisch to a female narrator and her father, changing from perceived slighting in normal social interaction to brutal physical acts of violence in dream scenarios, and equating the father figure with a Nazi-like violent perpetrator and the dreaming subject with his victim, the dream chapter implicitly equates women in patriarchy with Jews in Nazi Germany.

In this equation *Malina* does not so much convey an insight into basic conflicts of patriarchal civilisation. Rather, the novel can be read as the thought-experiment of a woman, the narrator-protagonist, who fails to appreciate the complexity of patriarchy. In chapter one, she sentimentalises as well as ironizes the love between a man and a woman. In chapter two, she catastrophises it. The novel gives us a subtle tracing of the way in which a woman responds to patriarchy. The fact that she conflates patriarchy and fascism, that she regards patriarchal notions of femininity as authentic, demonstrates that she fails to analyse it adequately. While the author may have intended to abstract from her personal experience to social analysis and make a truthful claim about patriarchy via art, the novel does in fact reflect the power of what the narrator is trying to protest against by the very incoherence of her protests. The narrator is unable to analyse her female self as being constructed by patriarchy. Instead, she perceives the disappearance of her female self as a tragic loss for the world in which there would be “kein schönes Wort mehr von mir, in großer Erregung gesagt” (M, p. 344), only the “trockene heitere gute Stimme von Malina” (ibid.), her male alter ego.

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43 See Steinhoff: *Ingeborg Bachmanns Poetologie des Traumes*, p. 125: “In *Malina* entspringen die Träume einem persönlichen Trauma der Erzählerin, weiten dieses aber ins Historische sowie Transhistorische aus und werden somit über die figurenpsychologische Dimension hinaus als Parabel ubiquitärer Gewalt lesbar. Mit dieser generalisierenden Bedeutungsschicht entfernen sich die Träume vom Freudschen Traumverständnis und nähern sich dem jungianischen Traummodell an.”

While self-preservation has led to the female self disappearing and only her male alter ego Malina surviving, the final sentence of the novel "Es war Mord" (M 356) presents this splitting of the self as a violent act and thus accuses patriarchy of murder, supported by the male surviving part of the female self. From the point of view of Judith Butler's understanding of gender as being discursively produced,<sup>44</sup> the kind of femininity which the narrator represents as the humane alternative to patriarchy we can see as its very product, being produced as an ideal of femininity in discursive practice. It is a discursive practice the narrator struggles against, but is ultimately unable to free herself from.

Furthermore, it would seem as if the insight Bachmann conveyed about Marcel Proust's depiction of a tragic concept of love was unacceptable to her narrator-protagonist. Bachmann wrote about Proust's insight about the nature of love:

Nicht der Wert der Frau oder des Mannes, die wir lieben, ist für die Tiefe unseres Gefühls und die Dauer der Leidenschaft maßgebend, sondern unser eigener Zustand. Wir tragen Musik, Flamme und Parfum an den anderen heran und nähren sein Wesen für uns. Deshalb sind die Liebesaffären anderer für uns so schwer zu begreifen. [...] Alle Liebe ist glücklos, und unter ihrem grausamen Gesetz geraten die Liebenden in ein Räderwerk von Angst, Eifersucht und Lüge und einen Schmerz, den Tod und Abwesenheit noch nicht zu heilen vermögen. Erst das Vakuum, das aus dem Vergessen entsteht, erlaubt ihnen, sich wieder an die Wirklichkeit anzupassen – für eine Weile wenigstens, bis ein anderer Mensch an diese Stelle tritt.<sup>45</sup>

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44 See Judith Butler: *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories of Subjection*. Stanford 1997, p. 145: "Yet if one considers that gender is acquired, that it is assumed in relation to ideals which are never quite inhabited by anyone, then femininity is an ideal which everyone always and only 'imitates.'" See also Judith Butler: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London 2006.

45 Ingeborg Bachmann: Die Welt Marcel Prousts – Einblicke in ein Pandämonium. In: Id.: *Werke*. Vol. 4. Ed. by Christine Koschel/Inge von Weidenbaum/Clemens Münster. Munich, Zurich <sup>2</sup>1982, pp. 156–180, here p. 163.