

**“Ein Wahnsinniger, der die Fakultäten vermischt”:
Interdisciplinarity and Ingeborg Bachmann’s *Das Buch Franza*
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Abstract: This paper seeks to demonstrate the ways in which Bachmann’s work constitutes a prime case for examining the scope and the boundaries of philological research. It does so by focusing on Bachmann’s fragmentary and unfinished novel, *Das Buch Franza* [1965-1966], exploring the text and its author in an interdisciplinary light. Forming part of Bachmann’s uncompleted *Todesarten-Projekt*, *Das Buch Franza* deals with the continuing legacy of fascism and its displaced forms in the post-war era. In its thematisation of the traumatic and necessarily belated after-effects of the Second World War and the Holocaust, Bachmann’s text draws on various disciplines and discourses, namely geology, archaeology and psychoanalysis. I consider the ways in which the interdisciplinary ambitions of the text reflect Bachmann’s struggle for a new form of representation, one that adequately mirrors the concerns of her society. Finally, drawing on Bachmann’s own theoretical reflections on the field of literary study in her Frankfurt Lectures on poetics, I trace the ways in which the author’s work repeatedly encourages us to adopt multiple disciplinary perspectives, as well as privileging literature with a utopian function that exceeds any generic or disciplinary boundaries.

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There are many reasons why Bachmann can be considered a prime case for examining the scope and boundaries of philological research. Her work has lent itself particularly well to interdisciplinary approaches, because of the depth and range of her knowledge of various disciplines, including philosophy, music, psychoanalysis and psychology, and her thematisation of these in her writing. In an interview given in 1971, the year in which her only completed novel, *Malina*, was published, Bachmann stressed her role in a specifically Austrian literary and cultural tradition, one that is irrevocably marked by the legacy of Austrian modernism, the language philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, and psychoanalysis: “[d]enn selbst zu deutschen Autoren, vor denen ich Respekt habe, finde ich keine Beziehung. Natürlich aber zu Musil und Kafka, zu Weininger, Freud, Wittgenstein und so vielen anderen” (*Gespräche und Interviews* 79-80). Bachmann’s best-known prose work, *Malina*, sees a staging of a psychological opposition between the male protagonist and his female alter ego, an animus/anima or analyst/analysand dynamic, while many of the other works in Bachmann’s *Todesartenprojekt* seem to have

been informed by the model of trauma and hysteria set out by Freud and Josef Breuer.

The following discussion will focus on Bachmann's fragmentary and unfinished novel, *Das Buch Franza*, which charts one woman's belated attempt to make sense of a traumatic personal and collective history. The text was composed in 1965-1966 and published posthumously as *Der Fall Franza* in 1978 and as *Das Buch Franza* (the title that Bachmann herself consistently chose for the work) in 1995. It forms part of Bachmann's uncompleted *Todesarten-Projekt*, a project that constituted the mainstay of Bachmann's literary preoccupations in the decade before her death. In a *Vorrede*-draft to *Das Buch Franza*, Bachmann stressed the project's concern with the period "danach", with the continuing legacy of fascism and with the displaced forms in which "das Quantum Verbrechen, der latente Mord" continues to manifest itself, following the ostensible caesura of 1945 (*Das Buch Franza* 17). Bachmann's work also clearly comes "danach", after the devastation and trauma wrought by the Second World War and the Holocaust, and her writing is rooted in a specifically Austrian context of repression and denial of this traumatic historical legacy. In its thematisation of the traumatic after-effects of the War and the Holocaust, Bachmann's text draws on various discourses, specifically geology, archaeology and psychoanalysis.

Bachmann's sketches of the Alps, made in preparation for her work on *Das Buch Franza*, illustrate her interest and engagement with the study of geology (in the author's *Nachlass* in the Austrian National Library, K6261/N2475, K6262/N2476). The sketches, depicting the *Hohe Tauern* Alpine range as well as a cross-section of the *Hohe Tauern Fenster*, which is characterised by rock formations that are outcrops of earlier, underlying layers, display an attention to various geological shifts, disfigurements and displacements. Bachmann saw the shifts and displacements prevalent in geological phenomena as a metaphor for the displaced and disfigured forms in which traumatic memory inscribes itself onto both landscape and individual, rendering them a *Symptomkörper* or symptomatic body in Sigrid Weigel's formulation (Weigel 517). The *Vorreden* to Bachmann's public readings of drafts of *Das Buch Franza* reflect her struggle for a new form of representation in this text:

Ich suche die Geologie, ich suche die brüderliche Geschichte der Erde in der Menschengeschichte, ich suche die Theorie der Alpen in der Theorie unserer Gesellschaft. Schichtung, Deckenschichtung, Faltung, [...] Ich suche mit Leidenschaft, weil ich nur noch <die> Leidenschaft habe, diese ganze Literatur abzutragen, die unsere Geschichte verdeckt, und ich werde über ihre Gesteine und

ihre Gefühle, über den Erdbeben und den Selbstmord sprechen wie ein Wahnsinniger, der die Fakultäten vermischt, aber zu wach ist, um noch an Kompetenzen glauben zu können. Wer glaubt noch an die Fakultäten. [...] Ich habe in einer unendlichen Raserei, seit Jahren, die stumm geblieben ist, die stumm bleiben wollte, die Gürtel aufgelöst, den Muschelkalk und diese ganze Geschichte über Enns und die Ennsberge, die natürlich niemand kennt, dieses Geschlecht von Lesern nicht, die sich umtun in den Buchhandlungen, die die Räusche und sachlichen Beschreibungen zum gleichen Preis einhandeln. (*Das Buch Franza* 11-12)

As this extract illustrates, Bachmann, in a text that has post-war Austrian society, patriarchy and ultimately Western civilisation as its subject, implicitly calls for a suspension of disciplinary boundaries. In the same way that Horkheimer's and Adorno's programmatic text, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, offered a critique of the strictures of post-Enlightenment thought which the authors saw culminating in the catastrophe of the Second World War, so Bachmann's approach is one informed by the sense that narrow boundaries of faculties or competencies are no longer adequate to fully explain or portray post-war society. Bachmann's approach is led by a passion to understand and portray phenomena in ways that counter the repression and covering-up (*Verdeckung*) that characterised Austrian post-war discourse on the recent past. Her preoccupation with "Schichtung, Deckenschichtung, Faltung" evokes a geological as well as a psychoanalytic, or psycho-topographic, preoccupation with history as a stratified, multi-layered entity. Bachmann's presentation of the interrelationship of the individual to the places and spaces they inhabit (*Alpen* and *Gesellschaft*) is one that may be understood as psycho-topographic. This is to construe the landscape as a symptomatic body that preserves the often traumatic history of the communities and individuals that inhabit it, following Freud's famous analogy of the city as psyche in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1929). Further, the privileging of interdisciplinarity in Bachmann's conception of *Das Buch Franza*, as illustrated by the quotation above, is mirrored in the novel by the figure of Martin Ranner, a young researcher who is a geologist-turned-historian.

The novel begins with Martin sitting in a train travelling from Carinthia to Vienna, holding a dictionary of hieroglyphs in one hand and a telegram from his sister Franza in the other, finding both equally challenging to interpret. Having made all the preparations for an impending research trip to Egypt, Martin finds himself unexpectedly having to switch his attention to the marital problems of his sister, who has left her husband, the Viennese psychiatrist Professor Leo Jordan. Franza's personal history, similar to ancient Egyptian histo-

ry, proves to be sedimented, stratified and challenging to decipher, while her psychological state following the collapse of her marriage is described in unequivocally geological terms:

Und ehe Martin von seiner Schwester etwas wissen mochte und zu einem Bild kam, wollte er herausfinden, wie sie auf ihrem Boden beschaffen war, nein, mehr als das, denn den Boden kannte er noch einigermaßen, aber was sich dann überlagert und verschoben hatte, was gewandert war, sich gefaltet hatte und was Mächtigkeiten erreichte von solchen Höhen. Schöne Worte hatten sie in der Geologie. Mächtigkeit. (*Das Buch Franza* 190-191)

Martin's attention to *Überlagerungen, Faltungen, Verschiebungen*, geological terminology, displays both the scope and limits of his discipline in his quest to find explanations for Franza's traumatic condition, which cannot easily be integrated into Martin's prior life experience. The enormity of the task of comprehension facing him means that he has to draw on knowledge from several disciplines - archaeology, geology and psychoanalysis - in order even to begin to comprehend the tectonic shifts that Franza's psyche has undergone. What these disciplines share is a method of interpretation based on discarded information and marginal data, a close examination of which leads to comprehension of a reality otherwise unattainable (as highlighted notably by Ginzburg 1990). The failure of Franza's marriage to Leo Jordan, a medically trained psychiatrist, puts into question the efficacy of medicine in addressing complex problems of the psyche, with Franza's fate left to the more unorthodox methods of her younger brother.

Das Buch Franza follows a path of retracing and return, informed by the exploration of the interrelationship between the psychic formation of individuals and the places that they inhabit. In addition to the geological sketches already mentioned, there are a number of geological studies found in Bachmann's preparatory work for the novel. Perhaps some of the most interesting material for the purposes of *Das Buch Franza* is the following note:

Gailtal: wichtige Stelle = große Trennungslinie zwischen Südalpen und Zentral- und Nordalpen. Genannt wird diese Linie alpinodinarische Naht. längs im Tal. Die Morphologie hat ihre Ursache häufig in der Geologie. An der Störungsstelle bildet sich manchmal ein Tal. – Gailtal. (*Das Buch Franza* 353)

The first section of *Das Buch Franza* takes place largely along the *Störungstelle* of the Gail valley in Carinthia where the Ranners' childhood home is located. Bachmann is particularly interested in such fault lines where borders and tectonic plates intersect, and the subsequent topographic shifts and distortions to which the area and the people who inhabit it become subject.

Unable to find his sister in Vienna, Martin is instinctively prompted to return to the *Störungstelle* of his and Franza's childhood home in the fictional village of Galicien in Carinthia. In Galicien, Bachmann presents us with a place ostensibly located in Carinthia (as references to actually existing Carinthian localities attest), but where this setting has become conflated with—or has been *verschoben*—into the historical region of Galicia in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Indeed, 'Galicien' is often spelt with a 'z' instead of a 'c' in Bachmann's *Vorreden* to *Das Buch Franza* (see, for example, *Das Buch Franza* 73). In Freud's speculative study on the origins of religion, *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion* (1939), 'Entstellung' and 'Verschiebung', distortion and displacement, are necessary consequences of repression or negation, whereby the repressed traumatic symptom, according to the psychologic of trauma, must eventually manifest itself, albeit in another time and place (Freud 493). Both *Entstellung* and *Verschiebung* are given shades of meaning by Freud that are at once spatial and temporal. These spatial and temporal disfigurements give rise to the detective work that is necessary in order to uncover that which is suppressed or denied. Galicien in *Das Buch Franza* may be understood as a product both of geographical *Verschiebung* and geological *Entstellung*, the result of different geographical locations and epochs having been compressed together.

The juxtaposition of two geographically opposed regions (Kärnten and Galizien) is part of Bachmann's privileging of peripheral topographies, valorising the other voices often suppressed within Austria-Hungary's multi-ethnic state. In the case of Galicia, these other voices are those of the region's large Jewish community, destroyed in the Holocaust; in the case of Bachmann's Carinthian Galicien they are the voices of the region's large Slovene population, brutally repressed under the policies of *Eindeutschung* during the Third Reich. Bachmann's choice of name for the Ranners' *Ursprungsort* thus, in itself, performs the act of *Entstellung*, whereby the unconforted and shameful past of the Holocaust is re-evoked in a location that has also been the scene of ethnic persecution. Moreover, this doubling of name functions as a negation, symptomatically revealing the impossibility of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the post-Holocaust age; Galicien's referent being always its

haunting original double, an original that no longer exists, but which remains present in its topographical absence and in cultural memory, here concretised in Bachmann's choice of name for the Ranners' home.

The *Störungsstelle* of the Gail valley provokes a number of psychosomatic symptoms in Martin and Franza's psycho-topographic experience of the place. Their search for a point of origin finds its expression in Martin and Franza's walks in the area around Galicien during their week-long stay in their childhood home. These walks serve as triggers for childhood memories which, even if ostensibly experienced together, differ radically. It becomes increasingly clear that Franza's memories of Galicien are tinted with a melancholic nostalgia that separates her experience from Martin's. Her attachment is to a past that only ever existed securely in the imagination, which is diagnosed by Martin as a *Krankheit des Damals* (*Das Buch Franza* 170-171). This conflation of Franza's present-day illness and the retroactive, belated effect of an earlier *Krankheit des Damals* is symptomatic of hysteria, and what Freud, in his earliest writings on hysteria and trauma with Josef Breuer calls the "Summation der Traumen", whereby further traumatic events serve to stabilise and entrench a primary repressed trauma (Breuer and Freud 242). Freud repeatedly uses geological metaphors to describe these processes of stabilising trauma within the psychic structure, describing the point at which trauma has stabilised as a "schwächere Stelle", or even "provozierende Krystall" (Breuer and Freud 298, 263). This mode of analysis is symptomatic of the interdisciplinarity of psychoanalysis itself, which was, in Joe Moran's terms, "founded on a desire to challenge the disciplinary exclusions of medicine" (Moran 95), and to investigate and find explanation for the illnesses that conventional medicine failed to consider, drawing on the fields of anthropology, archaeology, religion, literature and art to do so.

Ultimately, both Martin and Franza reach an impasse in relation to their Galicien past and in their search for a point of origin in their childhood home, a key concern for this section of the narrative. Their search for a point of origin of personal and collective identity continues in another place and time, when the Ranners travel to Egypt. It is a quest that continues to be informed by an approach to the past that draws on the disciplines of geology, archaeology and history, with the Ranners' crossing of geographical borders mirroring Martin's crossing of disciplinary boundaries. It is a position that is symptomatic of Bachmann's own approach, set out in her first Frankfurt lecture on poetics (*Fragen und Scheinfragen*): "Denken Sie nicht aus *einem* Grund, das ist gefährlich -- denken Sie aus vielen Gründen" (*Werke IV* 198).

In Bachmann's work, dependence on one particular foundation, or search for such a foundation, is frequently demonstrated as leading to paralysis. She repeatedly challenges us to base our thinking on several disciplinary foundations, as well as privileging literature with a utopian function that both encompasses and goes beyond any generic or disciplinary boundaries, as the following quotation from her fifth Frankfurt lecture (*Literatur als Utopie*) illustrates:

Aber warum entzieht sich die Literatur auf eine so verhängnisvolle Weise immer der Literaturforschung, warum bekommen wir sie nicht zu fassen, wie wir sie fassen möchten, denn es kann nicht nur an den Forschern, an der Kritik liegen?! Sie allein können nicht Schuld haben an den widerspruchsvollen Bestimmungen. Es muß einen Grund geben, der nicht nur in der veränderlichen Konstitution der Zeit und unserer selbst zu suchen ist. [...] Im Lexikon steht: >Literatur ist gleich Gesamtheit der schriftlichen Geisteserzeugnisse.< Aber diese Gesamtheit ist zufällig und unbeendet, und der Geist darin ist uns nicht nur schriftlich gegeben. Wenn wir die Suchlampen auslöschen und jede Beleuchtung abschalten, gibt die Literatur, im Dunkel und in Ruhe gelassen, wieder ihr eigenes Licht, und ihre wahren Erzeugnisse haben die Emanation, aktuell und erregend. (*Werke IV* 267-268)

The light imagery in the above quotation, different facets of literature and all that it encompasses, coming to the fore with every illumination, and continuing to emanate light even when a light source is not present, may serve as a model for philological research, in bringing different disciplinary perspectives to bear on a literary work, without ever neglecting literature's own particular qualities.

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