

# WOMEN WRITERS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

*Bachmann, Duden, Özdamar*

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## CHAPTER I

### *Franza and the Righteous Servant*

In her recently published introduction to Ingeborg Bachmann, Stefanie Golisch quotes Christa Wolf's comment on Bachmann's relationship to her protagonists in the fourth Frankfurt lecture: 'Die Bachmann aber ist jene namenlose Frau aus *Malina*, sie ist jene Franza aus dem Romanfragment, die ihre Geschichte einfach nicht in den Griff, nicht in die Form kriegt.'<sup>1</sup> (Yet Bachmann is that nameless woman in *Malina*, she is the Franza of the unfinished novel who simply does not get her story in hand, cannot give it form.) Although Golisch admits that the ability of an artist to attain a reflexive distance from his or her experience when incorporated into their work is not dependent on the sex of the author but is 'eine Frage der psychischen Disposition einer kreativen Natur'<sup>2</sup> (a question of the psychological disposition of a creative personality), she nevertheless argues that Wolf is pointing in the right direction:

Es ist für Schriftstellerinnen offenbar bis in die Gegenwart hinein schwieriger als für ihre männlichen Kollegen, jenen überlegenen Blickwinkel einzunehmen, der ihre Werke erst aus der Befangenheit der eigenen Betroffenheit entließe und somit unanfechtbar mache.<sup>3</sup>

(Until now it is clearly harder for female authors than their male colleagues to adopt an elevated perspective, such as would allow the works to escape the intense personal investment of their authors, thereby becoming unassailable.)

This is a frustrating critical response, for Golisch perpetuates the naive identification of Bachmann with her protagonist, equating the suffering of the fictional figures with Bachmann's inability to maintain a sovereign distance from her own emotions. It is a response which fails to explore the significance of narrative technique for interpretation and which overlooks previous scholarship addressing precisely that question.

Thus in her much earlier article tracing the structural development of the *Todesarten* fragments, of *Das Buch Franza*, *Requiem für Fanny Goldmann* and the posthumously named *Goldmann/Rottwitz-Roman* fragment,

Monika Albrecht emphasizes the increasing sophistication of Bachmann's narrative stance. As she points out, *Das Buch Franza* and *Requiem für Fanny Goldmann* were both published after the death of the author, so without her express consent, and furthermore, they were abandoned by her in order to write *Malina*, and to work on the *Goldmann/Rottwitz* novel:

Die diesen Texten [*Das Buch Franza* and *Requiem für Fanny Goldmann*] eingeschriebene Gegenüberstellung von Mann und Frau als Täter und Opfer ist mit dem Konzeptionswandel um 1966 und dem Beginn der Arbeit an *Malina* zugunsten einer differenzierteren Position aufgegeben. Zwar liegt mit den Binnengeschichten von Fanny Goldmann und Aga Rottwitz auch weiterhin tendenziell eine Mörder/Opfer-Konstellation vor, allerdings nur tendenziell, denn die Multiperspektivität der Fragmente aus der dritten Phase des *Todesarten-Romans* arbeitet dieser Konstellation entgegen.<sup>4</sup>

(The opposition of man and woman as culprit and victim that is found in these texts was given up in favour of a more differentiated position in around 1966, when there was a shift in Bachmann's conception and she started work on *Malina*. Although in the stories of Fanny Goldmann and Aga Rottwitz there is still a tendency towards a murder/victim constellation, this remains only a tendency, since the multiple perspectives of the *Todesarten* novel fragments written in the third phase opposes this constellation.)

The fact that Bachmann did not consider *Das Buch Franza* publishable in its existing form, but showed herself happy with the narrative structure of *Malina*, with its rigorous questioning of perspective and identification, makes the assumption that Bachmann's experience is represented in the figure of Franza all the more frustrating. Nor did she even consider *Das Buch Franza* a text that she would necessarily return to, writing to Klaus Piper in November 1970, '(DAS BUCH FRANZA ist zudem in einer Schublade verschwunden und wird von mir, aus verschiedenen Gründen, noch lange nicht oder überhaupt nicht veröffentlicht werden, ich weiß es selber noch nicht)'.<sup>5</sup> (Moreover, *Das Buch Franza* has disappeared into a drawer, and for various reasons won't be published by me for a long time, if at all. I don't know myself yet.)

Albrecht's analysis is fascinating and she convincingly argues that there is greater narrative sophistication in the later *Goldmann/Rottwitz* fragments and in *Malina* than there is in the earlier fragment. This is a view she elaborates in a later study, in which she argues that occasional moments of narrative irony do not serve to relativize the questionable perspective of the protagonist, Franza.<sup>6</sup> Albrecht's analyses are excellent, yet I would suggest that she underestimates the potential of the narrative structure of *Das Buch Franza*. Although the male/female, oppressor/victim juxtaposition is

obvious, as it is in *Malina*, this is not in itself (as Albrecht makes clear) a reflection of a simplistic position; there are important textual indications that these dualities are not to be taken at face value, and that the woman Franza represents one facet of a destructive polarity. Weigel has already pointed to this polarity, arguing that Franza represents the type of thinking that leads to death, without which the thinking of the 'Whites', exemplified in the figure of Jordan, could not function.<sup>7</sup> However, Weigel still sees in Franza's confrontation with her illness in the Egyptian desert the possibility of utopia; according to her, Franza has done what the female narrator of *Malina* has failed to do and has overcome her victim self, even though this entails death. In her fluctuation between states she has moved ever closer to the language of Egyptian hieroglyphs, in which Weigel sees the indication for a mythical utopia. This is based on her assessment of hieroglyphs as possibly the earliest form of autobiography: 'In der ägyptischen Grabinschriften ist vermutlich auch der Beginn der Ich-Perspektive in der Literatur zu sehen, denn die Biographien wurden (noch zu Lebzeiten) von den sogenannten Grabherren verfaßt und in der Ich-Form formuliert.'<sup>8</sup> (It may also be possible to see in the Egyptian grave inscriptions the beginning of the I-perspective in literature, for the biographies were composed by the so-called grave masters (during their lifetime) and formulated in the first person.)

Weigel's desire to situate Franza in relation to a utopia despite her victimhood and death is in keeping with Franza's seductive idealistic vision. In contrast, Sara Lennox's recent study, in which she seeks to demonstrate that the identity of Bachmann's female protagonists is based on racist and imperialistic discourses, refuses any such idealization. Lennox argues that while Bachmann emphasizes 'die Verstrickung aller EuropäerInnen in die imperiale/neokoloniale und rassistische Ordnung des Westens' (the entanglement of all Europeans in the imperial/neo-colonial and racist order of the West), she nevertheless, as author, perpetuates racist stereotypes.<sup>9</sup> On the one hand Lennox points to the complex narrative technique of the *Todesarten* texts as evidence for Bachmann's critical questioning of the subjectivity of the 'White Lady' that depends upon the abjection of the black or oriental Other; on the other hand she considers that Bachmann is caught up in the same discourses as her white protagonists. Thus she concludes 'daß Bachmann selbst nicht ganz von der Kritik auszunehmen ist, der sie ihre Figuren unterwirft'<sup>10</sup> (that Bachmann is herself not innocent of the criticism that she makes of her figures). Lennox argues her thesis convincingly. The final emphasis of her study is such, however, that the imaginative potential of her argument is constrained by a limiting understanding

of literature's ability to write about its time. She rightly asserts that Bachmann, while responding critically to her epoch, is also a product of it, and that therefore neither the texts nor the protagonists escape the tension between critical momentum and conformity. Yet to conclude here, without returning to the question of how the literary text itself allows or enables us to understand that tension is to assign to literature the function of mere seismograph. So while recognizing the importance of narrative technique for the *Todesarten* texts' critical dimension, Lennox does not pursue the significance of the narrative *insistence* upon irresolution, seeing it merely as symptomatic of Bachmann's historical situation, rather than understanding it as an important response to that historical situation.

That individuals are trapped within the discourses language makes available to them, but that in reacting against those discourses they become the vehicle of their perpetuation is a dominating theme of *Das Dreißigste Jahr* collection. Bachmann was all too aware of her own entrapment in the 'schlechte Sprache' (bad language), but held out the theoretical hope that 'im Widerspiel des Unmöglichen mit dem Möglichen erweitern wir unsere Möglichkeiten'<sup>11</sup> (in the interplay of the impossible with the possible, we broaden our possibilities). The extent to which her creative writing achieves this opening up of new possibilities is of central importance for understanding 'wie Literatur angemessen "über die Zeit schreiben" könne'<sup>12</sup> (how literature can adequately write 'about its time'). Karen McAuley, in her outstanding study of *Kindlichkeit* in Bachmann's prose, remains unconvinced that Bachmann's subversive qualities offer emancipatory potential, pointing to the fact that the 'hyperbolic conformity' of so many of the female protagonists might lead to further self-injury.<sup>13</sup> Although, unlike Lennox, McAuley does not include the author Bachmann in her assessment of the texts' profound ambivalence, she too concludes her study without further considering whether this ambivalence might be understood as an integral part of the texts' response to their epoch.

In the following analyses of Bachmann's *Todesarten* prose I hope to show that the texts, however much they fail to resolve the tension between critique and conformity, also, through their complex narrative structures, insist on irresolution as a timely and ethical response to their time. I shall begin by discussing the way in which the narrative complexity of *Das Buch Franza* serves to expose and criticize Franza's idealism and her hankering for an absolute as profoundly limiting and destructive, not as a utopian release. In chapter 2 I shall also trace the theme of idealization and self-deception in the *Requiem für Fanny Goldmann* and the *Goldmann/Rottwitz-Roman* fragments, showing how closely the exploration of naive and narcissistic

female identity is linked to a questioning of Austrian identity. For my analysis of *Das Buch Franza* I refer to the edited final draft in Volume 11 of the 'Todesarten'-Projekt, and for the analysis of *Requiem für Fanny Goldmann* and the *Goldmann/Rottwitz-Roman* I refer to the edited drafts in Volume 1.<sup>14</sup>

#### DAS BUCH FRANZA: NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

*Das Buch Franza* depicts the devastating results of Franza's marriage with Leo Jordan, a psychiatrist whose research is on the long-term effects of experiments on Holocaust victims. The story begins with her 'escape' to her childhood home in Galicia after discovering that Jordan had been using her as the object of his experiment. Her brother, Martin Ranner, who is shortly to leave on a trip to Egypt, comes to help her and then takes her with him. They travel through the desert and return to Cairo, where Franza meets a doctor, an old Nazi who had been involved in giving lethal injections to Jews. She asks him to give her a lethal injection, convinced that she is ill beyond saving, but he refuses, horrified. Finally, she is assaulted at the pyramids and dies, apparently as the result of a fall.

There are three perspectives represented in *Das Buch Franza* – that of the narrator, of Martin and of Franza – but they are not equally present, varying in each of the three sections. The omniscient third-person narrator is in evidence throughout, although her voice is frequently submerged in the perspective of either Martin or Franza. Thus in the first section, 'Heimkehr nach Galicien' (Homecoming to Galicia), the perspective is predominantly Martin's, although the narrator is keen to point to the constructed nature of her story in the passage 'Exkurs, während ein Zug durch den Semmering-Tunnel fährt' (Digression while a train drives through the Semmering tunnel). She insists that drawing the reader's attention to the fictionality of her figures does not detract from their significance, 'denn die Tatsachen, die die Welt ausmachen – sie brauchen das Nichttatsächliche, um von ihm aus erkannt zu werden' (134) (for the facts that determine the world need the non-factual as a basis from which to be recognized). Thus she begins the narrative by distinguishing between a reality and its fictional representation, and, more importantly, by emphasizing the distance between herself and her characters. She reinforces this distance shortly afterwards by informing the reader that the biblical reference to Matthew 12. 20,<sup>15</sup> and the statement 'Die Liebe aber ist unwiderstehlich' (But love is irresistible), are not part of Martin's thought processes, but her own comment on his search for his sister: 'ihm ging nichts dergleichen durch den Kopf, er kannte solche

Sätze nicht' (149–50).<sup>16</sup> (Nothing of the sort went through his mind, he did not know such phrases.)

In the second section, 'Jordanische Zeit' (The time with Jordan), the perspective is Franza's, either in the form of her first-person recollection in response to Martin's brief questions, or through the narrator, who recounts some episodes from her marriage, and most obviously tells us of Franza's 'schönsten Frühling' (loveliest spring), but always from her point of view. In 'Die ägyptische Finsternis' (The Egyptian darkness), the final section, there is undoubtedly a greater coalescence of the narrator's perspective with that of Franza, and although Martin's perspective is also present, the narrator's interest is with Franza. As Sabine Grimkowski points out, 'Der Erzähler ist keine neutrale Instanz, sondern weist eine besondere Affinität zu Franza auf.'<sup>17</sup> (The narrator is not a neutral voice, but shows a special affinity for Franza.) She points to the increasing similarity of the narrator's and Franza's language, and argues that at times they even become one voice, as for example when the narrator seems to have become Franza's partner in dialogue; 'Wo ist der Golf von Akaba! Gehetzt immer noch . . . in der Nacht am Nil, im Segelschatten, der allein dunkel ist. Was willst du in dieser Wüste' (277). (Where is the Gulf of Aqaba! Still harassed, . . . at night by the Nile, in the sail's shadow, which alone is dark. What are you seeking in this desert.) It is the proximity of the narrator and Franza in the last section which has made it the particular focus of much feminist interest, often at the expense of engaging with the narrative strategies of the preceding two sections. The skewed focus that results has also been exacerbated by the exclusion of certain final draft sections of the 'Jordanische Zeit' from the collected works.<sup>18</sup> These sections focus on Franza in the time before her relationship with Jordan and on her first meeting with him, and are crucial for understanding her and the nature of her victimhood. As Albrecht remarks, 'Die Episoden über den "schönsten Frühling" und die "Vor-Jordanische Zeit" mit einem Pianistenprinzen [haben] die Funktion, Franzas Grunddisposition und damit ihre Prädestination für die "Ermordung" durch Jordan darzustellen.'<sup>19</sup> (The episodes depicting the 'loveliest spring' and the 'time before Jordan' spent with a piano-prince, serve to portray Franza's basic disposition and her predestination to be 'murdered' by Jordan.) Nevertheless, despite this assertion, Albrecht remains sceptical as to whether the narrator adds a critical dimension to the text, remarking that 'Insgesamt gewinnt die Relativierung von Franzas fragwürdiger Perspektive in dem Roman . . . wenig kontur.'<sup>20</sup> (Overall the relativizing of Franza's questionable perspective in the novel . . . has little definition.)

My purpose now is not to deny the reality of Franza's suffering, but to show that the narrator, deeply sympathetic to her protagonist though she is, does invite the reader to adopt a critical position in relation to her anguish. Indeed, not only does the narrator recognize Franza's contributory role in her plight, but by making us aware of the destructive potential of Franza's position, she questions the validity of Franza's judgements and values.

#### FRANZA'S SUBSERVIENCE TO THE ABSOLUTE

Franza's suffering is not disputed in the texts, but her innocence is. This co-existence of suffering and complicity is initially indicated by Martin, who, even if he never fully understands his sister, does not deny or reject the severity of her despair. While there is no question in his mind that Jordan is to blame for Franza's collapse, he is not blind to her participation in the destructive process. Martin has long been disturbed by Jordan and was discomforted by aspects of Franza's behaviour when she and Leo were still together. Martin has always been tempted to tell Jordan 'wie ihm alles immer auf die Nerven gegangen war, die paar belehrenden Sätze, mit denen er abgefertigt worden war, was Franza nie gestört hatte, den überlegenen Ton, der . . . nicht nötig gewesen wäre' (147–8) (how everything had always got on his nerves; the couple of didactic sentences with which he had been fobbed-off but which had never bothered Franza; the superior tone, which . . . had been unnecessary). But 'Am meisten erschreckt hatten ihn in Wien diese Altarblicke von ihr' (192). (What had shocked him most in Vienna was her devotional expression.) Martin observed that Franza 'immer mit einem Gebet auf den Lippen herumging' (193) (always went around with a prayer on her lips), and when the siblings met in cafés he had to hear about her beloved Leo, her 'großartiges Fossil' (193) (marvellous fossil), whether he liked it or not.

Martin's observations of his sister's marital life point to Franza's willing subsumation into her husband's values and aspirations. However, Martin has, if anything, underestimated the extent to which her passivity has made her an occasional accomplice to Jordan's murderous methods in relation to his previous wives. Martin's assessment of the relationship is not only confirmed but also extended by Franza's own devastating realization of her passive complicity. So whereas Martin attempts to exculpate her from what she now sees as the ignominy of her life with Jordan by claiming 'Das ist doch keine Schande, mit einem Schwein gelebt zu haben' (207) (But it's no shame to have lived with a pig), Franza realizes that she is deeply

implicated in his cruelty through her condescending and scornful attitude to his ex-wives:

Erst jetzt habe ich mich nach den anderen Frauen gefragt . . . warum die eine nicht mehr aus dem Haus geht, warum die andere den Gashahn aufgedreht hat . . . und wie bereitwillig habe ich geglaubt, sie seien dumm, verständnislos, defekt gewesen, nichtswürdige Kreaturen, die sich mit einem Abgang ins Schweigen selbst bestrafen für ihr Scheitern . . . Ich fühlte mich noch erhoben, geschmeichelt, daß ich vielleicht den Ritterschlag mir verdienen könnte . . .

(Only now have I asked myself . . . about the other wives, why one no longer leaves the house, why the other turned the gas tap on . . . How willingly I believed that they were stupid, lacking in understanding, flawed, unworthy creatures who punished themselves for their failure by retreating into silence . . . I felt edified, flattered, that I could perhaps earn the knighthood . . .)

She participates in his lifestyle without reflection, admitting 'Nie fragte ich mich, wie wir denn leben und ob wir richtig leben' (218). (I never asked myself how we lived and whether we were living the right way.) Now she wonders 'Warum ist mir das nie aufgefallen, daß er alle Menschen zerlegte, bis nichts mehr da war' (219). (Why did I never notice that he dissected people until nothing was left.) When in one fragment Martin asks her when it all began, she describes a process of self-deceit that was present from the beginning, and which then feeds on itself: 'der Betrug zeugt neuen Betrug' (227) (deceit breeds new deceit). She now acknowledges this process of deceit and willing self-deceit in which she participated as more than an innocent victim as 'eine Schande, eine Schandgeschichte' (228) (a disgrace, a shameful story).

However, it is not only the fact of her subservience and self-deceit that is of interest here, but the nature of that submission to her husband. When Martin comments on Jordan's condescending tone, he also refers to 'etwas Hochmoralisches, das noch diesen Ton überlagerte und dem seine Schwester aufgesessen war' (148) (something highly moralistic that overlapped with this tone and that his sister was taken in by). Again Martin's observation is confirmed by Franza's own admission that she thought Jordan's two previous wives 'sich . . . selbst bestrafen für ihr Scheitern an einer höheren Moral, an einer Instanz, einem Maßstab, den ich zu dem meinen machen wollte' (207) (punished themselves for their failure to attain a higher morality, an authority, a yardstick that I wanted to make my own). Her struggle to admit her mistake is related to the consequent need to relinquish this idealized moral absolute that Jordan represented in her eyes: 'Wenn ich zugebe, daß ich mich getäuscht habe. Altarblicke, sagst du. Wenn

ich das zugebe . . . dann sterb ich zweimal, einmal noch mit für ihn, für mein Idol' (216). (If I admit that I was mistaken. A devotional expression, you say. If I admit that . . . then I die twice, the second time for him, for my idol.) Jordan has not been her only idol. Her yearning for the absolute and her desire to see in certain men the embodiment of an ideal to which she can then willingly submit as representative of a higher moral authority, is a pattern that is established before meeting Jordan. Herein lies the crucial role of both the section on Franza's relationship with the English army captain in the spring of 1945, and that on her time with the two Csobadi brothers when she is a medical student, leading to her first meetings with Jordan.

In her depiction of the young Franza's meeting with 'Sire', the narrator clearly shows the process by which a man assumes symbolic value for her. He is the personification of freedom even before he is an individual: 'Und sie sagte zu dem Frieden und diesem Mann Sire' (181). (And to Peace and to this man she said Sire.) He is at once 'Sire und der Frieden, dieser König und der erste Mann in ihrem Leben' (181) (Sire and Peace, this King and the first man in her life), and it is not the person who speaks to her, but the 'ein Meter neunzig lange dürre Frieden' (181) (one-metre-ninety-tall, scrawny Peace). Her desire transcends the individual and has the man as its object only as the personification of the ideal. This difference is again emphasized when she meets the Captain, now Percival Glyde, years later in England. She does not admit to him who she is, but wonders to herself afterwards whether she should ring him and consummate the love she had, now that she is no longer a skinny girl. Her considerations bear the trace of the self-sacrificial language that later culminates in the adoring devotional expression to her husband, although at this stage Franza is still able to laugh at the split between ideal and man: 'Sie . . . überlegte, ob sie anrufen solle und zu ihm gehen, denn jetzt hatte sie einen Körper, und den war sie ihm noch schuldig, ihm ja nicht, aber Sire, und dann lachte sie, weil kein Percival Glyde und kein ehemaliger Captain in einer Armee sie verstehen würde' (189). (She . . . wondered whether she should ring up and go to him, for now she had a body, and she still owed it to him, well, not to him, but to Sire, and then she laughed because no Percival Glyde and no former captain in the army would understand her.)

Franza's relationship with the pianist Ödön Csobadi during her time as a medical student in Vienna again confirms the pattern of subsumation which later reaches its extreme with Jordan. Very different in character from her time with either Glyde or Jordan, her time with Ödön is a 'halbverstandenes musikalisches Abenteuer' (236) (half-understood musical adventure) in

which she gets caught up. He is dependent on her for his emotional equanimity, for practical arrangements and for stability when plagued by depressive moods; in response to his dependence and the excitement of the new lifestyle, she suspends her studies. In the context of this relationship she is not at ease with the decision to delay her studies, although their total cessation is not identified as a problem when she is married. She retains an underlying dissatisfaction with a relationship that does not offer her a greater moral meaning, despite the joy it gives her:

Das schönste an Ödön war, daß er, selbst wenn ihn die Traurigkeit um die Ecke schwemmte, Franza nie traurig, sondern immer stark machte und fröhlich. Sie hatte nie soviel gelacht, sie ging in lauter Lachen und Glanz auf, ohne es zu merken, und es [gab] nichts, was [sie] ihm je hätte übel nehmen können. (237)

(The nicest thing about Ödön was that he never made Franza sad, but always made her strong and happy, even if sadness was just around the corner for him. She had never laughed so much, she was subsumed by all the laughter and radiance without noticing, and there was nothing she could ever have resented him for.)

But despite this joy she cannot escape the feeling of 'Schwerfälligkeit' (236) (ponderousness), cannot refrain from murmuring '“unnützig”' (236) (pointless) to herself, and instead wants stability and a meaning that exceeds the moment. Ödön is a man who represents the moment, the pleasure of instant gratification of desire. As he says, 'Ich weiß nur, was ich jetzt will, ich will dich. Und jetzt möchte ich Eis dazu' (238). (I only know what I want now, I want you. And now I want ice-cream too.) Franza's role is to satisfy the demand for 'jetzt' (now) with a 'sofort' (straight away): 'Warum möchte man dir eigentlich immer alles sofort geben und holen?' (238). (Why do people always want to give and fetch everything for you straight away?) However, it is not the giving and fetching in themselves which are a problem for Franza, but that they are not done in the service of a greater good, so when the relationship ends, 'Franza akzeptiert Ödöns Selbstbeschuldigung, weil er das Ordinäre ad absurdum führt' (243). (Franza accepted Ödön's self-castigation because he took the ordinary to its absurd extreme.) In contrast, Jordan, a man whose research is concerned with the experiments done on Holocaust victims, provides a ready cause, one for which she can give and fetch by working as an assistant on his book. Once she has met Jordan there is no further mention of resuming her studies.

The desert is, of course, the final object of Franza's need to sacrifice herself to an absolute. It becomes the last of the moral authorities that will save her from oppression, the 'große Heilanstalt' (248) (large sanatorium),

the uncompromising extreme in which she need no longer be afraid of the 'Whites': 'Ich werde nie mehr auf die Knie fallen, vor keinem Menschen, vor keinem Weißen' (255). (I will never go down on my knees again, not before any human, not before any white man.) When she arrives she links the desert with the attainment of her first desire: 'Sire, ich werde ankommen' (249). (Sire, I will arrive.) She knows that this final desire can be consummated because the desert is an object which has no voice, a perfect surface for projection and hallucination. The desert offers no answers to the fundamental question it poses: 'Was suchst du in dieser Wüste, sagte die Stimme in der Wüste, in der nichts zu hören ist . . . Und die Stimme antwortet nicht, da es in der Wüste still ist' (260). (What are you seeking in this desert, said the voice in the desert, in which there is nothing to be heard . . . And the voice did not answer, because it is still in the desert.) It remains permanently and irreducibly absolute, and is the logical conclusion of what has gone before. Indeed, it is the fulfilment of Franza's own youthful fantasies, for in her student days she dreamed about the grand ethical gestures she could make when she was qualified as a doctor. She felt that only such grand gestures would be 'real', and would avoid becoming ordinary, a prospect that is intolerable for her: 'Es mußte etwas Wirkliches sein, später Afrika oder Asien, unter den härtesten Bedingungen, mit Opferbringen, mit Heroismus, Opferbringen mußte unbedingt dazugehören, und großartig sollte es sein, voller Anstrengung, aber glorreich für sie selber, mit frühem Tod' (233-4). (It had to be something real, later Africa or Asia, under the hardest conditions, with sacrifice and heroism; sacrifice absolutely had to be part of it, and it would be marvellous, full of effort, but glorious for her, with an early death.) How well she succeeds in her ambition! She dies her early death in the desert of North Africa, the female sacrifice to the dominance of 'die Weißen' (the Whites). And, at the risk of being too caustic, the glorious postscript is provided not by the surreptitious removal of her body from the Cairo hotel, but by some critical attempts to see her story as a model for utopia.

While in the last section, 'Die ägyptische Finsternis', the narrator remains consistently sympathetic to her protagonist, she nevertheless continues to point to Franza's pathological compulsion to make absolute the ordinary as a necessary element in the story of her death. The episode of her seaside vision of God is a grotesque microcosm of the repeated process that is fundamental to her destruction, whereby idealization is followed by the terrible confrontation with the real object. In a walk along a beach she sees an object which she initially believes is Jordan, then her father, but who she then realizes is God: 'Gott kommt auf mich zu, und ich komme auf Gott

zu . . . Ich habe Gott gesehen' (286–7). (God is coming towards me and I am approaching God . . . I have seen God.) Weeping, she runs to the object, falls, and kneels before it, 'Und da lag Er vor ihr, ein schwarzer Strunk, aus dem Wasser geschwemmt, eine Seewalze, ein zusammengeschrumpftes Ungeheuer . . . Darauf war sie zugerannt' (287). (And there He lay in front of her, a black stalk washed up out of the water, a sea cucumber, a wrinkled-up monster . . . That is what she had run towards.) The disparity between God and sea cucumber throws her into convulsions, an existential crisis in which she feels herself trampled down, and from which Martin then carries her away. The narrator's crucial comment comes last: 'Die arabische Wüste ist von zerbrochenen Gottesvorstellungen umsäumt' (288). (The Arabian desert is lined with shattered images of God.) The narrator's voice is quite distinct from Franza's preceding perspective, and although her comment does of course link Franza to the prophets, it concurrently ironizes that association, coming as it does immediately after a vision based on a sea cucumber. It recalls another remark made by the narrator, this time on the occasion of the young Franza's first meeting with 'Sire', and exposes the degree of irony present in that early judgement: 'Da bewies Franza zum erstenmal in ihrem Leben den Instinkt, der sie später außerhalb Galiciens sich zurechtfinden ließ, ihre Unterscheidungsfähigkeit' (180). (There Franza demonstrated for the first time in her life the instinct that later enabled her to cope outside Galicia: her power of discernment.)

#### NATIONAL IDENTITY

Franza's suffering victimhood is inseparable from her need to idealize; she seeks a moral absolute and attempts to assimilate with it, thereby winning for herself the moral worth she aspires to. She fluctuates between self-deceit and denial, seeing only the absolute, and the inability to live in a state of moral compromise or ambiguity. At a wider level, her dependence on an idealized object, and the licence to ignore present reality which it offers, are fundamental to her perception of national identity. Franza idealizes the past of the Habsburg Empire and the oriental present. In her, the two are related, both imagined realms where she will be uncompromised, realms that signify the return to an origin, to authenticity, away from the deceit, manipulation and denial of contemporary society. The Empire offers an image of an 'innocent' Austria, untainted by complicity with German National Socialism, and the Orient offers escape from the morally tainted post-war Austria while giving the hope of moral redemption. By identifying with the oriental victims of the 'Whites', and indeed with Holocaust victims, Franza

effects a neat double gesture: she responds with moral repugnance to racist atrocities, while herself avoiding any association with 'White' ideology, historically exemplified in fascist thinking.

In the figure of Franza, a woman whose identity is founded in victimhood, deceit, and idealization, many of the characteristics of post-war Austrian identity manifest themselves. In his article on education and national identity in post-war Austria, Robert Knight shows how a similar constellation of features served the attempt to construct an identity in opposition to Germany.<sup>21</sup> The major parties of the Second Austrian Republic made the claim that the difference between Austrians and Germans was both national and ethical; the Austrians were not members of a Greater German Nation, and Austrians had been resisting victims of National Socialism. Felix Hurdes, secretary of the People's Party, and Education Minister from 1945, emphasized an Austrian Nation that was capable of reconciling East and West, was purged of German traces and was based on a distinct ethnic identity involving intermarriage with Slavs and Magyars. He argued that 'Durch eine Geschichte von Jahrhunderten . . . eine wesentlich andere Blutmischung und eine Erziehung, die an anderen Sternen orientiert war, Österreich längst eine eigene Nation geworden [ist] und mit Deutschland nichts als die Schriftsprache gemein [hat]'.<sup>22</sup> (As a result of centuries of history, . . . an essentially different mix of blood, and an upbringing that has been oriented to quite other stars, Austria has long become her own nation and has only the written language in common with Germany.) Hurdes may not have been expressing the view of all his government colleagues here, but there was certainly agreement between the People's Party and the Socialists to insist to the outside world that Austria had been the victim of German aggression, and to deny or ignore the fact that there had been widespread support for the *Anschluss* of 1938.<sup>23</sup>

Austria's acknowledged status as victim was central to its self-definition, and continued to be generally accepted until the Waldheim affair of the 1980s forced public discussion and acknowledgement of Austrian support for the Nazi regime and anti-Semitic policies.<sup>24</sup> The denial that sustained this image was profound, as Jean Améry stated so clearly: 'Österreich jedoch, von seinen Politikern der Welt als ein Opfer Hitlers vorgestellt, steht vor der unerträglichen Nötigung, sich selbst ganz und gar zu verleugnen.'<sup>25</sup> (Yet Austria, presented to the world as a victim of Hitler by its politicians, is faced with the unbearable need to deny itself absolutely.) And as Gerhard Botz argues, while anti-Semitism continued to be rife, Austria benefited financially from its 'victimhood', first by having Allied reparations substantially reduced, then by refusing compensation payments:

Im Gegensatz zur Bundesrepublik Deutschland lehnte Österreich als 'Opfer des Nationalsozialismus' Entschädigungszahlungen an Israel ab und verzögerte bzw. erschwerte solche an einzelne Juden lange Zeit . . . Die österreichische Regierung versuchte immer wieder, die Vermögensrückstellungen an Juden aus Grundbesitz, Betrieben, Wohnungen, Kunstgegenständen, Aktien etc. möglichst einzuschränken. (Zigeuner sind im übrigen erst ab 1981, Zwangssterilisierte und Homosexuelle bis heute nicht voll als Opfer des Nazismus anerkannt worden, während Dienstzeiten und erlittene Schäden durch Tätigkeit im NS-Staatsapparat und in der Wehrmacht voll kompensiert wurden.)<sup>26</sup>

(In contrast to the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria rejected compensation payments to Israel, claiming to be a 'victim of National Socialism', and for a long time delayed, or obstructed, such payments to Jews . . . The Austrian government repeatedly attempted to limit as much as possible the restitution to Jews of property, businesses, flats, artworks, shares, etc. (Incidentally, gypsies were only recognized as full victims of Nazism in 1981, and those who were forcibly sterilized and homosexuals have still not been recognized. In contrast, a period of service and damages incurred whilst working in the NS state machinery and in the Wehrmacht, were fully compensated.))

It is in the processes at work in constructing identity that strong parallels emerge between the individual woman Franza and the public discourse of post-war Austria. Botz concludes that in terms of her representation of National Socialism, Bachmann was 'more modern' than other contemporary historical analyses, but goes on to argue that there is a tension, if not a contradiction, between that and the traces of the official 'victim' discourse and her mourning for the loss of the Habsburg Empire.<sup>27</sup> Yet in his analysis Botz gives little attention to the narrative strategies of Bachmann's fiction, using the themes present in her prose as ready, unmediated evidence. This failure of vision is repeated in an article by Hans-Ulrich Thamer, in which he argues that in Bachmann's public comments 'Österreich ganz im Sinne des im Österreich der Nachkriegszeit lange dominanten Geschichtsbildes lediglich aus der Perspektive des Opfers [erscheint].'<sup>28</sup> (Austria is presented in a way which is fully in keeping with the historical conception of Austria that was so long dominant after the war, which was simply from the perspective of the victim.) He then cites 'Unter Mördern und Irren' and *Malina* as further evidence, without first considering questions of narrative perspective, thus too easily aligning authorial statement with fictional expression. I would like to argue, however, that although Bachmann may share 'das verbreitete österreichische Gefühl der Nostalgie und des Verlustes'<sup>29</sup> (the widespread Austrian feeling of nostalgia and of loss), her prose work serves as a complex critical response to nostalgia and idealization. To take further Botz's comment on Bachmann's modernity, her fiction is evidence that she

was not only ahead of her time in her depiction of National Socialism, but that she thematizes the many processes involved in the construction of identity, and then goes on to appraise them critically. The narrative perspective is so important because it crucially transforms sympathy for the protagonist from being an apologia for victimhood and deceit to being a critical appraisal which is nevertheless founded upon comprehension of the protagonist's real suffering. The tension that Botz identifies is one arising from the narrator's profound sympathy with Franza and her views, and her concurrent refusal to condone Franza's position. And by extension, through the parallels established with Austrian identity, the tension reflects the narrator's sympathy for Austria, but also her refusal to simplify what post-war Austria is through idealization or deceit. Similarly, the eager demonization of Germany, lurking in *Das Buch Franza* but more obviously thematized in *Requiem für Fanny Goldmann* and the *Goldmann/Rottwitz* novel, is not advocated but criticized as a necessary bolster for Austrian idealization.

Franza's suffering cannot be seen in isolation from the process of submission and self-deception that not only facilitate but actively contribute to her death. Just as in her relationship with Jordan it is her willingness to identify with him as a moral authority which prevents her thinking about and questioning her responsibility, so too her tendency to conceive of political issues solely as moral instances results in attitudes based on idealized generalizations in which she fails to reflect upon her own role. So although Franza may powerfully and evocatively articulate the voice of the wronged, she is a figure who, in her failure to differentiate critically, provides the conditions, even the support, for the wrongdoing.

The 'Heimkehr nach Galicien' itself already signals the impossibility of Franza's ideals. As the name of the place in which Franza and Martin grew up, Galicia is also the name of the province that belonged to Austria before 1918, after which it was ceded to Poland. The return home to Galicia thus represents both the futile attempt to recapture the imagined comfort of a large and protecting Empire, 'das Haus Österreich' (170) (the House of Austria) and the fantasy of an imagined childhood idyll with its profound and unexploitative sibling love. For Martin it was a time when his bare-legged sister looked after him, and when they were so close that she instinctively knew when he was drowning and ran to rescue him; for Franza it was the time before illness, of the coming of peace and 'Sire', of her love for her brother and the English Captain, unmarred by the manipulative objectification of her relationship to Jordan. The narrator confirms the power of the desire for Galicia, for a return to an uncorrupted pre-history,

remarking 'Wie unwiderstehlich ist Galicien, die Liebe' (149). (How irresistible Galicia is, love is.) That Galicia assumes this function of unsullied idyll, a place with an untarnished pre-history, relates too to the fact that it was a province which, before the Second World War, had a large Jewish population. The desire to return here is thus also the desire to turn away from a present that is dominated by the knowledge of genocide.

Martin, however, is himself aware of the impossibility of returning to what was: 'Es war alles ganz sinnlos geworden, was er gedacht . . . und was er erinnert hatte, das war nicht mehr die Franza von früher . . . und von Galicien war auch nichts mehr übriggeblieben' (157). (It had all become pointless, what he had thought . . . and what he had remembered, that was no longer the Franza of before . . . and nothing was left of Galicia either.) 'Der ganze Mythos einer Kindheit . . . und eines Wiederfindens' (158) (the whole myth of a childhood . . . and of a rediscovery) as Martin recognizes his yearning to be, is not, however, merely a personal myth, but carries with it the association of a greater past. Martin and Franza's cottage becomes representative of the lost Habsburg Empire, within which one could identify with a part or with the whole, now modernized but with no name. The cottage is 'Überbleibsel eines imposanten Besitzes . . . wo man auch zu den Großen oder den Kleinen gehören konnte, und das hier in Galicien war einmal groß gewesen, ein Reich und ein Name, und jetzt gab es das nicht mehr, dafür elektrisches Licht und fließendes Wasser' (158) (a small remnant of an imposing property . . . where one could belong to the great or the small, and this place in Galicia had once been great, an empire and a name, and now it no longer existed, but instead there was electric light and running water).

Although both siblings share this yearning for the past, their relationship to that yearning is quite different. This becomes evident in their responses to the names on the gravestones at Maria Gail that Franza has insisted upon visiting. The names are a mixture of Germanic and Slavic, and the first names are endlessly repeated in a circle. The importance of the names lies not only in the fact that some, like Gasparin, belong to relatives, but that they represent a political system that was:

Nicht nur die Ranner und die Gasparin hatten sich so immer im Kreis gedreht, und dazu um ihre Hausnamen . . . damit sie doppelt getauft waren wie das Haus Österreich, das sich mit seinen dreidoppelten Namen immer im Kreis gedreht hatte bis zu seinem Einsturz und davon noch an Gedächtnisverlust litt, die Namen hörte für etwas, das es nicht mehr war. (170)

(It was not only the Ranners and the Gasparins who had repeated their names like this, and also revolved around the name of their house . . . so that they became

doubly christened, like the House of Austria, which had turned itself in a circle with its three double names until its collapse; an event it failed to remember, still hearing names for something that no longer existed.)

This political ailment of looking to the past for a name that is now obsolete, of thus seeking to define oneself anachronistically, is, in Martin's view, what Franza is suffering from. In her new faked passport she has once again assumed her maiden name of Ranner, so attempting to regain the past through a name. Martin observes 'daß auch Franza von einem Einsturz mitgerissen wurde und daß sie durch ihre Krankheit noch an der Krankheit des Damals litt, viele Merkmale auch dieser Krankheit trug. Sie schaute zurück, drehte sich in ihren wirklichen alten Namen' (170) (that Franza was also swept along by a collapse and that through her illness she was suffering from the 'in-those-days' disease and displayed many of the characteristics of this illness: she looked back, wrapped herself in her real old names). The problem is that this old name 'bedeckte sie nicht mehr ganz, nur noch die Blößen' (171) (no longer fully covered her, only her nakedness). Whereas Martin perceives Franza to be looking back to an idealized past, refusing to recognize that these old names are effective disguises for 'die Monstrosität des Besitzenkönnens und Besitzenwollens' (171) (the monstrosity of ownership and the desire to possess), he is determined to reject the myth, the 'veralteten Schmerzen und Verhängnissen' (171) (obsolete pains and disasters). Although he soon rejects the notion, it occurs to him that not only Jordan is a 'Fossil' in his ways of thinking, but his sister is too, as someone not prepared to look forward and develop: '[Fossil] galt mit für alle Zumutungen, die von langher kamen, für alle diese Erpressungen, für die Erpresser wie Jordan und die Erpreßten wie Franza' (171-2). (The term 'fossil' included all the demands that stemmed from long ago, all this blackmail; it included the blackmailers like Jordan and those blackmailed, like Franza.)

This view of Franza is from Martin's perspective. However, just as his analysis of Franza's subservience to Jordan is later confirmed by Franza's own analysis and the narrator's 'Vorgeschichten' (pre-histories), so too is his judgement of her idealization of the past in 'Heimkehr nach Galicien' consistent with the changing perspectives of the following sections, even though the emotional and political context differs. In two of the versions of 'Jordanische Zeit' Franza's idealization manifests itself in a different and disturbing form. Here it is not projected onto the lost Habsburg past, but onto exploited and victimized races and groups whose very existence has been threatened by 'Whites', and with all of whom Franza fully and undifferentiatedly identifies. She dreams a dream in which she is in a gas-chamber and Jordan turns on the gas, a dream which is all the more terrifying because

for Franza it represents her conscious experience: 'es [ist] nichts Fremdes, es gehört zu mir' (229) (it's nothing strange, it belongs to me). Her self-positioning as a Holocaust victim is confirmed when she calls herself 'ein einziger Spätschaden' (215), a term referring to the long-term psychosomatic effects of Nazi persecution.<sup>30</sup> And on the occasion of her visit to Dr Körner, who had been a Nazi doctor involved in euthanasia killings, she establishes an immediate relationship between her own suffering and the anguish of the witness B., a victim of Nazi experiments, by, like him, saying to the oppressor, 'Verzeihen Sie' (forgive me). Franza says it to Körner, the witness said it to the court: 'Verzeihen Sie, daß ich weine . . .' (306) (forgive me for crying). Her surprise at the fact that Dr Körner is Austrian is telling: 'Sie hatte automatisch angenommen, er sei Deutscher' (298). (She had automatically assumed he was German.) Just as in her relationship with Jordan she avoided what had been perpetrated in the past, thereby becoming complicit through passivity, here she repeats the process by assuming that the perpetrators were German; as an Austrian woman identifying with victims while accepting German guilt, she can avoid the question of Austrian involvement in persecution, until so shockingly confronted with evidence to the contrary.

Franza's identification is not only with the Holocaust victims, but more generally she defines herself as 'von niedriger Rasse' (230) (belonging to an inferior race), or indeed as an inferior class, 'denn ich [bin] ausgebeutet, benutzt worden, genötigt, hörig gemacht' (230) (for I have been exploited, used, compelled, enslaved). She draws many comparisons between her own plight and gradual death and that of the aboriginal Australians, the Papuans, the Incas, the Murutes of North Borneo, the Blacks in general, until she finally asserts 'Ich bin eine Papua' (232). (I am a Papuan.) Jordan's exploitation of her is, in her view, like the White exploitation of 'lesser races', and there is no doubt that Franza articulates the despair of victims of oppression and exploitation powerfully and with a moral outrage that is effective and easy to sympathize with:

Er hat mir meine Güter genommen. Mein Lachen, meine Zärtlichkeit, mein Freuenkönnen, mein Mitleiden . . . er hat jedes einzelne Aufkommen von all dem ausgetreten, bis es nicht mehr aufgekommen ist. Aber warum tut das jemand, das versteh ich nicht, aber es ist ja auch nicht zu verstehen, warum die Weißen den Schwarzen die Güter genommen haben. (231)<sup>31</sup>

(He took my goods from me. My laughter, my tenderness, my gaiety, my sympathy . . . he erased each one when it appeared until it never appeared again. But why does someone do that, that is what I do not understand, but then it is impossible to understand why the Whites took the Blacks' goods away from them.)

In the final section, Franza's idealization and its necessary opposite, demonization, find expression in the opposition of the desert and the Whites, and, as Moustapha Diallo points out, between the desert and Cairo.<sup>32</sup> I have already shown how the desert signifies for Franza the final moral absolute; it is the place where she feels she can no longer be oppressed, and where she can finally attain a subjectivity that does not depend on victimhood: 'Ich werde nie mehr auf die Knie fallen, vor keinem Menschen, vor keinem Weißen' (255). (I will never fall to my knees again in front of any person, in front of any white person.) The law of the desert affirms the right of all to have access to water, a law in which Franza sees the guarantee for this new subjectivity: 'Du siehst, sagte Franza, es darf auch mir hier etwas nicht verweigert werden. Ich komme zu meinem Recht' (264). (You see, said Franza, even I cannot be refused anything here. I am coming into my own.) The desert represents the authenticity and respect that the White cultures have lost; it is they who desecrated the ancient Egyptian graves in their search for knowledge and categorization, a desecration that continues in the form of the stream of eagerly photographing white tourists in the museum, the 'Breughelfiguren aus Holland, aus Deutschland, aus Dänemark, mit sonnverbrannten Unterarmen und glühenden Nasen' (289) (Breughel figures from Holland, Germany and Denmark, with sunburned underarms and glowing noses). Franza is repulsed by the tourists' behaviour and vomits. She considers it, though, a just response: 'Ich habe euch, euch Leichenschändern wenigstens vor die Füße gespien' (290). (At least I have been sick at your feet, you grave-desecrators.)

It is at this point that we come up against the problem of the increasing confluence of the narrator's and Franza's voice in the final section, for it would seem to lend authority to the protagonist's identification with the desert and criticism of the Whites. There are certain passages where the Whites are criticized and the desert acclaimed as a place where authenticity of perception can be regained, which can be read from the perspective of either Franza or the narrator or both, but are not specifically ascribed to Franza, even if they are congruent with her view:

Wer fürchtet hier die von den Weißen katalogisierten Bakterien. Wer wäscht einen Becher aus, wer kocht das Wasser ab, wer laust die Salatblätter, wer nimmt den Fisch unter die Lupe? Hunger, Durst, wiederentdeckt, die Gefahr, wiederentdeckt, die Ohren, die Augen geschärft auf die Außenwelt gerichtet, das Ziel wiedergewußt. (259)

(Who fears the bacteria that have been catalogued by the Whites here. Who cleans out a cup, who boils the water, who washes the salad, who examines

the fish under a magnifying glass? Hunger and thirst are rediscovered, danger is rediscovered, ears and eyes are sharply trained on the world, the goal is again known.)

Here, the view of Whites as petty and divorced from basic and authentic human sensation appears to be condoned by the narrator, as is the accusation that their presence is ubiquitous, to the point of colonizing others' psyches:

Die Weißen kommen . . . Und wenn sie wieder zurückgeworfen werden, dann werden sie noch einmal wiederkommen . . . sie werden mit ihrem Geist wiederkommen, wenn sie anders nicht mehr kommen können. Und auferstehen in einem braunen oder schwarzen Gehirn, es werden noch immer die Weißen sein, auch dann noch. (278)

(The Whites are coming . . . And when they are repelled, then they will come once again . . . they will come with their spirit if they can no longer come another way. And even when they are resurrected in a brown or black mind, they will still be the Whites, even then.)

Now the critical potential of this position is undoubtedly considerable. As the debates in contemporary post-colonial theories reveal, colonialism and white supremacy are achieved and maintained not just through political and economic dominance, but through language and the privileging of certain modes of thinking and Eurocentric philosophies. But as contemporary debate also reveals, the reduction of the discussion to generalized binaries within which one pole dominates the other, forecloses on the possibility of a more complex analysis and fails to recognize the dynamic and often ambiguous relationships of power, resistance, hybridity and complicity. This, for all the critical potency encapsulated in Franza's attack on the Whites, is precisely the reduction that she makes. Lennox describes just this double effect of critique and reinscription of imperialist discourse. She points to Franza's fantasy of the desert as the place of healing that can rescue her from Europe, her conceptualization of and identification with it as 'Other' that is, like her, oppressed and exploited by European man. Such fantasies, Lennox concludes, have little to do with the desert, or with the real places of Egypt and Sudan, but are themselves typical of the way in which European identity – here the identity of a European woman – constitutes itself through projection onto a racialized Other. The question remains, however, of whether these simplifying fantasies are Franza's alone or whether the narrator is lending authority to her view. This is the question that concerns Albrecht in her close analysis of the historical veracity of Franza's assertion about the Papuans, Incas and Aborigines. She argues that Franza's statements are historically wrong, simplified and that they