



Suffering and Nostalgia in Ingeborg Bachmann's *Franza* Fragment: Interpolations of Gender and Power in the Context of Nazism

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Abstract:

Post Second World War German literature bears traces of the resentment of the younger generation towards the figure of father for his complicity with the Nazi state. Ingeborg Bachmann's *Franza* fragment documents the agony of a daughter viz-a-viz her Nazi father. In *Franza*'s contemplations, the image of father conflates with that of her husband Jordan, who haunts her memory as the Nazi oppressor. *Franza* encounters in her dream her brother and her father wearing 'horrifying' white coats. God too is far from bringing peace to her, and she runs away crying seeing him in the dream. A critique of masculinity constitutes, thus, the undercurrent of the narrative. As if to repay for her love to the Nazi father, the scenes of *Franza*'s masochistic experiences are interspersed in the text. Bachmann employs the postmodern technique of inter-textual 'nostalgia' in the narrative, which in turn proves to be short of an utopian content, and 'nostalgia' remains embedded in the text as ironized.

Key-Words: Nazi father, Critique of Masculinity, Intertextuality, Nostalgic Alternative, Fatherless Generation

The leading thinkers of Critical Theory in Germany traced the sustaining undercurrent of the Nazi system to a well-structured process of the flourishing of the authoritarian-personality during the Nazi rule. The acceptance accorded to the personality at the helm of power during this period in Germany echoed the much larger endorsement given to an authoritarian figure, whose legitimacy was drawn from the weak position of both father and husband in this period in German history. Weak fathers and husbands in the family were vulnerable agents for giving mass-support to

Nazism. Ilona Ostner argues: "The founders of Critical Theory linked what they called the "authoritarian personality," and mass support for Nazism, to men's weakness as fathers and husbands. The extension of the market and commodification of labor, they argued, seriously eroded men's status in society and their authority in the family, and thereby jeopardized male identity." (151)

The young generation of post-war Germany developed a strong resentment against the complicity of the father with the excesses of the authoritarian Nazi state. This young generation wanted to distance itself from the figure of a father and the movement of 1968 of the younger generation witnessed a refusal of the father as the supporter of the authoritarian regime during 1933-45. Those belonging to the younger generation, however, engaged in the interrogation of the as much pressing questions of guilt, innocence, and justice. Vicki Lawrence refers to a history which this younger generation was yet incapable of fully abdicating: "In the last decade or so, a significant number of books have been published that examine the legacy of National Socialism from the perspective of a new generation. This is the generation that has enjoyed *die Gnade der spätgeborenen* –the grace of being born too late to be held responsible for the horror of the Nazi years. And yet they are not free of that time. It is always with them. Though not personally responsible, they are tied by love and respect to the people who were, and by upbringing, blood, and nationality to a history they cannot escape." (100) One special issue of the journal *Kursbuch* resonated with the reverberations of this very question at length. In this issue, the questions relating to guilt and the



generation-conflict of the post-war years were ardently examined, which only highlighted the resistance of the post-war youth against the father-figure. Ilona Ostner refers to the June, 2000 issue of *Kursbuch*, in which “the discursive links between fatherhood and Nazism are rehearsed in a series of articles on father-son conflict and the 68-generation.” (151) These articles articulate psychological/social dimensions of 1968 protests and bring to light “sons’ rejection of their fathers, whom they accused of having blindly obeyed the state.” (151)

If father-son relationship of the post-second World-War years is fraught up with tension, situation seems not to be very different in the evocation of father figure in Ingeborg Bachmann’s *Franza* fragment, where the suffering befalls the daughter, whose relationship to her father bears traces of agony, for the image of father is always tied up with Nazism. Recent scholarship has sought to identify the links between the literary-pursuit of Ingeborg Bachmann and her awareness about the complicity of her father with the Nazi state. Critics have argued: “That Ingeborg Bachmann knew her father as an “Illegal,” or early member of the Austrian National Socialist Party, was long concealed behind a veil of discretion in her works that has since been lifted.” (Fetz/Strigl/Kastberger/Eder/McVeigh/Magsham 131) The pivotal significance of the *Franza* fragment for Bachmann scholarship lies in its being a successful attempt to examine the role of father in the framework of coming to terms with the Nazi past. The question of the link between the father-figure and the Nazi state informs also a pronounced awareness to gender-sensitivity in this narrative. Heidi Schlipphacke has pointed out: “Bachmann’s *Franza* fragment provides perhaps the most radical indictment of fascism in any of her literary works. It is this text which makes the explicit link between the political model of fascism and gender and family relations...” (Schlipphacke, 2006, 76)

In a dialogue with her brother in *Franza* fragment, Franza seeks to locate the fascism in the realm of inter-personal relationship between the family-members. She tells Martin, her brother, that the category of ‘personal behavior’, far from being undiluted from the ramifications of fascism, itself bears the apparent codes of fascism. To quote Heidi Schlipphacke: “In the fragmentary dialogue between Franza and her brother Martin from an early draft of the *Franza* fragment, Franza frames her relationship with her husband Jordan in terms of fascism: “Du sagst Faschismus, das is komisch,

ich habe das noch nie gehört. In dem Wort für ein privates Verhalten...”ⁱⁱ (Schlipphacke, 2006, 76) Jordan, the husband of Franza, appears in the narrative as a medical researcher investigating the experiments of Nazi doctors, and is not the less a figure “compared to a Nazi tactician”. (Schlipphacke, 2006, 76) Franza’s conjuring up of the father figure as the accomplice of the Nazi state manifests itself in the way she presents the image of Jordan. In her contemplation, the figures of Jordan and her father conflate, and when she dreams of Jordan subjecting her to the excesses of the gas-chamber like that of the Nazis, the image of father figure flashes at the moment. Heidi Schlipphacke remarks: “In Franza’s dreams, Jordan is the Nazi father who gases Franza: “Heut nach habe ich geträumt, ich bin in einer Gaskammer, ganz allein, alle Türen sind verschlossen, kein Fenster, und Jordan befestigt die Schläuche und läßt das Gas einströmen.”ⁱⁱⁱ (Schlipphacke, 2006, 76-77) This dream is an instance how the mechanism of fascism operates at the level of the relationships within family, even as the tacit acknowledgement of fascism as a political institution does not figure in *Franza* text. It is important to consider this aspect as Bachmann was convinced that fascism as a phenomenon takes root and unfolds in the inter-personal relationships, in particular in family-relationships. In an interview in 1973, Ingeborg Bachmann had pinpointed the connections between fascism and family-relationships as follows: “...ich habe schon vorher darüber nachgedacht, 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...”ⁱⁱⁱ (Schlipphacke, 2006, 76)

If one takes into account Bachmann’s position on fascism as expressed here, one would be guided to trace the presence of Franza’s suffering set against an oppressive power-structure, in which the male figure is the denominator of the oppressive mechanism. Men are infallibly the ones, who are one in their masculinity and whose masculinity threatens the female protagonist. At this point, Bachmann’s *Franza* fragment documents intense gender-sensitivity of a languishing female protagonist against the tormenting masculinity. In another of her dreams, Franza sees her father, brother, and God together. The overall aura of this dream is that of pain. Her



father, brother are different from each other, and yet in as much the dream invokes pain in the memory of Franza, their lines of demarcation are floating and they all appear to be interspersed identities. Franza describes the dream: “Ich muß laufen, eswirdschondeutlicher, eristes, ich muß nochbiszu ihm, aberes war nicht Martin, der zurückwich, abereristesja, er in demweißen Mantel, ersteigtausdemBild, eristgekommenaus Wien, in demTrostmantel, um michheimzuzuholen, nein, in demschrecklichen Mantel, den erabwirft, abereristesnicht. Mein Vater. IchhabemeinenVatergesehen.Erwirftseinen Mantel ab, seine vielenMäntel ab. [...] Aberesistnicht, eristnichtmeinVater. [...] Gottkommt auf michzu, und ichkomme auf Gottzu. Sieliefwieder und weinte, weinte, [...] IchhabeGottgesehen.”^{iv} (Schlipphacke, 2006, 78) Franza’s recognition of the images of the horrifying brother, horrifying father with coat (-s) and yet her inability to perceive either the brother or the father as the sole, distinct horrifying agent implies the problematizing of the ‘male’ figure as the tormenting agent. Even having desecrated God, Franza runs away crying in the dream. With this, the narrative takes on the character of a critique of ‘abstract’ oppressing masculinity. To argue with Heidi Schlipphacke about this dream: “Each male figure serves as a representation of masculinity that culminates in the image of abstract male power, God. Power is thus simultaneously oversimplified and elusive, since it manifests itself in figures who explicit oppressors and also in those who have remained abstract or absent.” (Schlipphacke, 2006, 78)

Ingeborg Bachmann had known her father as a Nazi supporter, yet she had loved him. At the time of the death of her father, Bachmann had “purportedly commented, “that [he] was the only person to not abandon her,” and suggested a more positive personal relationship...” (Fetz/Strigl/Kastberger/Eder/McVeigh/Magsham 132) The *Franza* fragment seems an apologetic enterprise of repaying for her tenderness to a Nazi father. It is as if as an act of reproof for this love to a Nazi father, she takes on the role of punishing herself. The perpetration of oppression on Franza takes place from two poles—first, from father, and secondly, from herself. As such, in the narrative one notes a masochist Franza alongside a sadist father. One might recall the depiction of a scene of gender oppression on Cairo railway station in the *Franza* fragment, in which apparently a masochistic woman figure inflicts torture on herself. Heidi Schlipphacke refers to the ramifications of masochistic self-torture by Franza:

“As the placeholder for the “victim” Franza masochistically attempts to choreograph the scene of her own murder, she mimics the violence perpetrated upon her by banging her head against the wall of the pyramid. This moment of performative masochism recalls an earlier scene of gender oppression witnessed by Franza at the train station in Cairo in which it is unclear whose desire is being met by the performance. Indeed, the bystanders suggest to Franza that it is the woman who is perverted: “Nichteristverrückt. Sieistwahnsinnig.” Franza identifies with the woman simultaneously as victim and as unapologetic masochist, a figure who desires her own oppression...” (Schlipphacke, 2006, 79) Bachmann’s *Franza* fragment thus documents not only the identification of the father figure as tormenter, but also illuminates the guilt that the younger generation yet cannot throw its shoulders from. If the novella “*Vati*” by Peter Schneider articulated the predicament of postwar younger German generation and betokened an “anguished examination of the conflicting demands placed on this generation to both love and hate, to accept and reject, to take on the burdens of guilt” (Lawrence 101), the same holds true for the *Franza* fragment of Ingeborg Bachmann also.

By roping in Lord Percival Glyde, a protagonist from Wilkie Collins’s Victorian novel *The Woman in White* (1860) in her *Franza* fragment, Ingeborg Bachmann has subtly used the postmodern technique of intertextuality and invoked the trope of ‘nostalgia’. For the younger generation, which Bachmann belonged to, any ‘nostalgic’ reckoning of the past meant returning to pre-fascist times. The intertextual contour of the narrative reaching as far back as the Victorian English setting adumbrates Bachmann’s search for the utopian undercurrent of the nostalgic recollection in an idealized, unruffled, and romanticized past far removed from the memories of Nazi Austrian homeland. As she encounters her father as a sadist, in her nostalgic recollection Lord Percival Glyde appears as “an idealized figure who seemingly represents an alternative to the patriarchal and, by extension, fascist structures...” (Schlipphacke, 2006) Franza meets Lord Percival Glyde at the time of the liberation of Austria from Nazi powers by the English soldiers, and hence in her recollections, her meeting with Percival Glyde retains a unique charm. Heidi Schlipphacke notes: “Glyde is purely a product of Franza’s past, the period of her adolescence that coincides with the moment of “Befreiung” from the Nazis by English soldiers. It is spring of Franza’s



life and the spring of liberation.” (Schlipphacke, 2006, 80)

Bachmann has given a specific dimension to Franza’s recollection of the past. The coincidence of her meeting with Lord Percival Glyde with the liberation of Nazi Austria by the British soldiers lends this recollection an utopian touch of hope situated in the past. The recesses of this past are not confined to the immediate moments of “liberation”, rather they reach back to the Victorian idyll, so that this utopia can be set as a counter-model to Nazi sadism, as represented in the father figure. It is the pre-Nazi idyllic setting of this utopia, which helps Bachmann to conjure it up also in romantic terms. Tracing romantic shades in this utopian nostalgia, Heidi Schlipphacke observes: “In terms of the narrative, Percival Glyde functions as a nostalgic fantasy for Franza, a figure who represents an exceptional eroticism that is not sadistic and whom she recalls in a vague mantra: “Sire, ich werde ankommen.vi” And “Sire, ich will ankommen.vii” (Schlipphacke, 2006, 74-75)

A careful examination of the figure of Percival Glyde in the Victorian novel belies the utopian motive in the ‘nostalgia of hope’ that he apparently represents. In Collin’s novel, Percival Glyde’s portrayal carries the features of a villain. Heidi Schlipphacke points out: “The “magical” alterity of Victorian England is deconstructed through a cursory knowledge of Collin’s novel in which Glyde, the baronet, turns out to be a charlatan and a sadist.” (Schlipphacke, 2006, 82) In this respect, the figures of Percival Glyde and father of Franza reinforce each other by virtue of sadism ingrained in their personalities. Critics have argued that by employing the figure of Percival Glyde in her Franza narrative, Bachmann has “overcoded” the text with irony. As a consequence, the nostalgia becomes flawed and its liberating promise fades. To quote Heidi Schlipphacke: “Bachmann’s use of Collin’s complex villain in the Franza fragment returns both nostalgia and irony to Bachmann’s text.” (Schlipphacke, 2006, 83) Heidi Schlipphacke, in one of her another study, has termed this nostalgia as ‘displaced’. She argues: “The writings of Ingeborg Bachmann can be located at the forefront of a post-fascist German-language literature that both displaces nostalgia and resituates it temporally.” (Schlipphacke, 2010, 37)

As ultimately even Lord Percival Glyde is short of offering a credible alternative to the figure of a sadist Nazi father, Bachmann’s Franza seems to be one among those who belonged to the postwar “fatherless generation” of the youth. The term ‘fatherless generation’ was coined by the

postwar German psychoanalytic thinker Alexander Mitscherlich in early 1960s, and in particular in his work

Auf dem Weg zur vaterlosen Gesellschaft. Ideen zur Sozialpsychologie.^{viii} Analyzing this term in the context of a series of biographies about Nazi fathers written by the authors of younger generation in 1980s, Michael Schneider and Jamie Owen Daniel write: “About 20 years ago, this generation was diagnosed as the “fatherless” generation by Alexander Mitscherlich, who used the term to indicate that the parental role-models which had been discredited by fascism and the war could no longer exercise any lasting influence on it. The term also expressed the idea that the younger generation had “rid” itself of its fathers, and had “overcome” them.” (4) The case of “fatherlessness” is yet distinct in Ingeborg Bachmann’s *Franza* fragment. Franza’s Nazi sadist father whose memory variously occurs to Franza in her daily relationships with her husband and in her dreams as a torturer is far from a desired parental role-model, and is truly discredited by Nazism. But, the nostalgic alternative to the father remains too unfulfilling, for Lord Percival Glyde too is a character tainted with sadism. In view of such an alternative, that Franza secures nostalgically, Franza’s attempt to “rid” herself from father is thwarted. Bereft of the parental warmth of a father and facing a flawed alternative, Franza appears to be one among those inheritors of Nazi traumas, whom history turned powerless. The powerlessness of Franza testifies to the futility of utopia as an aesthetic alternative, where, according to Fredric Jameson “history of aesthetic styles replaces ‘real’ history.” (Schlipphacke, 2010, 38) Fascist devastation was too deep to allow even an aesthetic experience of liberation and hence, poetic imagination of Ingeborg Bachmann in her *Franza* fragment betrays a ‘blind spot’, in which “the notion of historicity is saddled with the burden of the historical crimes of Nazism.” (Schlipphacke, 2010, 38). This historicity permeated with Nazi crimes can only be attempted to be depicted, but its ‘overcoming’ appears to be formidable and much distant from being realizable in Bachmann’s *Franza* narrative.

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My father. I have seen my father. He throws his coat, his many coats off. [...] But it is not he, he is not my father. [...] God comes to me, and I come to God. She ran again and cried, cried, [...] I have seen God."

^v "Not he is crazy. She is insane."

^{vi} "Sire, I shall come."

^{vii} "Sire, I want to come."

^{viii} Alexander Mitscherlich's book *Auf dem Weg zur vaterlosen Gesellschaft*.

Ideen zur Sozialpsychologie appeared in 1963. The book discusses the psychological effects of the disempowerment of the image of traditional family father in post Second World War Germany. The author argues in the book, that the human beings turned 'fatherless' search for 'surrogate fathers' whom they can accept as 'Super-Ego'.

Endnotes:

ⁱ "You say Fascism, that is funny, I have never heard that other than as a word for a private behavior..."

ⁱⁱ "Today night I have dreamed, I am in a Gas chamber, totally alone, all the doors are closed, no window, and Jordan fastens the tubes and lets the gas flow in."

ⁱⁱⁱ "...I have already earlier thought about that, where does fascism begin. It does not begin with the first bombs that are thrown, it does not begin with the terror, on which one can write, in every newspaper. It begins in the relationships between human beings. Fascism is the first in the relationship between one man and one woman..."

^{iv} "I have to run, it becomes already clearer, it is he, I have to yet to go to him, but it was not Martin, who withdrew, but it is he, he in the white coat, he steps out from the image, he is come from Vienna, in the consolation coat, to take me home, no, in the horrific coat, which he throws off, but it is not he."