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# ‘Ich kann nur gut allein sein’: Love and Friendship in the Correspondence of Ingeborg Bachmann and Hans Werner Henze<sup>1</sup>

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## I

The correspondence between Ingeborg Bachmann and Hans Werner Henze is testament to a relationship characterized by a continuous crossing of boundaries: in a cultural and linguistic but also aesthetic and emotional sense. Over two decades, Bachmann and Henze regularly wrote letters to each other, lived together for some periods of time, and had a fruitful creative partnership. Their joint work blends poetry and music, their letters flow between German, Italian, French and English, and their relationship was part friendship, part love affair. Indeed, the literary scholar Renate Stauff perceives the correspondence between Bachmann and Henze as paradigmatic for a modern discourse of love. According to Stauff, the letters are not expressions of two stable and consistent selves. Instead, the correspondence becomes a space in which the lovers’ volatile self-conceptions can be articulated and negotiated.<sup>2</sup>

In her characterization of the letters between Bachmann and Henze, Stauff is not necessarily concerned about the difference between love and friendship. The terms could be used almost interchangeably. This, however, is in stark contrast to Bachmann and Henze’s own use of these concepts. For Bachmann, love in its most radical and uncompromising form is an ideal that one can aspire to, but any attempt to realize it will ultimately lead to despair and demise. This is one of the central themes of her oeuvre, most poignantly expressed in Bachmann’s radio play *Der gute Gott von Manhattan*.<sup>3</sup> In one of his last surviving letters to Bachmann, Henze issues a similarly bleak verdict on romantic love, alluding to

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Ian Cooper and Alvise Sforza Tarabochia for their helpful advice on this article, in particular regarding translations from Italian and into English.

<sup>2</sup> Renate Stauff, “Erklär mir, Liebe”: Kunst des Liebens und Liebessprache im Briefwechsel Ingeborg Bachmanns mit Hans Werner Henze’, in *Der Liebesbrief. Schriftkultur und Medienwechsel vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. by Renate Stauff, Annette Simonis and Jörg Paulus (De Gruyter, 2008), pp. 401–25 (pp. 420–21).

<sup>3</sup> See Michael Klein, ‘Das Verhältnis von Liebe und Tod in Ingeborg Bachmanns Hörspiel “Der gute Gott von Manhattan”’, *Sprachkunst — Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft*, 41 (2010), pp. 17–28.

Louis Aragon: 'Il n'y pas des amours heureux' (IB/HWH, p. 281) [There are no happy love affairs].<sup>4</sup> In his opinion, the futile pursuit of romantic love should be replaced by 'freundschaft, freundlichkeit, brüderlichkeit' (IB/HWH, p. 282) [friendship, kindness, fraternity].<sup>5</sup>

In an earlier letter, Bachmann had described her feelings for Henze as brotherly: a tender kind of love without the doubts of romantic yearning (IB/HWH, p. 360). Nevertheless, there are reasons to characterize the correspondence between Bachmann and Henze as love letters, not least for Henze's passionate though often tongue-in-cheek courtship of Bachmann, but also for Bachmann's repeated reassurances that Henze is the most significant person in her life (see for example IB/HWH, pp. 267 and 339). Several times during their friendship, Bachmann and Henze considered getting married. Even though the composer's homosexuality posed clear limits on the physical side of their relationship, they envisaged a life together: a pact to realize a chaste and pure idea of living as artists (see IB/HWH, p. 314).

In theory, this agreement might have granted them a certain amount of privacy and freedom in their romantic pursuits and for Bachmann an escape from her precarious financial situation. In reality, however, both struggled with the arrangement. Henze, who was the driving force initially, was soon beset with doubts and, despite the platonic nature of their relationship, was jealous of Bachmann's lovers. Bachmann in turn soon resisted the inherently conservative character of this lifestyle, modelled after a bourgeois heterosexual relationship.

Their correspondence exposes the challenges in their attempt to shape a friendship in the mould of a romantic relationship. It documents Bachmann and Henze's struggle to escape the boundaries of conventional relationship and gender ideals and yet also reveals how such norms implicitly still shape their thinking and behaviour. In contrast to Renate Stauff, I thus consider the difference between friendship and romantic love significant for an understanding of Bachmann and Henze's relationship, as they consciously explore the potential as well as the limitations of love and friendship, in their lives as well as in their letters. While Stauff is right to claim that Bachmann and Henze's letters strive to establish proximity in absence,<sup>6</sup> their correspondence is also a continuous struggle to create the distance and detachment necessary to make their relationship last.

When Henze emphasizes the value of friendship over love in his letter to Bachmann, he is invoking an old topos that can be traced as far back as Michel de Montaigne and his pivotal essay in the philosophical discourse on friendship,

<sup>4</sup> Louis Aragon, 'Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux', in Louis Aragon, *La Diane française* (Seghers, 1963), pp. 25–26. It is unclear whether Henze's use of the plural in contrast to the singular in the original, including the grammatically incorrect article (*des* instead of *d'*), is intentional.

<sup>5</sup> In many of their letters, Bachmann and Henze exclusively used lower-case characters, even for nouns that are capitalized in standard German.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Stauff, "Erklär mir, Liebe", p. 414.

*De l'amitié*<sup>7</sup> Montaigne compares passionate love to a fire that is ‘temeraire et volage, ondoyant et divers’ [‘rash and fickle, fluctuating and variable’], while friendship is characterized by ‘une chaleur generale et universelle’ [‘a general universal warmth’].<sup>8</sup> It is ‘temperée [...] et égale, [...] consistante et rassise’ [‘temperate and smooth, [...] constant and at rest’].<sup>9</sup> Love must be regarded as ‘un desir forcené après ce qui nous fuit’ [a mad craving for something which escapes us], yet friendship is ‘toute douceur et polissure, qui n'a rien d'aspre et de poignant’ [‘all gentleness and evenness, having nothing sharp nor keen’].<sup>10</sup> Thus, its calm emotional constancy makes friendship the superior relationship to the momentary passion of romantic love.

More recently, the sociologist Eva Illouz wrote a similarly fervent essay in praise of friendship over love. Love, Illouz argues, is always characterized by a sense of urgency: ‘Because it is grounded in biology, [it] seems to overpower our minds and hearts’.<sup>11</sup> The ‘ecstasy of love’ however is short-lived: ‘it fades, evaporates from our lives, sometimes turning into the sweetness of attachment and sometimes in the bitterness of burdensome promises we cannot fulfill’.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, Illouz claims that true friendship is the bond that lasts, often for a lifetime. It can adapt to accommodate the emotional needs and capacities of both friends. Friendship goes along ‘with the movements and flow of our life, and lacks the dramatic, theatrical trappings of love’.<sup>13</sup>

In the German discourse on friendship, it is Siegfried Kracauer’s essay *Über die Freundschaft* that contains the most compelling distinction, between what he calls ‘begehrende Liebe’ [desiring love] and friendship.<sup>14</sup> Love, according to Kracauer, strives for complete unity between two people, whereas friendship requires a certain degree of distance and otherness. In love, there is the urge for all aspects of life to be shared, in order that partners become one with the other.<sup>15</sup> Yet, this ‘Verlangen nach einer Verschmelzung des Daseins’ [‘the desire

<sup>7</sup> Michel de Montaigne, ‘De l’amitié’, in Michel de Montaigne, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat (Gallimard, 1962), pp. 181–93; ‘On Affectionate Relationships’, in Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, ed. and trans. by M. A. Screech (Everyman’s Library, 2003), pp. 205–19.

<sup>8</sup> Montaigne, ‘De l’amitié’, p. 184. Translation: Montaigne, ‘On Affectionate Relationships’, p. 209.

<sup>9</sup> Montaigne, ‘De l’amitié’, p. 184; Montaigne, ‘On Affectionate Relationships’, p. 209.

<sup>10</sup> Montaigne, ‘De l’amitié’, p. 184; Montaigne, ‘On Affectionate Relationships’, p. 209.

<sup>11</sup> Eva Illouz, ‘Why We Don’t Celebrate Friendship with the Same Fervor as Love’, *Haaretz*, 13 February 2016 <<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/culture/2016-02-13/ty-article-magazine/.premium/on-the-nobility-of-friendship/oooo017f-e36e-df7c-a5ff-e37e1ddcc0000>> [accessed 13 October 2023].

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, ‘Über die Freundschaft’, in Siegfried Kracauer, *Essays, Feuilletons, Rezensionen*, ed. by Inka Mülder-Bach (Suhrkamp, 2011), pp. 29–59 (p. 41).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 41–43.

for a melding of existences'] is foreign to friendship.<sup>16</sup> Friends encounter each other as free and independent individuals.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, just like romantic love, friendship is a union between two people who seek to recognize each other in their entirety, that is, in every aspect of their being. Friendship satisfies the need to be taken up into another's existence and to feel understood there: 'Sich gemeinsam entfalten, ohne sich aneinander zu verlieren, sich hinzugeben, um sich erweitert zu besitzen, zur Einheit zu verschmelzen und dennoch getrennt für sich bestehen zu bleiben: dies ist das Geheimnis des Bundes' ['To flourish together without losing oneself in the other, to devote oneself in order to possess oneself in expanded form, to melt into a unity and yet remain existing separately for oneself: this is the secret of the bond'].<sup>18</sup>

Kracauer's differentiation between love and friendship accurately describes the fault lines in Bachmann and Henze's relationship: for several years, the vision of a life together is a common theme in their correspondence. Yet over time, Bachmann seems to realize that what Kracauer calls the 'melding' of existences would necessarily require her to abandon her independence and therefore also her literary ambitions. Over and over again, the friends discard their shared plans. During this process, they develop an increasingly profound understanding of their personal needs, both as artists and as friends. Their example confirms Illouz's claim that friendship persists because of its ability to change and transform. As much as the letters are therefore a means of deepening the bond between Bachmann and Henze and of continuously renegotiating the nature of their relationship, they are also a necessary vehicle for demarcating the differences between them.

## II

Bachmann and Henze first considered getting married in spring 1954, roughly a year and a half after they had been introduced to each other at a meeting of Gruppe 47 in 1952. In 1953, Bachmann visited Henze in Ischia and stayed with him over the summer, prompting her own decision to relocate from Vienna to Rome. There was no formal marriage proposal, but we know about their intention from a letter in which Henze explains his reluctance to go through with these plans:

[L]isten, it is rather hard for me to write to you [...]. I should feel ashamed very much and I did so when I learnt from most different people what I seem to have done to you. The whole fact can be explained in a few dry words: When I saw you having got those form papers from the embassy and things started to get real, I felt I wouldn't be able to drop into that marriage.  
(IB/HWH, p. 293)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 43. Translation by Harry Blatterer, 'Siegfried Kracauer's Differentiating Approach to Friendship', *Historical Sociology*, 32 (2019), pp. 173–88 (p. 178).

<sup>17</sup> Kracauer, 'Über die Freundschaft', p. 58.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Translation: Blatterer, 'Kracauer's Differentiating Approach', p. 179.

While the initial idea might have been Henze's, Bachmann was the driving force when it came to bringing it to bear. The fact that it was her who took the initiative might have contributed to Henze's reluctance and ultimately to his decision not to pursue the marriage. In his letter, Henze rationalizes his behaviour and points out that neither he nor Bachmann would have found happiness in this relationship:

In fact it would have been the hell of a life especially for you [...]. For me there's no hope[,] no rescue, I must continue my awfully lonesome life until it's [sic] very end, and you ought to realize, now, that your honour has been less hurt this way than it would have been after having really married me [...] (IB/HWH, p. 294)

What is striking about this letter, apart from the emotional candour, is the fact that Henze chose to write it in English. Later on in their correspondence, the shift between languages becomes a common practice, but apart from a Christmas card a few months prior, this is the earliest of the surviving letters that is entirely written in a foreign language. As scholars have pointed out, the multilingual character of Bachmann and Henze's letters is a deliberate strategy of distancing (see for example IB/HWH, p. 481).<sup>19</sup> The act of alienation makes things sayable that could otherwise not be articulated. In this instance, for example, Henze explains how he was unable to address the matter face to face, when he went to see Bachmann a few days earlier: 'I could not even speak, so afraid was I to hear from you things concerning this affair' (IB/HWH, p. 293). The letter and the foreign language become means of dissociation, diluting the emotional immediacy of Henze's admission.

The published correspondence contains Bachmann's draft of a response. In this letter, also in English, she gives the impression that she had never taken the idea very seriously in the first place: 'I [...] had taken the whole thing like a joke [...]. Reading your letter I mean you were only afraid of this marriage-idea, afraid that I could take it seriously' (IB/HWH, p. 295). Rather than reproaching Henze for his ambivalence towards their relationship, yet again Bachmann takes agency: 'I mean we should both forget this affair and make in future the best out of our friendship and our work and the possibilities between both' (IB/HWH, p. 295). For the first time in their correspondence, Bachmann explicitly characterizes the relationship between her and Henze as a friendship. There is an echo of an earlier letter by Paul Celan to Ingeborg Bachmann, written in 1952, that was intended to conclude their love affair: 'Wir wissen genug voneinander, um uns bewusst zu machen, dass nur die Freundschaft zwischen uns möglich bleibt. Das Andere ist unrettbar verloren' (IB/PC, 41) ['We know enough about each other to realize that friendship is the only possibility between us. The rest is irretrievably lost'].<sup>20</sup> Yet the insistence on friendship also disguises the desire

<sup>19</sup> See Stauf, "Erklär mir Liebe", pp. 406–07.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Paul Celan to Ingeborg Bachmann, 26 February 1952, in *Paul Celan, Ingeborg Bachmann, Correspondence. With the Correspondences between Paul Celan and Max Frisch*

for its romantic other.

For Bachmann and Celan, defining their relationship as a friendship resulted in a hiatus in their correspondence until their spontaneous reunion and the resumption of their love affair in 1957. The opposite is true for Bachmann and Henze. Their relationship over the following years was characterized by prolific creative collaboration. After Bachmann had rewritten the Prince Myshkin monologue for Henze's pantomime ballet *Der Idiot* in 1953, Henze composed the score for Bachmann's radio play *Die Zikaden* (1954/55) and set several of Bachmann's poems to music. The pinnacle of their collaboration is *Der Prinz von Homburg* (1958) and *Der junge Lord* (1964). Large parts of Bachmann and Henze's correspondence document the creative process of writing these operas. Their friendship may have found its truest expression in this collaborative artistic endeavour. As Siegfried Kracauer notes, friendship and art share an affinity, as both enable the articulation and recognition of one's full personality.<sup>21</sup> In this sense, the letters exchanged between Bachmann and Henze can themselves be considered as works of art. In fact, the poet and the composer had intended to publish a selection of their correspondence related to *Der junge Lord* (IB/HWH, pp. 251 and 509). Both were keenly aware of the personal as well as the poetic significance of their letters. Far more than simple communication, their correspondence served as a means of expressing and exploring their inner selves through the written word.<sup>22</sup>

A particularly compelling document of such self-scrutinization is contained within a collection of notes by Bachmann that have survived among her papers in the Literary Archive of the Austrian National Library. Although they were not part of the published correspondence and have only recently been included in a collection of Bachmann's autobiographical sketches,<sup>23</sup> they are addressed to Henze and were written in early 1956. These draft notes therefore date from a period in which the friends spent several months sharing a flat in Naples. Right at the onset of the notes, Bachmann tries to justify to herself and to Henze the reasons for writing them: 'Mein Lieber, weil ich so schlecht ins Arbeiten hineinkomme, hab ich dran gedacht, Dir jeden Tag etwas hier aufzuschreiben, für einen Fall, der mir selbst noch nicht klar ist, vielleicht für den, nehmen wir

*and between Ingeborg Bachmann and Gisèle Celan-Lestrange*, ed. by Bertrand Badiou, trans. by Wieland Hoban (Seagull Books, 2010), p. 49.

<sup>21</sup> See Kracauer, 'Über die Freundschaft', pp. 53–54.

<sup>22</sup> This is a point that Roland Berbig makes for the entirety of Bachmann's letter exchanges, see Berbig, '„bin schon versehrt, wenn ich das Datum hinsetze“: Die Briefschreiberin Ingeborg Bachmann', *Ingeborg Bachmann: Eine Hommage*, ed. by Michael Hansel and Kerstin Putz (Zsolnay, 2022), pp. 192–200 (p. 197).

<sup>23</sup> These drafts were not included in the original published correspondence. They were only recently made available for the first time as a facsimile in the Salzburg Bachmann Edition: Ingeborg Bachmann, 'Senza casa': *Autobiographische Skizzen, Notate und Tagebucheintragungen*, ed. by Isolde Schiffermüller, Gabriella Pelloni and Silvia Bengesser-Scharinger (Suhrkamp, 2024), pp. 330–33.

an, dass ich eines Tags fortgehe und Du es nicht verstehst' [My dear, because it is so difficult for me to start working, I thought I would write something down here for you every day, for a reason that I don't yet understand myself, maybe because, let's assume, I leave one day and you don't understand].<sup>24</sup> Although they had abandoned the idea of a marriage, even living with Henze as friends proved challenging for Bachmann. She struggles to find her own sense of self within a shared life that she experiences as the life of a stranger: 'Das Einrichten unserer casa hat mir meistens Freude gemacht, aber bei jedem Stück, das an seinen Ort gerückt worden ist, war mir auch so, als würd ich für immer irgendwo hingerückt, wo ich nicht hingehöre' [I mostly enjoyed setting up our casa, but with every piece that was moved into place, I also felt as though I was forever being moved somewhere I didn't belong].<sup>25</sup> Initially, Bachmann tries to find the reason for her discomfort within herself, in her own disposition. Perhaps, Bachmann contemplates, when she is living with someone, she becomes too concerned about the well-being of the other: '[M]eine ganze Natur ist so eingerichtet, dass ich vielzuviel Antennen habe, das macht schwach den andern gegenüber, man stellt sich zu sehr ein' [My entire nature is set up in such a way that I have far too many antennae, which makes me weak towards others, one adapts to them too much].<sup>26</sup>

While writing these notes, over the course of several days in early February, Bachmann begins to understand that her personal anxieties are rooted in society's restriction of female creativity. In practical terms, she deplores the lack of someone to share the struggles of the creative process with:

Männer die schreiben haben ihre Frauen und Freundinnen, vor denen sie lamentieren und herumstottern, und ich hab meistens niemand gehabt, hier und da war aber doch jemand da, die Ilse, die Kaschnitz [...] und bei Dir werd ich ängstlich aus Rücksicht, aus ich weiss nicht was; ich denke auch, dass Du viel zu beladen bist mit Deiner Musik, und der tägliche Kleinkram wie Kohlenkaufen gibt Dir dann sowieso den Rest. Wie soll ich von Dir noch verlangen, dass Du mit mir einen Genetivgebrauch überlegst oder Beistriche.<sup>27</sup>

[Men who write have their wives and girlfriends to whom they complain and stutter, and I mostly had no one, but now and then, there was someone there, Ilse, Kaschnitz [...] and with you I become fearful out of consideration, out of I don't know what; I also think that you are far too burdened with your music, and the daily little things like buying coal are bound to be too much for you anyway. How can I still ask you to think about the use of a genitive or commas with me.]

It is revealing that the friends Bachmann mentions are both women writers themselves: Ilse Aichinger and Marie Luise Kaschnitz. While Bachmann and

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 330.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 331.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 332.

Henze's correspondence is full of references to their joint projects, there is very little evidence of mutual involvement in the development of their individual work. Indeed, when Bachmann envisages her future with Henze, it almost turns into the caricature of an artist's wife:

Es wär wunderbar, wenn ich nichts zu tun hätte und nur für Dich da wäre, zum Abstauben des Notenpapiers und zum Anhören von allem, was Du schreibst und sagst, und es gibt ja auch Tage, wo ich glaube, sowieso nichts zu taugen, es aufgeben zu sollen und mit der ganzen Kraft für Dich dazusein.

[It would be wonderful if I had nothing to do and I could be there just for you, to dust the music paper and to listen to everything you write and say, and there are days when I think I'm no good anyway, should give it up and be there for you with all my strength.]<sup>28</sup>

It is obvious that such a life would not suit Bachmann's drive for self-realization. And yet she struggles to imagine herself in a less passive position in relationship to men:

[I]ch fürchte, mir mit dem Beidirbleiben eine Rolle zuzulegen die sich nicht mit mir decken kann. Ich kann nicht nur eine Rolle haben. Ich muss mir den ganzen Horizont offene[r] Möglichkeit auch offen halten. [...] Auch bezieht sich mein horror nicht auf die Männer, sondern auf mich selbst, überhaupt alles auf mich, nicht auf irgend etwas ausser mir. (Wenn auch nicht auf mein persönliches und unwichtiges Ich, sondern auf seinen Spielraum und seine mögl[i]chen Erfahrungen). [...] [D]ie "Freiheit", die ich neben Dir zugebilligt bekomme, wäre keine Freiheit für dieses unruhige Ich, sondern nur eine, für ein Ich, von dem ich möglichst wenig Gebrauch machen will.<sup>29</sup>

[I am afraid that by staying with you I will take on a role that can't align with me. I can't have just one role. I have to keep the horizon of possibilities open. [...] My horror does not relate to men, but to myself, everything relates to me, not to anything outside of me. (Even though it is not about my personal and unimportant self, but about its scope and its possible experiences). [...] The 'freedom' that I would be granted next to you would not be freedom for this restless ego, [but] only for an ego of which I want to make as little use as possible.]

These notes foreshadow Bachmann's later prose as she articulates the firm conviction that a life by Henze's side, indeed a life with any man, would over time obliterate her ability for poetic expression. As is the case with the female protagonist in Bachmann's only published novel, *Malina*, her creative 'self' would ultimately disappear. Yet in a way that is also reminiscent of the female protagonist of *Malina*, the Bachmann of these letters can abruptly fold back the denunciation of social injustices into fundamental self-deprecation: 'Ich kann

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 333.

nur gut allein sein, alles andre kann ich nicht' [The only thing I am good at is being by myself, there's nothing else I can do].<sup>30</sup> It is unclear whether Henze ever saw these notes and the fact that there is no evidence of any response from the composer makes it seem rather unlikely.

### III

Bachmann did in fact leave Naples in August 1956 to stay with her family in Klagenfurt. Later in the year she travelled to Paris and subsequently returned to Rome, where it became ever more apparent to her that the precarious life as a freelance foreign correspondent in Italy was not sustainable. Yet at the same time, Henze enthusiastically drew up plans to move into a bigger apartment in Naples, with a room dedicated to Bachmann as the lady of the house. She initially struggled to reject Henze's ideas until a journey to Naples provided clarity.

In an unsent draft, written in Italian and perhaps composed while she was still in Naples or shortly after her visit, Bachmann articulates with astounding poetic vigour why she is unable to live with Henze and why she has to leave — not just him, but Italy altogether. The dramatic gesture of the letter's opening passage demonstrates the personal gravity of this decision.

Se avrai questa lettera — così [sic] cominciano spesso le lettere prima del suicidio, ma la mia non è una die questo genere, magari una di vivere, e qualcosa mi dice che sarai tu a comprendermi, questa decisione insolita che mi conduce non so quanti chilometri da qui. Sono molti, molti, e [sic] è l'altra fine del mondo. (IB/HWH, p. 360)

[If you receive this letter — this is how letters often begin before a suicide, but mine is not one of this kind, perhaps one of living, and something tells me that it will be you who understands me, this unusual decision that takes me I don't know how many kilometres from here. There are many, many, and it is the other end of the world.]

Bachmann invokes the genre of last letters: the suicide note as the ultimate termination of speech.<sup>31</sup> The sense of urgency in this comparison demonstrates the existential dimension of Bachmann's decision. It is a final farewell to the idea that lovers and friends can be one and the same: 'Ti amo ancora, ma lo farei sempre, ma è un altro amore, quello che non conosce Zweifelssorge, puro e quello del fratello' (IB/HWH, p. 360) [I still love you, but I would do always, yet it is a different love, the one that does not know Zweifelssorge [the worry of doubt], a pure and brotherly one].

With regard to their relationship, this letter is an urge to move on: to go

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Arnd Beise, Jochen Strobel and Ute Pott 'Gesprächsabbrüche: Schreiben ohne Antwort', in *Letzte Briefe: Neue Perspektiven auf das Ende von Kommunikation*, ed. by Arnd Beise, Jochen Strobel and Ute Pott (Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 2015), pp. 7–20 (p. 15).

and let go, to reject all claims and demands on each other. Expressing this disparity between loving friendship and passionate love, Bachmann uses the only German word in her letter and both syntactically and phonetically, the sibilants of *Zweifelssorge* [lit. concern of doubts] break into the tonality of vowels in 'amore puro'. Even acoustically, these two concepts appear utterly irreconcilable.

Echoing Montaigne and Illouz's verdict on the difference between love and friendship, Bachmann admits that the love she seeks might be painful and destructive: 'rovina rovinoso' (IB/HWH, p. 360) [ruinous ruin]. Yet she believes that this pain is vital for her writing: 'Non è soltanto passione che mi spinge verso questa decisione, ma molto di più è se vuoi, passiōsione, ma in se [sic] una comprensione del vuoto che ho sofferto qui e che soffro artisticamente' (IB/HWH, p. 360) [It is not only passion that pushes me towards this decision, but much more, it is, if you like, more than passion, but in itself an understanding of the emptiness that I have suffered here and that I suffer artistically].

The life that Bachmann intends to devote herself to is one of passion, or something even bigger: *passiōsione* — a poetic superlative of *passione* [passion] that is also reminiscent of the words *osessione* [obsession] and *possessione* [possession]. Bachmann is aware of the fatal consequence of exposing herself to life and love in all its destructive force, and yet she is determined, especially as a woman, to deny herself the protection that the bourgeois façade of a life with Henze would have to offer.

The passage ends with a figure of self-empowerment and a devastating conclusion: '[I]o, Hans, io sola, a capovolgere le cose così, perché gli uomini sono vigliacchi' (IB/HWH, p. 360) [It is I, Hans, I alone, who turns things upside down like this, because men are cowards]. In her notes from the previous year, Bachmann had tried to locate the source of her suffering in her inability to commit to a relationship. Now, however, she recognizes this reluctance as a strength — an ability to resist the domestication of female passion and creativity.

An attempt to locate the roots of literary texts in an author's biography might find the origins of Bachmann's short story 'Undine geht' [Undine goes or leaves] here. Bachmann herself, however, goes the opposite way, from poetry to life: 'È strano che poco fa ho scritto qualcosa su di quel continente oscuro, e ora ci vado veramente, e sento questo vecchio coraggio forte' (IB/HWH, p. 360) [It is strange that a little while ago I wrote something about that dark continent, and now I'm actually going there, and I feel this old strong courage]. Bachmann is referring to her poem 'Liebe: Dunkler Erdteil' ['Love: The Dark Continent'] (W, 1, p. 158; DS, pp. 323–25) and its title that alludes to Sigmund Freud's verdict on the incomprehensible nature of female sexuality.<sup>32</sup> In an exoticized setting, the poem conjures images of power relationships and their inversion along the axes

<sup>32</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Die Frage der Laienanalyse', in Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke*, XIV: *Werke aus den Jahren 1925–1931*, ed. by Anna Freud (Imago, 1948), pp. 207–96 (p. 241).

of race and gender. The ‘schwarze[r] König’ [‘black king’] (W, 1, p. 158; DS, p. 323) appears as the epitome of aggressive male sexuality. The crux of the poem is that the female object of desire turns into a subject of knowledge and thus gains authority over her male counterpart: ‘Du kannst das Reich um seinen König bringen, | du, selbst geheim, blick sein Geheimnis an’ [‘You can deprive the kingdom of its king, | for it’s you who, secretly, has seen his secret’] (W, 1, p. 158; DS, p. 325). The secret as a weapon of the oppressed is a motif familiar to Bachmann through Heinrich von Kleist’s novella *Michael Kohlhaas* where the eponymous protagonist chooses to be executed rather than to reveal a secret to his arch-enemy, the Elector of Saxony. Non-knowledge subverts the established hierarchies of power. Just as Bachmann’s image of the black king turns the imperialist undertones in Freud’s trope on its head, knowing about men’s lack of knowledge becomes the foundation for female self-empowerment.

Henze is devastated by Bachmann’s departure. In a note to Bachmann, he writes: ‘[L]a tua fuga continuata [...] è un dolore grande amaro e profondo’ (IB/HWH, p. 363) [Your continuous flight is a great, bitter and profound pain]. What is remarkable about this letter is that it contains three discrete messages, all written in a different language: Italian, German and English. The response to Bachmann’s ‘flight’ is an epistolary ‘fugue’ [both words translate as *fuga* in Italian], intertwining several voices, each representing contrasting emotional qualities. Henze starts out with a first line in Italian that is continued in the third and every other odd line of the letter. In the even lines in between the Italian, Henze initially writes in German before he shifts to English, roughly in the middle of the letter. Renate Stauf compares the German part of the letter to an admonitory speech of an anxious father,<sup>33</sup> while the Italian lines express Henze’s personal disappointment, but also his emotional hurt. Finally, in the English lines, Henze addresses what he suspects to be the reason for Bachmann’s withdrawal: ‘I get furious really by thinking that you do all these crazinesses only because I happen to be queer’ (IB/HWH, pp. 363–64).

While Henze’s letter skilfully pushes the boundaries of the epistolary form, it also exposes the patriarchal bias in his relationship to Bachmann. There is no acknowledgement of Bachmann’s desire to free herself from the misogynist underpinnings of conventional relationship models. On the contrary, he calls on her to reconsider her decision, which he perceives as sheer ‘wahnsinn’ [madness] (IB/HWH, p. 362): ‘stattdessen solltest Du [...] die disziplin aufbringen, Dich ruhig zu verhalten und zu arbeiten’ (IB/HWH, p. 362) [instead you should have the discipline to behave calmly and work]. Even the remarks about his own sexuality as the cause of Bachmann’s refusal to live with him can be read as narcissistic projections that do not recognize her urge for a life beyond the restrictions of traditional gender roles.

<sup>33</sup> Stauf, ‘“Erklär mir Liebe”’, p. 407.

## IV

One cannot help but agree with Renate Stauff when she claims that the correspondence between Bachmann and Henze demonstrates how societal norms and taboos (their sexual promiscuity, Henze's homosexuality) can take root in intimate personal relationships and subsequently lead to the most hurtful behaviour towards the other.<sup>34</sup> This is also the reason why Bachmann and Henze's attempts to establish a shared life within a romantic and heteronormative framework are doomed to fail. For Bachmann, the urge for a shared life, something that Kracauer describes as foundational for desiring love, becomes an instrument of patriarchal oppression. In this respect, Bachmann's quarrels with Henze appear like a prelude to her traumatic experiences in the later relationship with Max Frisch.

Thus Bachmann's insistence on friendship is also an insistence on distance as a prerequisite for her freedom and her independence, both as a woman and as a writer. Perhaps the reason why her relationship with Henze ultimately survived is rooted in his own experience of marginalization. Despite the frequently patronizing undertones on Henze's side of the correspondence, he had a sense for the fact that her experience as a woman was fundamentally different from his, just as his letters demonstrate his awareness of the multiple, dissonant and often contradictory voices inside us. He is thus in a position to acknowledge that friendship is as much built on differences as it is on similarities: a fact that makes the relationship mutable, but fragile at the same time.<sup>35</sup>

The common ground for Bachmann and Henze was their existence as artists. In response to the deep crisis that Bachmann experienced after the break-up with Max Frisch, Henze writes: 'Nessuna Schmach die questa terra ci può toccare se pensiamo sempre alla ragione per cui siamo Venuti al mondo. Siamo qui per creare questa è la santa verità, tutto il resto è marginale' (IB/HWH, p. 390) [No humiliation [*Schmach* in German] on this earth can touch us if we always think about the reason why we came into the world. We are here to create, this is the holy truth, everything else is irrelevant].

Friendship, according to Kracauer, depends on a common view of the world. It provides the opportunity to grow together — with and through each other.<sup>36</sup> Bachmann and Henze's friendship offered them a profound understanding of themselves as writers — in the mirror of the friend's life and work. It enabled them to gain a deeper awareness of the uncompromising demands of their vocation, yet also an inkling of the safe haven that only art can provide. '[L']artista [...] ha [...] da mettere contro le mutabilità delle cose, le sofferenze, le solitudini, una cosa che gli altri non hanno: Il trionfo della creazione. Quel trionfo che gli è anche rifugio, nei momenti più neri' (IB/HWH, p. 390) [The

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 421.

<sup>35</sup> See for example IB/HWH, pp. 325–???

<sup>36</sup> Kracauer, 'Über die Freundschaft', p. 53.

artist has something to counteract the mutabilities of things, the suffering, the loneliness, something that others do not have: The triumph of creation. That triumph which is also their refuge, in the darkest moments].

By recognizing each other as artists, the friends affirm the essence of each other's existence. In this way, the friendship, troubled by the friends' inability to share a home in terms of *Zuhause*, becomes a home in the sense of *Heimat*. In the words of Siegfried Kracauer:

Während ich überall sonst genötigt bin, mich in tausenden Lebenskreisen zu zersplittern, hier ein Stückchen zu nehmen, dort ein Quentchen zu geben, darf ich ihm [dem Freund] so gesammelt und umfänglich nahen, wie ich bin und wie ich mich fühle. [...] Der Seligkeit des Begriffenwerdens, des Aufgehobenseins in einer fremden Seele, entspricht aber die nicht minder große Seligkeit des Besitzens. Auch ich berge ja den anderen Menschen in mir. [...] Wir wollen eine Heimat haben und andern eine Heimat sein.<sup>37</sup>

[While everywhere else I'm compelled to split into thousand circles of life, to take a bit here, to give a smidgeon there, I may approach him [the friend] as composed and expansive as I am and as I feel. The bliss of being understood, of being sheltered in an alien soul is in no small measure equal to the bliss of possession. For I too shelter the other human being in me. We want to have a home and be a home to others.]

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 54.