Writing against war

Ingeborg Bachmann
1926 – 1973

In 1964, in the draft for a project relating to an international literary journal, Ingeborg Bachmann expressed the intellectuals' fundamental demand for peace as a "conditio sine qua non":

"...that everyone, without distinction and without color, without class, without rank, without anything, be permitted to live and work, and eat and sleep without fear, and because this is the conditio sine qua non for them, also..."

In a letter to friends in 1972, she wrote:

"...no thoughtless partial solutions, no apathetic, indolent, and sentimental ones, no solutions that are astonishingly safe and dangerous in the long and cobbled road, no rational, safe, calculated, and reasonable, but dangerous in the long term and cobbled together in the short term...

And the solution works, Weltliteratur, Weltgeschichte, Weltliteratur, Weltgeschichte, Europäische Lösung.

For this day, I want to keep my words untainted,
For the day as yet unknown when work on armaments
Is stopped [...]

As an exhibit of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the Literary Association for the Promotion of Understanding of Work and Art and the Austrian Embassy in Dublin.

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Text and image references:

As far as they are published there, the texts by Ingeborg Bachmann are cited according to the four-volume readers' edition of her work:


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"I want the war to come to an end," this sentence from Ingeborg Bachmann's novel Malina could stand as a motto for her entire work. Her poems, radio plays, short stories, novels and essays in literary theory represent a large body of anti-war writing covering many genres and forms.

Every Day
Alle Tage

War is no longer declared, der Arzt wird nicht mehr erklärt, it is prolonged. The outrageous is now legislated. Das Unhörsame has become the norm. The hero is not attacked; Der Held stays far from the action. The weakening of the nation, the seeming defeat of her homeland, has moved into the war zone. Der schwache ist in das Feuerwesen, The day is uniform, it's uniform, The day's beauty, the heroism der of the heart. Der armelige Stern der Hoffnung über dem Herzen. |...|

Borrowed Time

The pictures and text passages in this exhibition follow a biographical and chronological order, with the aspect of "writing" in the foreground. In the background, represented by close-ups, lies the historical horizon of the theatres of war.

I. War in the land of childhood.
   Carinthia 1926 – 1945

II. Ingeborg Bachmann's war diary
    1945

III. "After the war – this is the beginning of an era."
    Vienna 1946 – 1953

IV. "Safe passage (Ania II)."
    Italy 1953 – 1957

V. "Lay down your arms!"
    Munich, Zurich, Rome 1958 – 1962

VI. German twists of fate / Bohemia Lies on the Sea.
    Berlin 1963 – 1965

VII. "Haus Österreich" [The House of Austria] in Rome.
    1966 – 1973

Notes on her life, work and legacy

Ingeborg Bachmann was born on 25th June 1926 in Klagenfurt, Austria. She experienced the "Anschluss", the annexation of Austria by Hitler's Germany, as a deep-seated shock that determined her future life. After the war, in autumn 1945 she left Klagenfurt and studied philosophy, first in Innsbruck and Graz, and then from 1946 in Vienna, where she completed her studies (1949) with a dissertation on the critical reception of the work of Martin Heidegger. In 1948, during her years in Vienna, she met Paul Celan; this encounter was to have a lasting influence on her work. At the beginning of the 1950s, she achieved renown with her first volume of poetry, Die gestundete Zeit [Borrowed Time] (1953). She was awarded the prize of the German literary movement "Gruppe 47", going on to become the most famous young female poet in post-war German literature. Her second volume of poetry, Anrufung des Großen Bären [Invocation of the Great Bear] appeared in 1956. During these years, in addition to her poems she produced several essays on literature, philosophy and music, wrote three radio plays [Ein Geschäft mit Träumen [A Deal in Dreams], 1952, Die Zikaden [The Cicadas], 1955, Der gute Gott von Manhattan [The Good God of Manhattan], 1956], as well as two opera libretti for the composer and lifelong friend Hans Werner Henze [Der Prinz von Homburg [The Prince of Homburg], 1960 and Der junge Lord [The Young Lord], 1965].

Her renown as a poet made it difficult for her to gain recognition among the critics as a prose writer. It was not until the late 1970s that her volumes of short stories, Das dreißigste Jahr [The Thirtieth year] (1961) and Simultan [Simultaneous] (1972) and her only novel to be published during her lifetime, Malina (1971), gained recognition as important contemporary literature. However, for an entire generation of readers, the posthumously published prose of Todesarten [Ways of Death] (1978 in the readers' edition, and the critical edition of 1995) became a point of reference for a new consciousness of the murderous brutality underlying apparently quite normal everyday situations and relations between the sexes.

After leaving Vienna in 1953, she lived mostly in Rome, with stays in Paris, Munich, Zurich and Berlin. Ingeborg Bachmann died on 17th October 1973 as a result of injuries sustained in a fire in Rome.