

● OEUVRES CITÉES

- Adler, Alfred. *Le Tempérament nerveux*. Tr. de l'allemand. Paris: Petite Bibliothèque Payot, 1976.
- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.
- Brée, Germaine. *The World of Marcel Proust*. Riverside Studies in Literature. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966.
- Berger, Gaston. *Traité pratique d'analyse du caractère*. Paris: P.U.F., 1974.
- Brombert, Victor. "De 'Novembre' à 'L'éducation': communications et voie publique". *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*, No. 4-5 (juillet/octobre 1981): 563-572.
- Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961.
- Dällenbach, Lucien. *Le Récit spéculaire*. Paris: Seuil, 1977.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Proust et les signes*. Paris: P.U.F., 1964.
- Foucault, Michel. *Histoire de la folie*. Paris: Plon, 1961.
- Genette, Gérard. "Proust et le langage indirect." *Figure II*. Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1969: 233-294.
- Haeckel, Ernst. *The History of Creation*. 2 vols. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1880.
- Husserl, Edmund. *The Phenomenology of Internal Time — Consciousness*. Translated by James S. Churchill. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1964.
- Iser, Wolfgang. *The Act of Reading*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.
- Le Senne, René. *Traité de caractérologie suivi de Précis d'idtologie*. Paris: P.U.F., 1979.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phénoménologie de la perception*. Paris: Gallimard, 1945.
- Proust, Marcel. *A la Recherche du temps perdu*. Pierre Clarac et André Ferré. Préf. André Maurois; Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Paris: Gallimard, 1953.
- . *Contre Sainte-Beuve, précédé de Pastiches et mélanges et suivi de Essais et articles*; Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Paris: Gallimard, 1 vol., 1971.
- . *Jean Santeuil, précédé de Les Plaisirs et les jours*. Ed. Pierre Clarac avec la collaboration d'Yves Sandre; Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Paris: Gallimard, 1971.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation*. Translated from the German by E.F.J. Paybe. 2 vols. Vol. I, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1969.

The Truth About Language? — It's All Lies: Ingeborg Bachmann's "Ein Wildermuth"

Frank Pilipp
Lynchburg College

In her lectures on poetics Ingeborg Bachmann repeatedly deplores the arbitrariness and questionable nature of human existence—an existence that consists of unconnected realities and contradictory values at the center of which we find ourselves. Underlying this conception is Bachmann's thesis of the rupture between "Ich und Sprache und Ding" (FV 188), the discrepancy between (subjective) human perception and expression and (objective) external reality.¹ Bachmann's phenomenological approach is akin to that of the Austrian philosopher Wittgenstein, who equates the limits of human perception with the limits of language. Language, Bachmann agrees with Wittgenstein, is incapable of expressing anything external to its system and is therefore merely tautological and self-referential (LW 16).² While the language issue as well as the importance of Wittgenstein are commonly recognized as central problematics in Bachmann's writings,³ critics have neglected to investigate their further implications with regard to consciousness, intellect, and human values.

Several of Bachmann's fictional protagonists epitomize the impossibility of positioning themselves "außerhalb der Welt" in order to formulate "Sätze über die Sätze der Welt" and must recognize that the transcendental signified, an ultimate truth, remains a fiction.⁴ Therefore their desperate attempts at transgressing man's linguistic capabilities, "die Grenzen ... , die uns gesetzt sind" (DW 276), prove futile. In the title story of the collection *Das dreißigste Jahr* the protagonist increases his intellectual capacity to the degree that he is on the verge of breaking through all human confines, of gaining access to an ultimate truth, to that transcendental signifier which would account for the "Logik, ... an die die Welt gehängt ist" (DJ 108). However, his brainstorm implodes in short circuit and his thoughts are forced to unwind. He is thrown, or referred back onto himself and the world of linguistic tautologies, of half-truths and pseudo-values. In Bachmann's prose the word 'truth' is always used in a Derridean sense, under erasure as it were, since it is inadequate yet necessary. Inadequate because truth is defined negatively, through its absence,

necessary because it is ascribed the status of that for which most of Bachmann's protagonists desperately strive: the transcendental signified.

This quest is precisely the theme of "Ein Wildermuth," the story of the persistent truth-seeker, chief justice Anton Wildermuth. Although the narrative begins with the words "Ein Wildermuth wählt immer die Wahrheit" (EW 214), this motto is identified merely as a reverberating "Satz," and "Wahrheit" only as a hollow "Wort," an empty signifier. When a working man, who curiously bears the same last name as the protagonist, admits to parricide, Anton Wildermuth is determined to establish the truth about the motives and the execution of the crime. This, however, is made extremely difficult when the accused, who previously had candidly confessed his deed, unexpectedly contradicts the court's recapitulation of the crime and its motivation. As all of a sudden the new confession disallows any logical cohesiveness, the judge's lifelong belief in the mimetic powers of language is irreparably shattered. It becomes apparent to Wildermuth that signifier and signified are continually breaking apart and reattaching in new combinations, thus revealing the inadequacy of Saussure's model of the sign, according to which a signifier and its signified relate as if they were two sides of the same coin. For Wildermuth, this puts into question his entire life as a judge,⁵ whose professional duties focus exclusively on language.

After an almost philosophical discourse delivered in court by a button expert hired to establish the identity of two separate threads, again exemplifying the gap between language and reality, between signifier and signified, the judge suffers a mental breakdown and retires from the court voicing his frustration in an impulsive scream. Quite obviously this impetuous outburst is his reaction to the dissatisfying and disturbing realization of man's arbitrary and artificially constructed existence and marks his final abdication of man-made truths. While bidding farewell to the mimetic power of language that he had cherished so conscientiously and solemnly all his life, Wildermuth's scream—which consists of language—is also a mimetic manifestation of his agitation. Furthermore and more importantly, however, it imitates the very linguistic and communicative chaos which it decries: disparate, yet not contradictory accounts are reported by different people as to the precise verbal content of Wildermuth's scream, alluding to the instability of meaning and the varying degree of meaning depending on the depth of the receiver's comprehension.

The last segment of the narrative, a first-person account of Wildermuth's personal history as a seeker of truth, illustrates the futility of arriving at an ultimate truth. Again it becomes evident that meaning never stays quite the same but varies from context to context. As a schoolboy

Wildermuth considered truth to be the equivalent of an accurate and exhaustive reportage of incidents, and truthfulness to be a virtue and moral obligation. But as Wildermuth's samples of his meandering and circuitous narratives document, facts can at best be approximated by language, never appropriated, since even the smallest details consist of even smaller ones and so forth and thus make up a complex texture of signs which is never exhaustible. Wildermuth then recalls his discovery of another type of truth as a university student. These truths, scientific and empiricist in nature, remain arbitrary as well, as they are again merely constituted by "Sätze" the meanings of which are rather unstable and lead to "wortreichen Streiten" (EW 233) among Wildermuth and his fellow students. Nevertheless, and above all, these truths serve pragmatic ends since they enable the protagonist to establish himself in society as a "brauchbares Element" (EW 234).

Next Wildermuth remembers his discovery of moral, psychological, and phenomenological truths ostensibly expressed in language, but he recognizes in retrospect that what language can express is nothing but "banale Offenbarungen" (EW 238). Instead of pointing to some ultimate presence, essence, truth or reality, language achieves precisely the opposite function, namely that of "verschleiern" (EW 245), of veiling possible meanings. While Wildermuth yearns for a correspondence between "Gegenstand und Wort, Gefühl und Wort, Tat und Wort" (EW 251), between mind and matter, between language and everything external to it, words simply cannot be considered reliable referents to a meaning, because meanings are never stable varying with the context of the signifier. And since human identity constitutes itself essentially through language, Wildermuth realizes that the whole idea that the speaker is a stable, unified entity must also be a fiction.

The concept of truth having thus been deconstructed, its immediate implication is that language cannot be used as a substitute for facts and thus the truth in the murder case remains absent. On a larger scale the absence of truth implies a critique of social values. While the so-called crime of the accused, by the standards of social mores, represents a heinous deed, in the light of an ultimate truth where "Tat und Wort" correspond and which embraces that universal "Logik, ... an die die Welt hängt ist" (DJ 108), it would have to be considered in perfect accordance with that all-encompassing logic. The only claim of truth that can be made by virtue of its corporeality is the presence of the bloody axe, the murder instrument, the use of which resists any logical "Sinnzusammenhang" (EW 215) for the court. As a result, the verdict is based on that pathetic "Wahrheit ... , die wir brauchen können" (EW 251), the justice claims of the judicial code. The other truth, namely the meaning of the

assassination is only partly present and, consequently, partly absent. It is dispersed along the whole chain of signifiers that are used to refer to it, resulting in a kind of constant flickering of presence and absence together—"irrlichternd" (EW 251) as Anton Wildermuth himself notes. The murder case, then, exemplifies the unreliability of the signifier and the absence of stable meaning, once considered the fundamental condition of human existence. Yet the inefficiency of language is merely indicative of the innate shortcomings of human intellect, which is limited to constructing pseudo-realities.

At last Wildermuth reveals how he once did indeed almost transcend to that so-called truth ("diese Wahrheit"; EW 242). Contrary to his rational endeavors, this occurred during an essentially erotic experience. As he reports, it was the waitress Wanda, with whom he experienced unfathomable depths of erotic ecstasy and passion. Significantly, not one word was spoken between them, Wanda being characterized by "Sprachlosigkeit" and an overwhelming pre-intellectual and untainted, and at the same time uninhibited physicality. In contrast to the mendacious verbosity of others and to Wildermuth's own rational thinking, Wanda is typified by a sincere, if amoral, sensuality ("erleben"; EW 242) and communicates non-verbally. Almost unconscious ("bewußtlos") Wildermuth finds himself in perfect unity ("Übereinstimmung") with a body not his own, a corporeal harmony speechless with passion.⁶

Momentarily Wildermuth's "Suche nach Übereinstimmung" climaxes in an unprecedented state of transcendence. Unlike in "Das dreißigste Jahr," where the protagonist undertakes his effort of transcendence intellectually, Wildermuth's approach is non-reflective. In an impetuous whirl of emotions he abandons all inhibitions and reaches a state of freedom which he recapitulates as: "Ich erkannte meinen Körper nicht wieder und begriff ihn ein einziges Mal" (EW 243). This apparent paradox expresses Wildermuth's essential realization that the state of truth can only be reached in a fusion of "Gegenstand und Wort," of matter and mind. It is precisely through the blending of his body and intellect that Wildermuth himself becomes the "[B]egriff," the signifier and its signified simultaneously.⁷ This fleeting cosmic oneness which he experiences is the equivalent of the revelation of that "Geheimnis" (EW 245) which is lacking in his relationship with his wife. While Gerda lives outside of truth she lives "gut" (EW 236), to wit, within the universe of human value judgments. These values, however, bear no validity in the light of that truth which Wildermuth so ardently wishes to grasp in words. That truth, as Bachmann states in her dissertation on Heidegger, can only be experienced, as in the case of Wildermuth, in a state of introspective ecstasy—"im emotional-aktualen Bereich,"⁸ a state of purity that is char-

acterized by "Sprachlosigkeit und Stummheit" (MD 60). The meaning or content of such experiences cannot be expressed by language, it is "unsagbar" and as such it is what Wittgenstein has termed "das Mystische,"⁹ a meaning that will reveal itself but cannot be captured rationally.

While the truth about such intense experiences can be intuited as a momentary "stummes Innewerden" (EW 252), lasting truth would be, as Wildermuth concludes, devastating.¹⁰ Yet, because he insists on this impossible durability, "Ein Wildermuth" ends in disillusionment, with the protagonist crying out for an *unio mystica* of himself and the world, a kind of universal oneness, when he visualizes himself "die Welt abhören, abtasten, abklopfen, aufwühlen, mich in sie verbeißen und mit ihr übereinstimmen" until he *becomes* physically one with nature, the world, and the truth—"Bis mir die Wahrheit wird" (EW 252). It is again that passive mystical experience at which the passive verbs "sich zeigen" (Wittgenstein) and "werden" (Wildermuth) hint, indicating that rationality alone lacks the power to discover truth. Nevertheless it is the individual's task to muster his or her best efforts to get closer to that "Sprache" fit to express the intuitively "erfahrene Geheimnis" (DJ 108), an undertaking that, applied to a social reality, can perhaps be characterized as overcoming conventional patterns of thinking and determining values.

While an objective and absolute truth (outside of human value judgments) is unattainable, and as such defined negatively, by virtue of the incompleteness and deficiency of the given, we must nevertheless strive for

das Vollkommene, das Unmögliche, Unerreichbare, sei es der Liebe, der Freiheit oder jeder reinen Größe. Im Widerspiel des Unmöglichen mit dem Möglichen erweitern wir unsere Möglichkeiten. Daß wir es erzeugen, dieses Spannungsverhältnis, an dem wir wachsen, darauf, meine ich, kommt es an; daß wir uns orientieren an einem Ziel, das freilich, wenn wir uns nähern, sich noch einmal entfernt. (DW 276)

The postulated "Spannungsverhältnis" denotes a dialectical process aiming for a higher level of consciousness and a 'truer' form of expression. Since, as Bachmann has Wildermuth declare, human intellect is not able to effect more than a "kurze kopflose Verwirrung" (EW 215), she demands a renewal of the mind to terminate man's existential disorientation and found a new relationship between the self and the outside world, for: "Eine neue Sprache muß eine neue Gangart haben, und eine neue Gangart hat sie nur, wenn ein neuer Geist sie bewohnt" (FV 192).

Clearly, the emphasis lies on a new mind and a new sense of perception. The question remains, however, how vitally Bachmann, in all her

skepticism, considers the expansion of our intellectual and impulsive faculties within our existential prison an optimistic perspective. Wildermuth's final resignation—quite opposite to the eventual, albeit subdued, optimism of the protagonist in "Das dreißigste Jahr"—does not substantiate this hopeful proposition; it is rather reminiscent of the pessimism expressed in the last sentence of Kafka's "Forschungen eines Hundes" where the dog concludes: "Freilich, die Freiheit, wie sie heute möglich ist, ist ein kümmerliches Gewächs. Aber immerhin Freiheit, immerhin ein Besitz.—"¹¹ Freedom, as a "reine Größe" the analogue to truth, is reduced to a worthless possession devoid of meaning, a hollow signifier to which one can at least proudly refer.

● NOTES

¹ All page numbers refer to Ingeborg Bachmann's *Werke*; DJ = "Das dreißigste Jahr" (vol. 2); EW = "Ein Wildermuth" (vol. 2); FV = *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*; DW = "Die Wahrheit ist dem Menschen zumutbar"; LW = "Ludwig Wittgenstein — Zu einem Kapitel der jüngsten Philosophiegeschichte"; MD = "Musik und Dichtung" (all vol. 4).

² See Wittgenstein, clause 6.1. and 6.42: "... Sätze können nichts Höheres ausdrücken."

³ See for example Hapkemeyer, Jurgensen, Lennox, Seidel, and Angst-Hürlimann.

⁴ This quotation has its direct counterpart in clause 5.61 of the *Tractatus* where Wittgenstein states that language—which is subject to the laws of logic—cannot refer to anything outside of human confines, "da sonst die Logik über die Grenzen der Welt hinaus müßte: wenn sie nämlich diese Grenzen auch von der anderen Seite betrachten könnte."

⁵ Both Anton Wildermuth and his father, the teacher of the same name, represent professions that operate on the basis of moral value judgments. Together with the accused, they represent, so to speak, identical signifiers (names in the sense of Wittgenstein's "Urzeichen" [clause 3.26 of *Tractatus*]) referring each to contradictory signifieds (professions) and thus themselves epitomize the arbitrariness of language. Bachmann here seems to allude to clause 3.142 of Wittgenstein's treatise "Nur Tatsachen können einen Sinn ausdrücken, eine Klasse von Namen kann es nicht," postulating the unbridgeable split between signifier and signified.

⁶ The names Wildermuth and Wanda are themselves evocative of a bond between the two characters. Both names bear the connotation of "wild soul/spirit,"

while the German adjective "wild" denotes an animalistic and pre-linguistic state in agreement with nature associated with a state of grace or truth (see Kluge).

⁷ My interpretation is based on the two-fold conception of "[B]egriff" both as a noun and the verb form in the simple past. In immediate association stands the phrase "auf den Begriff bringen," to define, clarify, resolve, illuminate. It is precisely Wildermuth's short-lived harmony that must be understood as a moment of self-definition, a glimpse of illumination, a momentary resolution of an existential dilemma.

⁸ Quoted according to Detter (45).

⁹ See *Tractatus*, clause 6.522; also quoted by Bachmann (LW 20).

¹⁰ Wildermuth alludes to the lethal consequences when he associates truth with the poisonous "Fliegenpilz im tiefen Wald" (EW 250). Analogous to that, the name Wanda expresses the same idea as it derives from 'Vandal,' the destructive tribes(wo)man.

¹¹ Kafka 354. For a detailed account of parallels between Bachmann's and Kafka's reflective writings see Pilipp.

● WORKS CITED

- Angst-Hürlimann, Beatrice. *Im Widerspiel des Unmöglichen mit dem Möglichen: Zum Problem der Sprache bei Ingeborg Bachmann*. Zurich: Juris, 1971.
- Bachmann, Ingeborg. *Werke*. 4 vol. Ed. Christine Koschel, et al. Munich: Piper, 1978.
- Detter, Alfred. "Zu den philosophischen und sprachtheoretischen Grundlagen." *Interpretationen zu Ingeborg Bachmann*. Ed. Rupert Hirschenauer, and Albrecht Weber. Munich: Oldenbourg, 1976. 43-57.
- Hapkemeyer, Andreas. *Die Sprachthematik in der Prosa Ingeborg Bachmanns: Todesarten und Sprachformen*. Frankfurt/M.: Lang, 1982.
- Jurgensen, Manfred. *Ingeborg Bachmann: Die neue Sprache*. Frankfurt/M.: Lang, 1981.
- Kafka, Franz. *Sämtliche Erzählungen*. Ed. Paul Raabe. Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 1970.
- Kluge, Friedrich. *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963.
- Lennox, Sara. "Bachmann and Wittgenstein." *Modern Austrian Literature* 18.3/4 (1985): 239-59.
- Pilipp, Frank. "Der Wahrheitsbegriff bei Kafka und Bachmann." *Modern Austrian Literature* 24.1 (1991): 43-57.
- Seidel, Heide. "Ingeborg Bachmann und Ludwig Wittgenstein: Person und Werk

Ludwig Wittgensteins in den Erzählungen 'Das dreißigste Jahr' und 'Ein Wildermuth.' " *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 98 (1979): 267-82.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus-logico philosophicus. Logischphilosophische Abhandlung*. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1969.

"L'infinto possibile: Sciascia e la sua morte"

Domenico Ierardo
University of South Florida

Rileggere *Il cavaliere e la morte* dopo la scomparsa di Sciascia, suscita emozioni intense e viva commozione: si ha come l'impressione che lo scrittore siciliano abbia cercato nella composizione di un romanzo la valvola di sfogo per il dolore fisico che lo angosciava, senza essere capace però di tenere il suo lavoro su questo tono egoistico perchè costretto dalla sua intensa carica di vita e dalla sua inflessibile legge interiore, che lo vuole da sempre impegnato contro la mafia, a lasciare che la sua penna scriva di ciò che da anni ha scritto, così che il personale passa sicuramente in ultimo piano.

Sciascia scrisse, di getto, questo romanzo durante un soggiorno tra Friuli e Veneto, in occasione della assegnazione del premio Risit d'aur nell'estate del 1988,¹ un libro che sembra quasi anticipare l'idea di una sua sconfitta, di un cedimento alla morte. Per gli amici quel libro fu un dolore straziante, tale era la preveggenza della propria morte, regalo torvo che l'uomo ha avuto dalla sua lunga "contemplazione della morte", dalla sua quotidiana consuetudine con il dolore che lo logorava dentro e la dissoluzione del proprio fisico. Il male l'aveva intaccato, ma, dagli esiti letterari che abbiamo di questo periodo, non aveva di certo vinto il Nostro. Sciascia non ha mai accettato sconfitte, in nessun campo; ha sempre voluto lottare, fino in fondo, anche contro la morte, affrontando disagi dolori e sofferenze nella speranza di uscirne sempre vincitore.

La trama è ancora una volta semplice, chiara, con una conclusione precisa, irritante: è il Sciascia che conosciamo, l'uomo impegnato a cercare la Verità, quella verità scomoda che gli ha meritato per anni il linciaggio di tanta stampa e dello stesso PCI, dalle cui file il Nostro ha militato ma ha anche saputo levare una voce contestatrice e di denuncia del Partito stesso.

Il protagonista di questo romanzo è un commissario di polizia, il cui nome è Vice, molto malato, che si trova a dover dipanare gli intrighi che hanno portato ad un ennesimo omicidio. Di mezzo sta un biglietto, scambiato tra due potenti ad un pranzo, minaccioso e misterioso, cui ha fatto seguito l'uccisione di uno dei due. La polizia si impegna a scagionare l'altro, nonostante il Vice dimostri una certa riluttanza a farlo, soprattutto perchè nel gioco entra una associazione eversiva che ha minacciato l'uciso: *I figli dell'ottantanove*, associazione nata forse come richiamo ai