

TIFF 2016. Wavelengths Features
The Dreamed Ones (Ruth Beckermann,
Austria)

Michael Sicinski 20th Sep 2016

The vast majority of the running time of *The Dreamed Ones* consists of two actors in a studio, engaging in a readers' theatre performance of the correspondence between Romanian poet Paul Celan and his longtime friend and lover, Austrian poet / novelist Ingeborg Bachmann. The performers, Anja Plaschg and Laurence Rupp, read the letters from their handheld manuscripts and speak them directly into studio microphones, one after the other. It is as if Beckermann is filming a documentary about the making of an audiobook. But this doesn't give a precise sense of the experience of watching *Dreamed Ones*. With their low-key delivery, Plaschg and Rupp carefully bring out the tension and anguish in the letters. There are numerous complications in the Celan / Bachmann relationship: professional jealousy that

Celan felt at Bachmann's successes; the unspoken gulf of their disparate experiences of the war years; and Celan's ongoing sense of being an outsider in an anti-Semitic Europe, something he knows Bachmann cannot truly understand. And yet, apart from these crises, which are highly specific to this particular couple and their position within the postwar modernist literary intelligentsia, Beckermann helps us to feel just as acutely those infelicities that are fundamental to all star-crossed lovers. Bachmann knows Celan will not leave his wife and child; Celan knows she is too ethical to demand that he do so.

In the midst of the performance sequences, Beckermann shows us Rupp and Plaschg on break, rolling cigarettes,

chatting idly about their work, discussing their own relationships, and gradually disabusing the notion that a conventional film would take as an axiom. The performers are cordial acquaintances, possibly friends, but pointedly *not* lovers,

and their real-life relationship does not mirror the fictional one they are portraying as performers. *The Dreamed Ones* sits at the junction of several strains of experimental film practice. The film bears a surface-level resemblance to the cinema of Straub-Huillet, but Beckermann's direction, camerawork, and editing are slier and more agile, given to punctuation rather than the wide-open expanse of a blank page. In its making-of element, there is also a hint of Harun Farocki's influence, examining art's components coming together through visible labor. But above all, Beckermann is showing us how two performers can engage in a kind of fencing match through the epistolary record of a stunted, complicated love affair.

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