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Gertrud B. Pickar
University of Houston

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The Impact of Narrative Perspective on Character Portrayal in three Novels of Heinrich Böll:

Billard um halbzehn, Ansichten eines Clowns, and Gruppenbild mit Dame.

Gertrud B. Pickar

During the last fifteen years, Böll has published a prodigious number of novels and long narratives, employing a variety of narrative approaches. His most recent novels, *Billard um halbzehn* (published in 1959), *Ansichten eines Clowns* (1963), and *Gruppenbild mit Dame* (1971), reveal his experimentation in narrative form and present strikingly different alternatives for narrative expression. This paper is concerned with one particular aspect of such presentation, the impact of narrative perspective on character portrayal.

Billard um halbzehn, the first work to be considered, brings fifty years of the Fäbmel family into focus in the course of a single day, September 6, 1958, which constitutes the actual time span of the novel. The outward frame of time, provided by the events of that day, is essentially progressive, though not consistently chronological. Segments of that temporal period are repeated in scenes involving different individuals, and events taking place simultaneously are presented sequentially,¹ a phenomenon associated in part with the multiple narrative perspective with which the novel is written.

Throughout the novel, incidents of the preceding five decades are brought to the fore by direct conversation or, more characteristically, by means of the thoughts and memories of the various narrating persons without regard to chronological order. Events in the outside world from the days of the Kaiser, the Weimar Republic, the Nazi years, and the Adenauer era are related wherever they directly touch the family, as are occasions internal to the family, such as births and deaths. These episodes from the past, however, along with the hopes, fears and fantasies of those earlier days, are presented from the vantage point of the particular day chosen as the fictional present of the novel, and hence are subjected to the temporal perspective of that frame. They are filtered by the perspective of that September day, tempered by a degree of objectivity furnished by the distance in time, and colored by that latter day assessment of them, with their impact ultimately demonstrated by the present condition and existence of the characters themselves. The reader is presented with

the characters' past as well as with their present, and the completed condition of their existence. Yet this dual temporal perception, while broadening the base of the character portrayal, reveals no character change or development. Though affected by events which have taken place and emotionally touched or scarred by their tragic losses, the figures themselves are depicted as essentially unaltered.² The qualities valid in the present for the individuals are the ones which are described as operative in the past. Heinrich, for example, had arrived in town determined to play his game and experienced the intervening years without radically wavering from his initial stance or the goals he had set for himself. Robert's stony correctness, lack of humor, aloofness and fascination with the abstract sciences of mathematics and physics and their effect upon physical bodies, showed themselves already in his youth and remained a constant throughout his life. Thus the complex temporal structure of the novel, rather than demonstrating character development, serves mainly to reiterate and reemphasize the image created of a given figure.

A similar effect can be noted with regard to yet another aspect of the narrative perspective. Here, as in the other two novels to be discussed, there is no omniscient narrator to expound upon the nature of the participating characters, to evaluate or analyze the content, motivation and orientation of their thinking or the basis or effectiveness of their behavior; or even to summarize their thoughts and actions. Rather the reader draws directly upon the thoughts and words of the various figures themselves.

Appropriately, the greatest portion of the novel is constituted by passages of inner monolog, interspersed with *erlebte Rede*, and conversational dialogues, often dominated by external monologs. There are in addition some essentially transitional sentences presented in third person and not associated with one of the narrative figures, but these brief passages are expository in nature and unobtrusive. (They are never used to impart information concerning character, motivation or intent or to provide insight into either character or events. Rather they establish a scene by giving temporal or spatial orientation not explicit in the thought patterns of the individual narrators.)³

In *Billard um halbzehn*, Böll utilizes a narrative technique developed in earlier novels in which a dual or multiple perspective was created by the presence of more than one first-person narrator. (The dual perspective of Käte and Fred Bogner in *Und sagte kein einziges Wort*, 1953, and the five narrators—the two mothers and two sons and the intermediary Alfred—in *Haus ohne Hüter*, 1954, were stages in the development of this technique which culminates in *Billard*.) In this, his last novel to use the multi-perspective approach, narration is shared by three major figures (all of the Fähhmel family), and a number of minor figures (both within and without the family circle). In the course of the novel, the reader is presented with the thoughts, memories and projected wishes of these characters and their reactions in thought and in word to people and situations.

The technique of multi-perspective narration does, however, provide the reader

the opportunity to evaluate or verify a character's thoughts, descriptions and self-analysis through comparison with the thoughts and memories of other figures with whom he is involved, and thereby to confirm, amend or reject the initial presentation. (Dissenting or contradictory commentary does not occur in *Billard*; rather the numerous narrators tend to supplement or affirm material previously presented.)

An analysis of the portrayal of Robert, the key figure of the novel, demonstrates the technique and its manner of characterization. The reader is prepared for the introduction of Robert through his secretary Leonore, the first figure to appear in the book. From her we are given an evaluation of him from the point of view of an outsider and learn of his morning routine and his work pattern; her feminine inquisitiveness and keen observation serve the reader's interest and reveal aspects of Robert's living habits from his pleasure over his son's visits to his annual wine consumption. Her comments on his constant courteousness, his formality, aloofness and inscrutability complete her portrayal of him. A few pages later the reader is presented with a moral evaluation of Robert and his family and an affirmation of their integrity from the more impartial, though emotionally charged words of the hotel employee Jochen Kuhlgame. ⁴ This is further confirmed by an objective third-person evaluation provided by a detective's report, where essential biographical and professional facts and a blemish-free appraisal of Robert are presented precisely, accurately, and with professional objectivity. The reader, thus prepared, is introduced to Robert himself, and as a result of the first-person narration gains direct and repeated access to his thoughts, memories and reflections.

In the course of the novel, Robert is also presented through the eyes of his father Heinrich, his institutionalized mother, his children Joseph and Ruth, his future daughter-in-law Marianne, the hotelboy Hugo, his boyhood friend Schrella, and even indirectly through his boyhood acquaintance and one time enemy Nettlinger. Robert is thus shown from multiple perspectives, through the eyes of individuals who stand in different relationships to him, who view him with differing degrees of familiarity, who have different personalities and are of different ages, and who belong to different economic and social classes. Yet we see him only in a single light, for in all these cases and throughout the various recalled or depicted incidents, the image of Robert remains unchanged. He is described with the same peculiarities of personality and the same character traits—his seriousness, his self-control, his detachment, his game-playing are repeatedly noted; everything from the ritual nature of his day to his identification as "shepherd" is recorded with unanimity. The result could appropriately be termed characterization by repetition.

This phenomenon is repeated in kind with the other figures as well. Nowhere is character portrayal marked by conflict of perception or of interpretation. Indeed, the similarity of the appraisals and the constancy of the presented personalities is even evidenced in the use of identical imagery, epithets, and wording. The degree of uniformity in character assessment is striking, especially since it is achieved through reliance upon the limited scope of several narrating figures.

Though the various narrators often provide additional information concerning events of the past and fill in missing parts of the Fählmel family history, they do not provide missing motives, differing character evaluations or varying interpretations of people, events, or situations. In this respect, *Billard* differs from the earlier novels which used dual or multiple narrators. In previous works intentional use was made of different points of view and even differing interpretations of the same events to provide contrast, as well as to supplement and complement. In *Billard*, the reoccurrence of events, incidents and individuals in the presentations of the numerous narrators, as well as in the varying temporal strata, serves primarily to reiterate or reconfirm assessments of individuals and situations.

Whereas *Billard* presents a multi-narrator approach in which character portrayal is achieved by reiteration and reconfirmation, Böll's next novel, *Ansichten eines Clowns* utilizes very different techniques. It is written as an *Ich-Erzählung*, a form which Böll has used successfully in some of his best short stories, and its stream-of-consciousness format differs from his earlier first person novels. The story line (which incidentally bears only the slightest resemblance to a plot—a phenomenon which itself is unusual in Böll's novels) is contained within an outward frame of tightly limited time and space. It encompasses Hans Schnier's return to Bonn after a failure on the stage, a series of phone calls and one visit at his apartment, and his return to that same railroad station some four hours later. Within this frame of consistently forward moving time, Böll presents Hans Schnier's thoughts, memories and agonizings. Flashbacks reveal, in non-chronological sequence,⁵ events earlier in his life (of which the most decisive was the loss of his sister Henriette), the years with Marie beginning from the day of her seduction, and most recently her desertion of him, his subsequent rapid deterioration, and the fiasco of his last public performance which precipitated his return to Bonn and immediately preceded the opening of the story.

This restriction in the portrayal of time and the reliance upon present consciousness for recall of time passed results in a static quality in the character portrayal. As in *Billard*, there is little or no attempt at character development. Though we are given a few events from Hans Schnier's youth to explain in part his hostility toward his mother and his distance from his father, we are in fact confronted with a fully formed figure without having been privy to the evolvment of that figure through time.⁶

Unlike *Billard*, however, the clearly defined narrative posture of the work, with its restricted perspective and protagonist-narrator possesses a highly subjective orientation which affects character depiction directly. The reader must rely upon the essentially personal and hence primarily subjective presentation of the protagonist for the materials with which to formulate an evaluation of the characters involved in the narrative. The reader learns about the clown Hans Schnier and the people he knows, loves, hates, admires, despises and pities, almost exclusively through his perceptions and opinions of them.⁷ He is in essence confined to Hans' thoughts, views and fantasies⁸ during this specific time period—and the memories, dreams and dis-

appointments he recalls and experiences during the course of this one evening. By monitoring the thoughts of the Clown, the reader is presented with a complex of seemingly unrelated incidents, recollections, opinions, musings and anxieties, as well as episodes and anecdotes, whose similarity to cabaret numbers has been noted.⁹ (The social criticism inherent in his presentation of the world about him is unmistakable, the satire often cutting.)

As befits Schnier's self definition—"Ich bin ein Clown . . . und sammle Augenblicke" (p. 294),¹⁰ the protagonist himself is revealed to the reader through a series of moments—individual scenes, impressions, and experiences—both those recalled and those which occur in the present of the narrative situation. Through them, the reader discovers the pattern of Hans' life, the schedule and functioning of his professional needs, his personal idiosyncracies, his preferences and dislikes, and the contentment he had found in an insular life with Marie. Besides the conscious evaluations of himself and others, the narrator's comments, reactions and reflections contain less conscious attitudes and opinions, which are, however, perceptible to the reader and enable him to deduce relationships and character elements not consciously acknowledged by the narrating protagonist. Gradually an image of the Clown as an individual evolves in the reader's mind through a process of evaluating the materials gleaned from the first-person narrative.

The character portrayal thus achieved indirectly by relating the thoughts, views and memories of the Clown is augmented only slightly through direct contact (by phone or in person) with a limited number of peripheral figures. Only two of these appear in the novel in the flesh—a neighbor, who has no reference to Schnier's life, and his father, who initiates in the Clown a heightened awareness of his past and his present predicament but who himself neither contributes new information about the protagonist nor serves to elucidate upon his nature as either a child or an adult. (The only new material he provides is a critic's evaluation of Schnier's artistic abilities and the prospects for his future professional career.) In addition, Hans has telephone contact with a number of others, including his mother, his brother, his father's mistress, and several friends.¹¹ The Clown's subjective presentation is supplemented by the conversations thus engendered, but, more significantly, the reader's view of Hans is further formed by his reactions to the words and actions of these individuals. His verbal exchanges with them reveal far more about the Clown and his basis of evaluating others than about the individuals with whom he speaks or the subject at hand.¹² In the brief conversation with his father's mistress Bela Brosen, for example, Schnier's position shifts from being sympathetic and complimentary (especially in his comparison of her with his mother) when he expects help from her, to suspicion of her integrity and the authenticity of her feelings for his father when he realizes no money will be forthcoming.¹³ The fact that Hans' attitudes themselves vary in the course of the evening points out the personal nature and orientation of the evaluations presented in his thoughts and words.

The need for evaluating his comments and his omissions is particularly true in

the case of Marie, the figure who is of primary importance to Hans and second only to him in importance for the novel itself. She is the person with whom he is most intimately involved and around whom his last five or so years had revolved. In this context a comparison of Marie with Edith in *Billard* points up clearly the differences in character portrayal between these novels. While each continues to be a strong influence on the life of her respective partner, neither Edith nor Marie is depicted directly in the novels. Edith is presented through the eyes of various protagonists, but, characteristic of character portrayal in that novel, no discrepancies or ambiguities exist in their descriptions or references to her. Because of her identification with the *Lämmer* and because the memories of the other figures seem to present an idealized (and hence, unreal) view of her and because the uniformity of the comments provides no incentive for independent appraisal of her on the part of the reader, Edith fails to become real and remains a rather flat, static and lifeless entity. Marie, on the other hand, is viewed from a single perspective, i.e., presented almost exclusively from the personal bias of the narrating protagonist. (In the Clown's confrontation with his father, the subject of Marie does not come up¹⁴; there are only passing comments in the numerous phone calls which refer to her, and of these only a few provide evaluative material.)¹⁵ Despite this limitation, however, Marie develops as an authentic individual and acquires in the course of the novel, a distinct, and convincing personality. The reason for the difference between the portrayals of Edith and Marie is to be found in the Clown's own commentary and in his descriptions of Marie.

The reader, though he has only Hans Schnier's word as to Marie's nature, has the option to draw his own conclusions and assessment from the related incidents of their life together, Hans' reminiscences and his comments. As the novel unfolds, the reader, judging by what is said and not said, becomes slowly aware of a discrepancy between the Marie Hans worshipped and loved and the one who deserted him, between the image the Clown intentionally projects of her and the woman she is. Because of the objectivity of his own position, the perceptive reader, by careful evaluation of the comments and information provided, is able to arrive at an independent appraisal of Marie. He comes to perceive a Marie whose nature is at variance with, if not contradictory to, the image of her which Schnier himself seeks to convey. In the process, the figure of Marie emerges as a convincing individual.

The technique Böll employed to achieve this characterization is an interesting one. Countering the view of Marie which Hans consciously reiterates are negative descriptions or evaluations of Marie which begin appearing in Hans' recounting of the recent months. Areas of disagreement emerge, and a certain degree of disenchantment with Marie on Schnier's part becomes apparent, although the Clown makes no such admission. There are, for example, references to signs of aging in her face,¹⁶ comments about her intelligence,¹⁷ and the Clown's highly original contention, that Marie didn't really understand him.¹⁸ His dissatisfaction is also covertly evidenced by his attempt to cast her in the mold of Frau Wieneken, the one positive adult woman figure of

his childhood. The attempt, however, fails, for when Marie at his suggestion tries to cut bread in Frau Wieneken's fashion, she succeeds only in badly cutting her arm.

Whereas Hans recalls but does not assimilate various incidents concerning the depth or at least tenaciousness of Marie's doctrinaire Catholicism, the reader does. He takes note of her reaction to the Communist dignitaries and the theologians in Erfurt, her desire to breath "Catholic air," her renewed contacts with the Catholic circle in Bonn, her unwillingness to travel to Rome with Hans, and her insistence that she leave Osnabruck to spend a few days in Bonn. He similarly disregards her desire to talk about art and aesthetic concerns which he despises, her slow disenchantment with the endless games of "Mensch-ärgere-dich-nicht" and family films, and her annoyance at his habitual confusion between reality and fantasy.¹⁹

By reading "between the lines" so to speak, the reader perceives a Marie who is not too bright, easily swayed, and eventually won over by a Catholic group to which she is drawn both out of faith and respect, and into whose inner circle she wishes to be accepted. That move, he realizes, is aided by her yearning to belong and her dislike of social isolation, as much as by the presence of Heribert. Marie emerges for the reader as a comprehensible person, and one whom he feels he understands better than the narrator himself.²⁰ The reader is able to answer the question which plagued the Clown, and runs subliminally throughout the novel—how could Marie leave him for Heribert.²¹ In searching for the true Marie, the reader draws upon material and insights inherent in, but not consciously projected by the first-person monologs of the protagonist, and in the process, a technique of character portrayal not yet utilized in *Billard* but effectively employed in *Ansichten* is revealed—the possibilities in first person narration for indirect or inadvertant character portrayal.

At this point, certain areas of congruence with Böll's latest novel emerge. *Gruppenbild mit Dame* also involves a woman who remains, except for a brief passage, hidden from the reader's direct view and here, too, the ultimate synthesis of elements inherent in the novel's text is left to the reader. The figure in this case, however, Leni Pfeiffer, né Gruyten, moves from the periphery of the novel to its center, and the search for her true identity and essence becomes the work's chief concern. This novel is the first to be primarily and self-consciously concerned with character portrayal—"Ich habe versucht, das Schicksal einer deutschen Frau von etwa Ende Vierzig zu beschreiben oder zu schreiben, die die ganze Last dieser Geschichte zwischen 1922 und 1970 mit und auf sich genommen hat," Böll stated in an interview,²² and the novel itself is constituted by the attempt of the *Verfasser*, the presumptive author, to capture and comprehend the nature and personality of the heroine. By far the most extensive and most enterprising Böll has undertaken, *Gruppenbild* represents an innovative change from the preceding novels in a number of ways, including its manner of character portrayal.

The protagonist Leni, whom Böll created in his alleged documentary,²³ is the first female figure to play the main role in a Böll novel, and she is also his most complex, baffling and intriguing protagonist to date. (She has also precipitated more disagree-

ment and controversy than any of his earlier figures.) The novel also deviates from Böll's previous works in its use of a clearly defined narrator, the *Verfasser*. The fastidiousness, general pedantry and personal bias which he exhibits give him a definable personality and invite comparison with Pileznik of Günter Grass's *Katz und Maus* and Serenus Zeitblom of Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*. Unlike Böll's other works, in which a narrating consciousness is identified with one of the chief protagonists, the narrator in *Gruppenbild* is only minimally involved as a fictional character in the story itself. In addition, he refers to himself in the third person,²⁴ a choice intended on his part to convey an impression of impartiality and objectivity.

As in the two works discussed above, Böll again utilizes interweaving levels of time. An ostensible present, inseparably associated with the fictive narrator, is constituted by his search for the identity of Leni, the investigation he conducts, and the documentation he collects, and eventually develops a sub-plot of its own. Into this frame is integrated the presentation of the actual story and content of the novel (Leni's life) which covers an extended period of time and is viewed predominately in retrospect. The statements concerning Leni, although they are gathered in the narrator's present, are based on recollection of days and events often long passed. These reports, recalling different events and persons from all periods of Leni's forty plus years,²⁵ are grouped in loose chronological order around her youth, her life with Boris, and her present predicament.²⁶ As a point of time removed from earlier events in Leni's life, the frame provides a temporal perspective for them, but one which becomes ultimately identifiable with a present which Leni shares. Consequently, as the novel draws toward its conclusion, the inner story reaches into the present and merges with the frame, the author becomes personally involved with the actions of Leni and her supporters, and the reader is confronted with Leni herself.

Böll has referred to the novel as containing elements of the "Bildungsroman" and of presenting "die Werdungsgeschichte einer Person und die Einflüsse, die diese Person geprägt haben,"²⁷ yet both the temporal structure of the novel and the portrayal of Leni herself tend to undermine this intention. Although the years are described with more detail, and their impact upon more individuals and social structures is presented in greater breadth and depth and chronicled in terms of the lives of more individuals than in earlier novels, temporal considerations prove inconsequential in defining Leni's personal being. The external conditions of her life are changed, often inalterably; she suffers loss of loved ones, social ruin and economic privations, but her being itself remains remarkably unaffected by and through all such external adversity. Rather than forging her character or molding her personality, they call to the fore qualities and attitudes which she already seemed to possess, give opportunity for the expression of her inner nature, and permit her peculiar brand of humanism to be manifested in a multitude of situations involving innumerable individuals under a variety of conditions. Leni herself remains remarkably unchanged, as did the chief protagonists in the other novels under discussion, and the conglomerate view of Leni with which the reader is provided is, in the final instance, devoid of temporal aspects.

Related to the third-person presentation of the narrator is the fact that *Gruppenbild* does not employ inner monolog (or *erlebte Rede*) to relate the conscious, or even unconscious thoughts and biases of the protagonists, as do *Billard* and *Ansichten*, and thus affords no entrance into the workings of their minds. This feature, combined with the absence of an omniscient narrator and the subsequent reliance upon the *Verfasser's* reporting and the accounts and recollections of other individuals, results in a shift in emphasis from internal to external realities. *Gruppenbild* is, in this sense, the least reflective of Böll's recent novels.

The portrayal of Leni is directly affected by the resulting inaccessibility to her inner thoughts. In addition, Leni's natural reticence and the briefness of her personal appearance in the novel severely limit the potential of direct quotation. Even the thoughts and views she had expressed through the years are proffered only second or third hand. Key figures in Leni's life, who might have been able to furnish a more penetrating appraisal of her—her parents and brother, first love, husband, mentor Sister Haruspica, and Boris, the father of her child—are dead when the novel opens; even her son, having been jailed, is not available for comment. Instead the reader must rely upon the material which the *Verfasser* has culled from his interviews, the impressions of Leni recorded by some sixty odd individuals²⁸—teachers, friends, in-laws, co-workers, and even persons not directly connected with her, who knew of her or knew those who knew her. These are the "resource persons" whom the narrator utilizes, and who offer their views of Leni and of the days and incidents of her life. Through these informants, a kaleidoscopic view emerges about her style of living, her acts, reactions and general behavior through childhood adolescence, young womanhood and middle age. As in *Billard*, the protagonist is viewed by a number of individuals but here there is no confirmation of character by repetition and no congruence of opinion. There is rather what at first seems to be a bewildering assortment of widely divergent views composed of apparently unreconcilable elements.

The portrayal of the chief protagonist, following a description of Leni's physical appearance and her present living conditions, begins, as it did in *Billard*, with an assessment by outsiders, though here in *Gruppenbild*, the views are harsh and the terms applied to Leni, pejorative. Her neighbors, judging her on external appearance alone and susceptible as they are to vicious gossip, are her most severe critics, hurling after her abusive terms, such as "mieses Stück," "ausgediente Matratze," "Schlampe," "Kommunistenhure," "Russenliebchen," and "dumme Pute" (p. 33).²⁹ Since these are the first evaluations of Leni presented in the novel, it is against this unfavorable appraisal that the author projects his own image of her which he continues to develop and to buttress throughout the novel. For him, Leni is and remains a remarkable, highly attractive, fascinating and positive figure. She is "eine schweigsame und verschwiegene, stolze, reuelose Person" (p. 237), all terms of approval, as the reader slowly learns. She is "nicht verbittert," "mäßig," and "so rheinisch," highest praise of all for the narrator, or for Böll, too, for that matter. Combining two factors, sensuality and innocence (or purity), inherent in her given names "Helene Maria," Leni exists as a highly integrated individual, having uncon-

sciously succeeded in combining elements traditionally viewed as mutually exclusive. Thus the narrator refers to her as "die irdisch-materialistische, menschlich-himmlische Leni," and describes her as someone who could serve either as a saint in a mystery play or as an advertisement for skin cream.

Not surprisingly, the *Verfasser*, interviewing his "resource people" about Leni, is confronted with a conflicting evaluations.³⁰ She is depicted as "ein entzückendes Geschöpf" (p. 85), "eine Träumerin" (p. 159) and "ein Prachtmädel" (p. 158) and derided as "Luder, Schlampe" (p. 161). One witness adamantly rejects the term "Flittchen" for her, the next refers to her as "ne Pute, ne halbe Nutte, ein Flittchen, ganz bestimmt" (p. 159). For some, she was "energisch und naiv" (p. 100), for others, "nett freundlich und sehr still" (p. 152), for yet another, both "sehr tief und sehr flach" (p. 159). One classified her as an "abgetakelte Neureiche" (p. 161), the next figure, because of Leni's attitude toward money, property and physical comforts, described her as "proletarisch," while noting she was "so stolz wie Prinzessinnen nur im Märchen sind" (p. 160). For yet another, Leni was simply "das arme liebe Ding" (p. 162).

The reader, however, is not left completely vulnerable to such diverse estimations of Leni. The fictive narrator is careful that the reader not be misled by the assorted attitudes with which he is accosted, for despite Böll's alleged intention and his own opinion, the *Verfasser* himself is far from impartial, and in his narration, the reader is given a continual slant in Leni's favor. While overtly proclaiming impartiality, producing miscellaneous material and often incidental information in an attempt at *Gründlichkeit*, inserting quotations and excerpts from various sources to evoke an aura of authenticity and credibility, and employing abbreviations and phraseology designed to impress the reader with his professionalism, the *Verfasser* nevertheless exerts considerable circuitous influence upon Leni's portrayal by affecting the reader's receptivity toward the material presented, as well as the material itself.³¹

Statements by witnesses are usually accompanied by introductory remarks which include a discussion of the *Verfasser's* contact with them, their reception and treatment of him, and his personal view of them. In general, the depiction of the witnesses' living quarters and conditions, their habits and appearances, serve to substantiate the narrator's evaluation of them and orient the reader toward a reception of their proffered remarks which approximates that of the *Verfasser* himself. (Those individuals, for example, who are most critical of Leni, the narrator intimates, are small, petty, bitter or narrow-minded.) The reader, thus obliquely provided with guidelines for assessing the witnesses is presented with the reports *in toto* or in resumé form. These are in turn subjected to the narrator's interjections. He corrects, explains or modifies the views expressed, interpolates his own reactions, or specifies his own position on a particular point.³² As a consequence, the *Verfasser's* personal view has a significant residual effect upon Leni's portrayal in the novel.

In the last analysis, as a result of the multiple versions of Leni with which the reader is presented—the opinions of the uninformed outsiders, the views of those

who lived or worked with her, and the overt and covert presentations of the narrator's own evaluation, the reader is given a kaleidoscopic view of the heroine, which he must combine with his own interpretation of the events and situations portrayed. In this novel, there is no confirmation by repetition as in *Billard um halbzehn*, no indirect characterization gleaned from a single narrator's subjective presentation, as in *Ansichten eines Clowns*, but rather a multiplicity of description, opinion, and documentation. It is a conglomerate or composite lense which Böll focuses not only on the life and times of Leni, but also on her personality and character. By the very multiplicity of depiction with its divergence of opinion, Böll has created a character so genuine, as to resist simple delineation. Complex and many faceted, she is far removed from Böll's earlier, rather simplistic black and white figures.³³ Truly three dimensional, she affects readers, as well as her fictional companions in the novel, as would a living, breathing being, who is perceived differently by each individual, depending upon his own disposition and orientation, thereby proffering the thesis that a human being in his uniqueness must needs defy all categorization.

The nature of her portrait, however, and the process by which it is amalgamated, have yet further ramifications for character portrayal within the novel. The views expressed by the contributors reflect back upon them, effecting a form of reverse analysis for these secondary figures. That is, the individual evaluations of Leni presented by the numerous witnesses reveal their standards, values and behavior as much as Leni's and often elucidate their own character and attitude toward life more than hers. Their remarks, their view of Leni, combined with the commentary of the *Verfasser*, serve to delineate their own nature in a far less ambiguous, and often unmistakable manner. The novel thus truly becomes a "group portrait," with the "lady" both providing its focal point and serving as its reflector. Just as the blank television screen, on which Leni believes she views the Virgin Mary, merely reflects, according to Klementina, Leni's own image, the secondary figures, too, in viewing Leni, reveal themselves to the reader. Thus in delineating the figure of the heroine, Böll simultaneously illuminates those persons and groups whose lives touched hers and presents a comprehensive view of the life and times of Leni Gruyten.

In this novel, as well as in the others, Böll's experimentations in narrative form and narrative perspective have produced strikingly different techniques of character portrayal and a variety of figures so conceived and created. His efforts have culminated in *Gruppenbild mit Dame*, where in the process of projecting the image of a unique individual, Böll has created a compelling work whose complex vision encompasses scores of individuals, intersects various strata of German society, and depicts half a century of social history.

University of Houston

NOTES

- ¹ The manipulation of time also includes the replay of a period of time (and a specific event), so that the reader witnesses the reactions of three groups of people to the shot fired by Johanna. The novel's time structure has been thoroughly analyzed by both Therese Poser, ("Heinrich Bölls Billard um halbzehn," *Möglichkeiten des modernen deutschen Romans*, ed. Rolf Geissler, 3. ed., [Frankfurt a.M.: Moritz Diesterweg, 1968] and Klaus Jeziorkowski, *Rhythmus und Figur*. [Bad Homburg, Berlin, Zürich: Gehlen, 1968.] In addition, James H. Reid ("Time in the works of Heinrich Böll," *MLR* 62 [1967], 476-485) deals with Bölls conception of time, his prediction for mixing past and present, and his subsequent montage technique.
- ² The day depicted in the novel, however, is one of reassessment, and although the figures themselves do not change in their essential nature, as a result of evaluating their life-style and its ramifications, the three main figures Heinrich, Johanna and Robert make a decision by the end of the narrated day, changing their stance toward the world about them and altering their pattern of behavior for the years to come.
- ³ Frequently, however, shifts between actual speech, *erlebte Rede* and interior monolog occur without clear delineation or designation of the narrating consciousness. Memories of the narrating figure, fantasies and future projections recalled from the past, present thoughts, and anticipated future mingle together; the thoughts of one figure are interspersed with the thoughts of another; and the reader is provided with little or no means of distinguishing the various strands and strata of thought.
- ⁴ Hans Joachim Bernhard attributes special significance to Kuhlgame's evaluation of the Fähmels, seeing in it "die moralische Integrität von Johanna, Heinrich und Robert Fähmel aus der Sicht einer plebejischen Gestalt konstatiert" (*Die Romane Heinrich Bölls. Gesellschaftskritik und Gemeinschaftsutopie*. [Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1970], p. 218).
- ⁵ The novel's temporal fluidity is well recognized, and Klaus Jeziorkowski views the suspension of temporal distance found in *Ansichten* as a phenomenon related to Hans's clown nature. In this regard he links the Clown's perception to that of Johanna in *Billard*, citing them as individuals for whom "die objektiven zeitlichen Entfernungen" do not exist. (Jeziorkowski, pp. 174ff.)
- ⁶ In *Ansichten*, the events of the past and the economic, political and social realities they represent seem to have had an impact upon the protagonist's constitution. He has become and remains a clown partly as a reaction to the past and present realities about him.
- ⁷ Emphasizing the subjective nature of the Clown's presentation, "die fast grenzenlose Subjektivität, ja Egozentrik der Schnierschen Position," Jeziorkowski views the *Ansichten* as "die streng privaten und persönlichen Meinungen dieses Clowns." He further notes that Hans's central position in the novel is reflected in his central geographic position, from which his telephone calls radiate out to those whose location, even geographically speaking, is on the periphery. (Jeziorkowski, pp. 170ff.)
- ⁸ The projections of the narrator's fantasy, just like those found in *Billard*, include both those recalled from the past and those currently envisioned for the present and the future. Most of the Clown's fantasies involve Marie, and, while some of the imagined scenes of her life with Heribert fall within the realm of the possible, some border on the ridiculous. Here as elsewhere, the Clown fails to distinguish between the world of reality and that of his own fantasy.
- ⁹ Bernhard, p. 303.
- ¹⁰ Page references refer to *Ansichten eines Clowns*, (Köln, Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1963).

- 11 There are in addition conversations with two strangers, the old priest at the seminary and an unknown man in a telephone booth.

The two people with whom Schnier is most intimately associated, Marie and his life-long friend Edgar Wieneken, who might be expected to furnish insights into his nature and to offer pertinent evaluations of him, are both absent from Bonn at the time the novel takes place and thus not available for direct presentation or dialogue.

It is, I believe, significant that the first call was to his mother, his last conversation was with his brother, and the central scene and single potentially meaningful personal exchange was with his father. Their mutually fumbled attempts at genuine contact and their failures at communication are thus placed between the double, and reciprocal, rejections manifested by those phone calls, and thus, present Hans' position as outsider and loner all the more poignantly.
- 12 Though he finds his own evaluation of his mother substantiated by his conversation with her, and his own attitudes and self-pity are confirmed in his conversations with the two sympathetic women figures (Sabine Edmond and Monika Silvs), in a number of conversations the responses he elicits effect a change in his position and cause him to alter his views. From his agent Zohnerer, for example, he had expected a lecture and a reminder of the expenses he had incurred, but was frankly astonished at the interest, understanding, and apparent genuine concern Zohnerer showed: "Ich konnte vor Erstaunen nicht antworten" (p. 135), he notes. On the other hand, his call to Frau Freudebeul, of whom he was fond, was a disappointment. He found only a cold, short reception—"ich mußte mich in ihr getäuscht haben" (p. 101), he comments and tries to attribute her curtness to pregnancy or instructions from her husband. Perhaps most disillusioning for him was his conversation with his brother Leo, whom he attempted to reach twice and for whose return call he waited most of the evening. He is clearly disappointed in his brother who declines to come to him that evening and, refusing to see his brother's point of view, Hans cloaks his disappointment with a bitterness which reveals a relationship which is neither intimate nor intense, testifying to the gulf which has come to separate them.
- 13 When Ms. Brosen answers the phone, he comments, "sie hat eine wunderbare Stimme, alt, warm und lieb" (p. 213) and when he raises the subject of money and senses her embarrassment, he is convinced her relationship with his father is one of "wahre Liebe" and that money is no concern to her. However, when she seems reluctant to name a sum, he suddenly recalls being surprised at his father's taste in choosing her—"Sie war eine mittelgroße, recht kräftige Person, offenbar blond und mit dem obligatorisch wogenden Busen" (p. 215). As she hesitates further, he begins to consider her "das dummste Weibstück . . . mit dem ich je zu tun gehabt hatte" (p. 216). After he rather abruptly ends the conversation, having received no satisfaction, he conjectures that she might well pocket the money she collects for needy colleagues from his father. He refers to her as "diese dumme Luder" (p. 217) and, beginning to pity his father, projects a fantasy scene which focuses on her hypocrisy and betrayal of his father.
- 14 His mother, similarly makes no mention of Marie and even his brother Theo, who knows and has seen Marie, is silent when Hans mentions her name.
- 15 It is, however, evident from the series of conversations that others were aware that Hans and Marie's relationship was an unstable one. Sabine's comment, "Du hättest sie heiraten sollen" contains an element of gentle chiding and reveals an understanding of the basis of the problem which Hans himself avoided facing. Kinkel remarks, "Wie sie über die Sache denken, ist Ihre Sache. Fräulein Derkum denkt offenbar anders darüber und handelt so, wie ihr Gewissen es ihr befiehlt" (p. 113) and Sommerwild refers to their relationship as being recently in a state of crisis. In all the conversations, only one comment pierces the fabric of associations and evaluations which Hans weaves around Marie's name and threatens the

image he seeks to project in his and the reader's mind: Sommerwild's incisive remark that while Hans and other animals were constitutionally monogamous, Marie evidently was not.

- 16 Hans records the first signs of aging in Marie: "Ich sah an ihrem Hals zum erstenmal Sehnen," (p. 92), and there are "ein paar Fältchen um ihren Mund, die ich noch nie gesehen hatte" (p. 93). He remarks, ". . . ich kam mir vor, als wäre ich schon zwanzig Jahre lang mit ihr verheiratet (p. 95); he notes her voice had "einen erzieherischen Ton" (p. 95) and playing parcheesi with him, she made a face "wie ein besonders beherrschte Kinderschwester" (p. 144).
- 17 He states, for example, "In manchen Dingen war sie naiv, und sehr intelligent war sie nicht" (p. 161) and even decides that Marie was not intelligent enough for Heribert (p. 163).

His first reaction to the note Marie left behind—"Ich muß den Weg gehen, den ich gehen muß" was both ironic and characteristic: "Sie war fast fünfundzwanzig, und es hätte ihr etwas Besseres einfallen müssen" (p. 96).

- 18 Hans states, for example, "Marie war nah daran, mich zu verstehen, ganz verstand sie mich nie. Sie meinte immer, ich müßte als 'schöpferischer Mensch' ein 'brennendes Interesse' daran haben, soviel Kultur wie möglich aufzunehmen" (p. 118).

- 19 Hans also noticed but did not consider the significance of her manner of smoking, ". . . auch das war mir fremd an ihr: dieses hastige Rauchen, es war mir so fremd wie die Art, in der sie mit mir sprach. In diesem Augenblick hätte sie Irgendeine sein können, eine Hübsche, nicht sehr Intelligente, die irgendeinen Vorwand sucht, um zu gehen" (p. 95).

The reader is similarly jarred by Hans' vagueness about Marie's miscarriages and her "female troubles" in general, the striking lack of attention to the repeated miscarriages and the limited concern he exhibits for her during these crises.

In assessing Hans' relationship to Marie, Leonard L. Duroche comments, ". . . he is unable to see through the inherent bad faith in his own dealings with her." (Böll's *Ansichten eines Clowns* in Existentialist Perspective," *Symposium* 25 [1971], 354.)

- 20 At one point, the Clown comes close to admitting not understanding Marie: "Ich verstand nicht, daß Marie ausgerechnet zu ihm übergelaufen war, aber vielleicht hatte ich Marie nie 'verstanden'" (p. 18).

It is ironic that Hans shows insight into the problems facing the woman with whom his friend, the former priest Heinrich Behlen, left town but fails to comprehend Marie's difficulties or even to acknowledge their existence.

- 21 Incidentally, Heribert also suffers from dual presentation. Hans repeatedly insists that Heribert was wrong for Marie, and his mental projections of him watching Marie dress, prying among her lingerie, brushing his teeth forcefully, are all unsympathetic and reveal his bias against Heribert. The scenes in which he describes actual encounters with Heribert, however, reveal nothing detrimental to Heribert. Indeed, the latter's concern for Marie, their earlier relationship, and his behavior during the Catholic evenings, indicate instead a rather likeable fellow.

- 22 Heinrich Böll, Dieter Wellershoff, "Gruppenbild mit Dame. Ein Tonband-Interview," *Akzente* 18 (1971), 331.

- 23 Cf. Rudolf Hartung, "Heinrich Böll: *Gruppenbild mit Dame*," *NRs* 82 (1971), 753ff.

Long concerned with the relationship between fiction and non-fiction, Böll stated with reference to this novel, "Ich habe versucht, eine Person, eine Figur durch eine Gruppe, die sehr umfangreich ist zu dokumentieren, und ich wollte beweisen, daß Fiction, also Belletristik, Roman, Erzählung, genauso dokumentarisch ist wie die sogenannte Sachliteratur." (Hartung, p. 753).

Böll includes, in addition, authentic documentation—"Auszüge aus Protokollen, Prozeßakten, die ich als Collage verwendete" in order to avoid "literizing" this material (Wellershoff, p. 337).

In his review of the novel, Hans Joachim Bernhard touches upon another issue—the change which takes place in the narrative stance as the *Verfasser* slowly evolves from reporter to story teller: “Am Beginn des zehnten Kapitels . . . hat ein Erzähler den Verf.” “völlig überrumpelt,” Bernhard notes. (“Der Clown als Verf.,” *NDL* 20 [1972], 158.

²⁴ Although I’m not suggesting the fictive narrator be identified with Böll, it is interesting to note that discussing his choice of *ich* or *er*, Böll stated: “Dieses fremde Ich, über das ich dann also in der Ich-Form schreibe, ist für mich weiter entfernt als Jedes Er. Also mal übertrieben ausgedrückt, wenn ich autobiographisch schreiben würde, würde ich in der Er-Form schreiben” (Werner Koch, “Der Dichter und seine Sprache,” *Der Schriftsteller Heinrich Böll* [Munich: DTV, 1969], p. 102).

²⁵ Böll himself considers the period spanned by the novel to be far greater. He views the story as one which presents life in a West German metropolis over some seventy, eighty years (between 1890-1970), including thereby the reflections over the lives and careers of Leni’s father, her uncle, and Pelzer. (Wellershoff, p. 335).

²⁶ There is, however, a continual movement back and forth in time, as the *Verfasser*, in the midst of relaying a past event or presenting the account of a witness, reveals the ultimate fate of a figure or the subsequent developments or resolution of an issue which has been mentioned. Thus, this novel, as the two before it, is marked by great temporal fluidity.

²⁷ Wellershoff, p. 340.

Böll, however, does qualify his use of the term: “Für mich ist es auch ein Bildungsroman im—natürlich nicht im klassischen, idealistischen Sinne, doch auch der Roman der Bildung einer Frau, Bildung im doppelten Sinne. Bildung im Sinne von dem, was man lernt und was wir herkömmlicherweise Bildung nennen, und auch wie sich jemand als Person und Figur bildet.” (Wellershoff, p. 334).

Speaking of the attraction Leni held for him, during the same interview, Böll noted, “daß diese Frau die verschiedensten sozialen Stufen durchlebt, materiell, milieumäßig, daß sie mit relativer Unbefangenheit, sehr sehr ernste Perioden der deutschen Geschichte fast unverletzt überstanden hat” (Wellershoff, p. 332), thus himself confirming her character constancy.

²⁸ The multiperspective evaluation of the central figure is central to the novel’s composition and intent. Böll, speaking of this feature, commented, “Die Bildung einer Figur, einer Romanfigur, aus verschiedenen Optiken habe ich wahrscheinlich bisher in den Romanen, immer nur aus der Optik des Erzählers genommen, die aber variierte, wie mir schien. Jetzt sind deutlicher die verschiedene Optik, die verschiedenen Ansatzpunkt, die verschiedenen Annäherungen an diese Figur, wobei aber nicht der Erzähler fiktiv ist, sondern die Zeugen.” (Wellershoff, pp. 331f.)

²⁹ This reference and those that follow are to *Gruppenbild mit Dame* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1971).

³⁰ The discrepancy in character assessment noted among the informants continues among critics of the novel as well. Marcel Reich-Ranicki stressing Leni’s “Weltfremdheit und Naturverbundenheit” claims she resembles “einem fatalen deutschen Mädchenideal” (“Nachdenken über Leni G.,” *Die Zeit*, August 10, 1971, p. 13); Rudolph Hartung sees her as “der neue Mensch,” and speaks of her “Einfalt” and of her being “im Irdischen beheimatet” (Hartung, p. 757); for Dieter Wellershoff, she is “ein Mensch . . . der instinktiv weiß, was für ihn richtig ist und der instinktiv immer das ihm Gemäße tut” (Wellershoff, p. 332); Hans Joachim Bernhard concludes she is “der Inbegriff . . . eines humanistischen Menschenbildes” (Bernhard, “Der Clown als Verf.,” p. 163); and Margarete Deschner, drawing upon Böll’s comment that in the feminine nature “Eva, Maria, Magdalena, sich nie rein nie getrennt zeigen,” perceives Leni as a combination of those three figures and suggests she represents Böll’s ideal woman

(Böll's Lady: A new Eve," speech given at the 1973 SCMLA meeting, Fort Worth, Texas). The Book-of-the-Month-Club in its advertising for *Group Portrait with Lady* simply called Leni "an enticing enigma."

- ³¹ The reader should also bear in mind that it is the narrator who initiated the quest into Leni's identity, searched out and interrogated the witnesses, and subsequently compiled, arranged and edited their contributions. There can be no question but that both the resource persons and the material they proffer are hypothetically under the organizational control of the presumptive author.
- ³² The insertion, "wenn hier dem Verf. ausnahmsweise ein Kommentar gestattet wird" (p. 177) is uttered with a delightful naiveté which is intentionally ironic (on Böll's part). What initially appeared to the reader as pedantic and indiscriminating on the part of the fictional author develops in the course of the novel into a source of humor and contributes a degree of lightness to the novel.
- ³³ This criticism of Böll's characters has validity, I believe, through *Billard um halbzehn*. (Cf. Walter Sokel, "The Novels of Böll," *The Contemporary Novel in German*, Robert R. Heitner, ed., (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 1967). The nature of his character portrayal changed significantly with Marie and the divergence between the conscious and unconscious presentation of her by the Clown. The extent of the change and the impact of this technique of characterization becomes evident, however, for the first time in *Gruppenbild*, where it is consciously used to develop the figure of Leni.