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# Continuity and Change in Heinrich Böll's Work: "Die Waage der Baleks" and "Erwünschte Reportage"

by K. Eckhard Kuhn-Osius

Probably no post-war author's name in West Germany is as closely linked to the genre of the short story or *Kurzgeschichte* as Heinrich Böll's, and he himself has mentioned that short stories are his favorite genre.<sup>1</sup> Still, the most marked difference between Böll's early and late works is the steep decrease in his production of short stories since the 1950's.<sup>2</sup> There may be many reasons for this, among them Böll's stylistic development, which seems to veer towards more complex and longer forms, and perhaps also the desire to avoid a tendency in his stories of following well-worn patterns, the same *Strickmuster*, as it was called.<sup>3</sup> This general development in the shape of Böll's oeuvre presents some problems if one compares two of his short stories to show patterns of continuity and change in his work. After all, the relative absence of short narrative forms would be the most typical developmental pattern, and one might simply want to contrast presence with absence. But since one can show difference best where there is also similarity and since the mere statement of presence versus absence begs for augmentation, the two stories to be compared will serve quite well for a number of reasons which will become clear in the course of this essay.

Let me begin by stating the goals and methodological presuppositions of this essay in the metaphors of structuralism: Meaning is constituted in systems of differences and equivalences. Meaningful difference ("opposition") is possible only in contexts that are equivalent to some degree.<sup>4</sup> We shall assume that the two stories are equivalent (as explained later on) and examine them to see how much they can be regarded as manifestations of the same "code", i.e. to what extent they share a system of underlying oppositions and similarities, which may show itself in various surface structures. It will be assumed that all observed differences in the signifier are potentially meaningful, and that all differences in meaning are observable in the signifier.<sup>5</sup>

In this context the term "signifier" must be interpreted loosely, including not only language material, but a multitude of "codes" that work 'above' or 'below' the linguistic level. "Signifier" includes the events as they purportedly took place (*histoire*) and their relation to the act of telling (*récit*). Thus, in understanding there is constant integration from understanding the language to the abstractive formation of higher units within the text. But all units are also embedded into a multitude of extraneous (but necessary) contexts which assign import to the particular cases at hand. These embedding contexts (which are commonly called "codes") may operate on any unit, starting from individual words and ending with the story as a whole.<sup>6</sup> Readers must apply their relational systems of world knowledge (or "sub-codes") to the text in order to make a story meaningful. Understanding can be 'correct' or 'exhaustive' only relative to the sub-codes applied. We shall use here the sub-codes of someone reasonably familiar with post-war Germany and the writings of Heinrich Böll. We have not tried to exhaust all possible codes and meanings beyond those that seemed to apply both to "Die Waage der Baleks" and to "Erwünschte Reportage." For example, the symbolism of the scales has been neglected in the following inquiry.

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While linguists and other scholars have developed various means of understanding their native informants and thus can avoid hermeneutic problems, the process of understanding remains central to the critical enterprise. The 'facts' to be explained are constituted in the same process as their explanation. There is a reciprocal relationship between the text as it is understood and its perceived structure. Structuration (and comparison) presupposes basic hermeneutic processes. Among the almost infinite number of possible oppositions that can be established between "Die Waage der Baleks" and "Erwünschte Reportage," attention will be given to those that are meaningful within the sub-codes brought to the texts. In fact, unless the oppositions can be seen as meaningful, they probably would be perceived as entropic noise.<sup>7</sup>

In comparing "Die Waage der Baleks" and "Erwünschte Reportage," one covers the time span from 1952 to 1975. Both stories are short, but both are not typical short stories, if one accepts that features such as the open form or surprise ending are characteristic for the genre.<sup>8</sup> There is a similarity as far as the basic facts of the stories are concerned. Both contain an unusual event, an *unerhörte Begebenheit*, as it was called by Goethe and by *Novellentheoretiker* from then on. "Die Waage der Baleks" is commonly compared to Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas*, but it is also termed a relative of Hebel's *Kalendergeschichten*.<sup>9</sup> "Erwünschte Reportage" shares some traits with a newspaper report, although one could not really mistake it for one. While "Erwünschte Reportage" is rather characteristic of Böll's late work in its pseudo documentary technique, and shares with it the general lack of critical attention, "Die Waage der Baleks" is not completely typical for Böll, although for a long time it was Böll's most widely anthologized work (and thus probably also his most widely read).<sup>10</sup> Apart from the obvious fact that both stories are by Böll and thus belong to the same biographically justified set of texts, they share aspects of content and the treatment thereof. Both are concerned with semi-feudal situations and with labor relations in this frame. While the situation of the Baleks suggests a feudal society, closer scrutiny shows its strong capitalistic elements. "Erwünschte Reportage" shows remnants of feudal relations in the Federal Republic of Germany. In their combination of feudal and capitalist aspects, the social settings in both stories are somewhat at odds with the respective social orders of their historical situation. But neither is perceived as being in a fundamental conflict with the predominant order. In congruence with the semi-feudal settings of both stories, they take place in rural surroundings and even share some motifs, such as children gathering products of the forest to support their families. Within this overall equivalence, however, there is ample room for significant difference.

"Die Waage der Baleks" stems from a period of transition for Böll, between the publication of his last war novel, *Wo warst du, Adam?* (1951) and his first novel concerning the post-war years, *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* (1953). "Die Waage..." must have been written fairly shortly after "Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit" (1951) and is one of Böll's early attempts to overcome the thematics of war.<sup>11</sup> While his probings in the satirical mode became seminal for Böll's entire work, his attempt at historical narration as exemplified by "Die Waage der Baleks" was hardly ever taken up again.<sup>12</sup> The story is well known: The Baleks are a rich family who dominate and exploit a small Bohemian village at the turn of the twentieth century. They not only have the people work in their flax mills, but they also buy herbs and mushrooms from the children, who gather them in the surrounding forests, and profit handsomely by reselling these objects to the rich people of Prague. The boy-hero of the story coincidentally discovers that the scales used for the transactions with the children are not accurate (the Baleks having forbidden ownership of scales by anyone else). After he has announced his finding, unrest spreads in the village; the villagers even steal the scales and the ledger book in which the transactions were recorded, in order to calculate their claims against the Baleks. The police forcibly recover the property. In the scuffle, the boy-

hero's Kuhn-Osiris: Continuity and Change in Heinrich Böll's Work ("Die Waage der Baleks" and is reduced to an itinerant life. Wherever they go they find justice wanting, and hardly anyone wants to listen to their story of the false scales of justice.

In addition to the choice of a story in an historical setting, there are some other features untypical for Böll. The most prominent is Böll's narrative stance. The narrator ostensibly is the boy-hero's grandson telling his grandfather's story, but he uses an almost chronicle-like style and omniscient point of view. This is quite unlike Böll's usual choice of first-person narration or the uncommented juxtaposition of various narrative voices and perspectives which he employs in his earlier works.<sup>13</sup> Yet there are typical elements as well, especially Böll's common thematic concern with the 'little people' and their lives, the *Waschküchenmief*, as it were.<sup>14</sup> Like all of Böll's heroes, the people are not revolutionary, although they are deeply disaffected by the time the story ends.<sup>15</sup> There is a certain ambivalence about the description of the life of the lower classes, not only typical for Böll, but for many writers who sympathize with their plight. While the poor's exploitation by the rich determines their situation in life, their lives themselves reflect true and good values and contain utopian elements of sorts.<sup>16</sup> The idyllic aspects of the people's lives qualify them as the bearers of hope and guarantee the presence of a more humane stratum in their existence on which to put one's expectations.<sup>17</sup>

Another typical Böll element is his concern with the social role of the church as opposed to the ethical demands of Christianity, a theme that preoccupied Böll at least until *Ansichten eines Clowns* (1963). The role of church and religion comes out clearly in the use of the hymn that serves as a kind of revolutionary anthem: "Gerechtigkeit der Erden, o Herr, hat Dich getötet." The villagers invoke the figure of Christ himself while they oppose the Baleks in their 'own' village church. The dichotomy between Christ and 'his' institution becomes complete in this scene. But then, the pointed reminder of this dichotomy remains the only revolutionary act that is left to the peasants, until even that is forbidden. And while the village priest clearly belongs to the repressive structure of the rural hierarchy, the church and religion by themselves also provide the opportunity and the medium for protest.<sup>18</sup>

The act of revolt, abortive as it may be, is one of the few acts of solidarity that the villagers perform. In spite of all cooperation and neighborliness, the villagers' lives seem strangely ritualistic in the collective description given them by the narrator. Part of the ritual seems to be a certain institutionalized mistrust and competition among the villagers, especially as far as the gathering of herbs and mushrooms is concerned: "... und fast jede Familie hatte ihre Plätze, an denen sie Pilze pflückten, Plätze, die von Geschlecht zu Geschlecht weitergeflüstert wurden." (p. 45) Even within the families there is some mistrust, as the children have to show the potato peelings as proof that they did not squander anything by making them too thick (ibid.). The idyll of the simple life thus is fraught with mistrust, which clearly is economic in origin. The mistrust among the villagers may be contrasted with their faith in the Baleks and their contentment with the social order symbolized by the Baleks' scales. During the revolt, there is a shift since the faith in the social order of the Baleks disappears and is replaced by collective action, rudimentary and helpless as it may be. One may presume that the villagers will return to their old habits of mutual distrust and competition after the revolt, as they return to the flax works and again gather herbs and mushrooms. But the story does not mention this aspect of the return to normalcy. Instead, it ends on a theme of suppressed solidarity among the villagers and the semi-forced isolation of the boy-hero's family.

In judging the relatively unique character of "Die Waage der Baleks," it may easily be this aspect rather than the historical setting that is unusual for Böll's work. There is no other story in

Böll's oeuvre that shows communal resistance against a perceived injustice. The closest parallel is the blockage by garbage trucks of Leni's house in *Gruppenbild mit Dame*. Most other forms of resistance one finds in Böll's work are private; if social, they are relegated to small groups or mythologized, as in the case of the *Lämmer* in *Billard um halb zehn*. Often, the protesting actions of Böll's protagonists are meant to be symbolic, while the authorities may try to keep them in the private sphere and thus rob them of any significance, as in *Ende einer Dienstfahrt*. While the significance of the villagers' actions is clear in "Die Waage der Baleks," this significance is very much in doubt in the other story to be analyzed here.

"Erwünschte Reportage" appeared "Anstelle eines Vorworts" in an anthology of texts by the *Vormärz* author Georg Weerth.<sup>19</sup> Weerth was among the first to write about the proletariat, a collaborator of Karl Marx's on the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, and the author of the satirical novel *Leben und Taten des berühmten Ritters Schnapphahnski*, which earned him a term in jail. Böll's story is dedicated to Günter Wallraff, who became famous (notorious to some) for his first-hand reports of his experiences in the West German industrial and social world.<sup>20</sup> For this purpose, he donned various disguises and impersonated a variety of roles. The seemingly affirmative title of Böll's story is an allusion to Wallraff's book *13 unerwünschte Reportagen* (1969). While both Wallraff and Weerth are known critics of their respective societies (and thus *unerwünscht*), Böll's story is the ironic rendering of an opposite type of event (*erwünscht*); or, rather a non-event, since the story concerns only a sum of approximately 30 Dollars.<sup>21</sup> An agricultural and forestry worker, employed by a count with extensive forest holdings, refuses a wage increase because it was negotiated by the unions. The worker, Mr. Sohlweg, wants none of the "rote Groschen" (p. 501) and returns the money "nicht demonstrativ, sondern überzeugt" (p. 500). This leaves everyone puzzled, since people are at a loss about how to account for the money, how to use it, and what to make of Sohlweg. While the people in power would have liked to keep the entire Sohlweg affair private and gloss it over, events are taken out of their hands by an anti-union employee of the count who leaks the story to the press (a free press in a free country, p. 401).<sup>22</sup> Sohlweg quickly becomes the focus of public attention and the goal of pilgrimages by conservative citizens' groups, especially RAM ("Rettet das Abendland vor dem Materialismus", p. 500). Here is a worker who is so combatively content with his lot that he refuses an official wage increase. In doing so, however, this member of the workingclass begins to upset the system of social consensus quite seriously and raises suspicions on all sides; the RAM even investigates if he might be a hireling of the unions.

"Erwünschte Reportage" still shows Böll's concern with social questions, but they have become a lot more complicated than exploitation, revolt, and repression. The change in the persona and role of the narrator is most significant. In "Die Waage der Baleks" there is no doubt as to his allegiances, since he appears as the grandson of the hero.<sup>23</sup> His writing is well-informed. There are few doubts as to the facts and events that are reported. In contrast, "Erwünschte Reportage" presents an uncertainty *vis a vis* the narrated events, which is rather typical for late works by Böll. The narrator tends to become a side character in the story who gathers opinions about facts which he may not otherwise know. In all this uncertainty, the narrator still tries to interpret the events which are so poorly known. There is no doubt in the narrator's mind that Sohlweg indeed turned back the money. This story is true "im Sinne von: So hat es sich zugetragen" (p. 502). But the narrative is not simply about the events as they happened. The investigation and narration of the events become parts of the entire narrative. The text ceases to be the translucent medium of events as they happened in a purported reality outside of it, which is fully known. Instead, it takes on a certain opaqueness, and the narrative discourse begins to drown out the simple events of the story.<sup>24</sup> The clearest sign of this in "Erwünschte Reportage"

is the ~~Ukuh-Osius: Continuity and Change in Heinrich Böll's Work~~ "Die Waage der Baleks" of events and protestations of their truthfulness. The text (and, it seems, Heinrich Böll) refuses to collude with the reader behind the backs of the story's protagonists, since the very act of telling is projected onto the textual plane of the narrative itself.

In "Erwünschte Reportage," there is no clear distinction between the object level of the narrated story on the one hand, and the meta-communicative understanding between the narrator and the reader that the story to be told is outside the realm of the narrative process on the other hand. The narrator as a transcendent figure has withdrawn in favor of a marginally involved narrator who is chained to the confines of the story, but without the benefit of insider's knowledge. Thus, any hopes of *Diskurs* are thwarted: There is no way any longer to ascertain the ultimate significance of events.<sup>25</sup> Such an understanding concerning the ultimate significance of the events would be doubly desirable, since the events themselves violate the social discourse by contradicting some basic shared assumptions in West Germany, without an explanation as to why this is happening (cf. below, p. 51 of this essay).

The technique of using a marginally involved narrator is not new. It is commonly used in the *Rahmenerzählungen* of the 19th century. But the appearance of the narrator as a gatherer of facts makes the story no longer his own. Of course, also in "Die Waage der Baleks" there is nothing more than a reported story, but the narrator has fully appropriated it and there are few indications that it is not really his story he is telling, but his grandfather's. These observations lead to another set of differences between "Die Waage der Baleks" and "Erwünschte Reportage." These differences come into focus when one looks at the proportions which have been assigned to the main events of the story in terms of the relationship between *Erzählzeit* and *erzählte Zeit*.<sup>26</sup>

"Die Waage der Baleks" mostly describes a status quo. Out of the total of approximately seven pages, at most one and a half describe the revolt of the villagers. Three pages are dedicated to the description of life in the village as is, and two and a half pages describe how the narrator's grandfather becomes aware of the falseness of the scales.<sup>27</sup> As mentioned before, the villagers' decision to act collectively against the 'system' is the new element in the story — new not only for Böll, but also for the villagers, who are used only to individual acts of defiance against the law (the poachers). But this unusual act, one of the pivotal points of the entire chain of events, is hidden in the only notable break in the narrative flow and the narrative perspective (p. 50).

The first two parts of "Die Waage der Baleks," the description of the status quo and the boy-hero's discovery, are closely linked and interwoven. There is agreement in the subject matter, temporal changes are fluid, and also the change from a more general narrative perspective to the narrative focus on the boy-hero is carefully introduced with the phrase "Mein Großvater hat mir oft erzählt, wie..." (p. 48). This leisurely introduction of the first narrative segment of the story contrasts with its rather abrupt end. When the boy has discovered by how much the Baleks have cheated, the story reads "... und er weinte diesmal nicht, sondern erzählte seinen Eltern, seinen Geschwistern von seiner Entdeckung." (p. 50) At this point the paragraph ends. When the next paragraph begins, the reader has jumped not only over all further events of the night, but there is also a marked shift in the focus of the narrative. The reader suddenly accompanies the Baleks to church on the next morning; one knows what the Baleks think and do. Although the narrator retains his omniscient stance (which, in a way, does not come into its own until this moment), events are suddenly described from the vantage point of the Baleks.<sup>28</sup> On the whole, the presentation shifts away from the detailed description of psychic processes, towards exterior events rather than interior ones. The reader is never again informed of the boy-hero's thoughts and

individual actions. The narrator thus moves from the central event of the story, abandoning it in its narrative augmentation to the imagination of the reader and creating a classical case of *Leerstelle*. This *Leerstelle* may be filled out in various ways, which gives the story a certain openness and free interpretability.<sup>29</sup>

The very proportions of the narrative discourse are thus slanted towards the Baleks, just as the social system is slanted to their advantage. Even the discovery of their cheating can only briefly challenge their supremacy. Whatever the villagers have done is ineffectual, at least for the moment. The boy's family wants to tell their story. "Aber es hörte ihnen fast niemand zu." (p. 52).<sup>30</sup> The narrator short-changes the revolt. In his adulation for his grandfather he thoroughly individualizes the entire story, converting it into a David-and-Goliath story, to which the uprising only provides sufficient proof that the grandfather's actions were indeed consequential. The revolt against the Baleks is justified, but it achieves nothing. The narration itself shies away from it.<sup>31</sup>

The opposite is true for "Erwünschte Reportage." Although the narrator is distinctly not omniscient, he takes conversational 'responsibility' for the central events regarding the acts of Sohlweg and the count. Although he would have good reason (given the second-hand nature of his knowledge) to hide behind his sources, to hedge, or use a *Leerstelle*, he tells the facts straight and in full detail. Like the revolt in "Die Waage der Baleks," the *unerhörte Begebenheit* in "Erwünschte Reportage" takes up a small portion of the narrative (about one fifth of the total). But, in contrast to the villagers' revolt against the Baleks, Sohlweg's refusal of the wage increase is consequential. This becomes clear when one compares the locations of the *unerhörte Begebenheiten* in both stories: The discovery and the revolt occur towards the end of "Die Waage der Baleks." They are effects, rather than causes, while Sohlweg's action is a cause, triggering all other events in "Erwünschte Reportage."

One may say that "Die Waage der Baleks" is about the situation of the rural working poor at the turn of the century, although the details of the situation are not identified. In contrast, "Erwünschte Reportage" is about the process of publicity that a non-event gets in the present time. The act itself has become unimportant relative to the interpretative possibilities that it holds and the public image it creates. If one accepts the events of "Die Waage der Baleks" as quasi-representational of the past, then the narration of these events in itself provides some of the publicity and consequentiality that the events originally lacked. The telling of the story thus becomes an act of partisanship for the cause of the villagers. In contrast, "Erwünschte Reportage" describes the process of which the telling of "Die Waage der Baleks" may be a part. The growing awareness of the processes of publicity can be traced through large parts of Böll's work, beginning perhaps with the advertising slogans of *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* and culminating in *Ende einer Dienstfahrt* and *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum*.

Meaningful difference is to be found not only at the level of metacommunicative understanding and narrative structure, however. In his well-known essay " 'Die Waage der Baleks,' dreimal gelesen" (which Rainer Nägele calls 'ein Glanzstück der Einzelinterpretation'), Cesare Cases points out that Böll's story is not quite logical.<sup>32</sup> It strains the limits of credulity that no one ever questioned the prohibition of scales. Furthermore, the Baleks' system of capitalist exploitation does not need false scales at all. Quite the contrary, capitalism depends on accurate scales to make its system of exploitation work. And it is not the small injustice of the false scales that kills, but the system of legal exploitation in the flax works. The villagers' song about the "Gerechtigkeit der Erden" points in the same direction, since it says that the justice of the earth killed Christ, not injustice. For Cases, the strange case of the Balek scales can, in the final

analysis, only serve as an introduction to the fact that the scales of justice are unfair altogether. This is the point, as supported by the statement in the title of Heinrich Böll's work: "Die Waage der Balek" (Kuhn-Ostus: Continuity and Change in Heinrich Böll's Work: "Die Waage der Balek"). The family finds the pendulum of justice always moving falsely, which would indicate that the experience with the Balek scales has taught them to be mistrustful of earthly justice. This role of the scales as a catalyst for social insight and, possibly, action is what saves the story according to Cases, in spite of the logical contradictions (for a Marxist) between the Baleks' seemingly feudal status and their economic behavior.<sup>33</sup>

Similar things could be said about "Erwünschte Reportage" since here, too, the social status of the protagonists and their actions is ambiguous. There is one major surface difference, however. In this story, nobody breaks any rules — in fact, everybody follows them to the point where the entire situation becomes uncanny. Everybody is content and happy; life in a village is stereotypically more wholesome than in cities; Sohlweg's family is content and the mood at their house is not depressed. The count, as he should, uses the money Sohlweg has refused, for himself, "als direktes, ihm zustehendes Opfer, das er in Wein verwandelt." (p. 503) The obvious perversion of the symbols of the Eucharist may indicate that the count easily identifies with traditional feudal rights and god-given prerogatives.<sup>34</sup> The count's daughter does not accept the money as easily and even tries to dissuade Sohlweg from returning it. But this certainly does not stem from any second thoughts about the 'system,' since she belongs to reactionary anti-union circles. At most, it might be a gesture of paternalistic concern. All of this befits her position. The only one who openly overdoes things is Sohlweg in his conviction of the virtues of serving his master, whose property is sacred to him. Still, he does not overstep in any way the boundaries prescribed by law. He only acts in a manner consistent with the wishes uttered by any *Arbeitgeber* at the occasion of wage negotiations. He is modest and has faith in his employer, who should use the money as he sees fit.

At first sight, this looks like a feudalist idyll in modern surroundings. But it is not — primarily because Sohlweg's refusal of the money is in itself an ascertainment of free will and of the worker's contractual freedom in capitalist theory. The seeming act of submission to the feudal lord entails an assertion of freedom. The same is true for the refusal of Sohlweg and his family to accept anything from the count or his daughter. Sohlweg reminds the reader that he is theoretically free to sell his labor at the price he wants. Thus he seems to be a picture-book case of capitalism while spouting the rhetoric of a feudal serf (which is another contradiction in terms since serfs could not make public pronouncements). The two sides of his actions do not fit with each other. And in this mismatch the reader may become aware of his own status as a seller of his labor, as well as the realities of that status. Such a realization runs counter to all official trends in West German ideology, which stress the sharing of responsibility and benefits between workers and management in such words as *Tarifpartnerschaft*, *Konzertierte Aktion*, or *Mitbestimmung*.<sup>35</sup> By asserting his contractual freedom, Sohlweg at the same time reduces all these terms to the basic relationship between *Herr* and *Knecht* (perhaps a reduction which the count's daughter wants to avoid by trying to talk Sohlweg into accepting the money).<sup>36</sup> Where economic theory and official parlance tended to obfuscate differences between *Arbeitgeber* and *Arbeitnehmer*, Sohlweg's actions tear through the veil of euphemisms and idealization, precisely by taking idealization to its extreme.<sup>37</sup> He opens up a social chasm which cannot be reconciled or glossed over by individual acts of charity, which he consequently refuses. Sohlweg's talk not only contradicts the essence of the relationship which he asserts, but it also contradicts the appearance of equality that has been so carefully maintained by all sides (almost) in the Federal Republic of Germany.



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One must ask oneself whether Sohlweg knows what he is doing. Is his refusal of the wage hike really *überzeugt*, or is Sohlweg some sort of *Eulenspiegel*, a real-life satirist trying to provoke second thoughts on the process of collective bargaining?<sup>38</sup> Due to the narrator's limited knowledge, one cannot completely rule out this possibility. Yet there is no evidence in the text that Sohlweg is more than a convinced and eager servant of his master, a fact which the narrator asserts repeatedly. Assuming that the narrator were wrong in his assertions would open a can of worms methodologically. While few people will agree with the narrator in all of his highly conservative value judgements, there is no point where one can logically stop when one begins to doubt his factual veracity. One might as well go all the way then, and join the "mehr oder weniger linke Publikationsorgane" (p. 501) which claim that the entire story is a fabrication by reactionary forces. As soon as one does that, one enters into a vicious circle of endless possibilities, which shall be avoided here, due to the lack of evidence in the text concerning Sohlweg's cunning. Such a reading might result in an unambiguous story about a satirist named Sohlweg. But the satirist still seems to be Heinrich Böll who satirizes his own narrator in his confusion about Sohlweg's unusual act, *erwünscht* though it may be.<sup>39</sup>

A last differentiating aspect concerning the two stories should be mentioned — the differing levels of personal motivation and culpability. The fronts in "Die Waage der Baleks" are clear, even though the immediacy of identifying with them may be mollified by historical distance. There can be no doubt that the Baleks profit from the peasants' murderous work as flax dressers, that the Baleks derive inordinate profits from the sale of the herbs and flowers, etc., and that they even cheat within their unfair system. It is easy to side with the villagers. Their lives are so full of hardships and so impoverished that they immediately earn the readers' sympathy. Their actions are marked by a clear identity of their self-interest with fairness, justice, and (we may add) progress. One accepts the villagers as the historically new force, and one also tends to accept their legal claims as morally superior to anything that the Baleks might have to propose. Their very exploitation dignifies the villagers and their fight for their rights, abortive as it may be.

The situation in "Erwünschte Reportage" makes identification a lot more difficult. The first aspect of this situation is that the hardships to be endured are far fewer; one never gets the sense of poverty in the extreme that permeates life in the Baleks' village. In a way, there is no real poverty in "Erwünschte Reportage." When Sohlweg's family is reported to have made some critical utterances about his "verweigte Lohnerhöhung" (p. 501), these concern questions of principle (the daughter), or material possessions such as a car (the wife) or a bicycle (the son; all instances on p. 502). It is never a question of life or death. Of course, poverty is a relative term. There can be little doubt, however, that Böll is quite critical of the affluence of Western society. One should recall that Léon Bloy, who was a formative force in Böll's youth, has extolled poverty.<sup>40</sup> Böll also seems to have great awareness of the plight of the Third World, a topic to which he dedicates a large part of his *Lesebuch*.<sup>41</sup> In light of the suffering in the Third World, the privations of the Sohlweg family would seem small and inconsequential, and the attention lavished on Sohlweg's act is not justified. In light of that Third World suffering, however, the non-privations of all the non-Sohlwegs seem blatant. In other words, the reader who compares his own situation to that of Sohlweg in terms of his relative lack of freedom in capitalism might also be tempted to compare his well-being with that of others and realize his relative wealth.

This idea sounds somewhat like the more radical strands of Christian social thought. Sohlweg pointedly refuses the equation of self-interest with justice, fairness, and progress, which was still operative in the villagers' revolt against the Baleks and which would be typically offered by all

sides in a labor dispute. But the altruism which Sohlweg has to offer seems misdirected. The count certainly needs no extra money, most of which goes to taxes anyway, as his daughter points out (p. 501). If Sohlweg insisted on altruism, he could donate the wage raise to a good cause or to charity. Instead, he espouses the virtues of serving the rich. It is no wonder that he does not meet with unambiguous responses, and it also is no wonder that religion no longer plays a visible role in these events. The church is not needed as a point of crystallization for someone who follows the rules as Sohlweg does, and religion in the story exists but as an organization. Its duality seems to have disappeared. True, Sohlweg shows some saintly traits, but he is completely secularized. This is especially obvious in the way in which he speaks about his (secular) "Herr," the count. For this reason, Sohlweg's renunciation of earthly goods, in the tradition of many a saint, cannot really offer a perspective. Workers are embarrassed, government workers are totally unmoved, and the church is split. While the reader has little difficulty identifying the forces of goodness and justice in "Die Waage der Baleks," there is nobody in "Erwünschte Reportage" with whom one would want to identify in this respect.<sup>42</sup>

Given the lack of suffering, heroism, and perspective, Sohlweg's action is not moving so much as it is unsettling. Its only meaning can be to point to an alternative to the materialism prevalent in affluent West Germany. Although the word *Konsumterror*, popularized by the student movement of the late 1960's, does not appear in the story, Böll certainly was aware of the phenomenon.<sup>43</sup> Sohlweg, in "Erwünschte Reportage," shows no signs of materialism. The only thing he will accept from curious 'pilgrims' is an occasional cigarette (which, for Böll, counts among the basics of life).<sup>44</sup> In spite of his relative poverty, the atmosphere in his house is described as not "duckmäuserisch oder gar muffig." (p. 502) This negative description of the mood of the Sohlweg family may provide some clue. The act of Sohlweg is purely negative; while it suggests the possibility of an alternative to materialism, it does not show the alternative. Sohlweg's assertion of his freedom from the unwritten norms of West German society is, at the same time, extremely affirmative. It is 'progressive' only in its negation of what exists, and in its negation of progress from the past. Because of its inner negativity in spite of its law-abiding nature, Sohlweg's action no longer needs the help of religion to become focussed. The possibility of breaking out of the mould is unsettling enough and may eventually prove more revolutionary than the reiteration of traditional stances, just as *Austeiger* and *Alternative* have changed the mood in the Federal Republic of Germany more profoundly than could have been imagined.

To a certain extent, the two stories under consideration are the reverse of a trend in Böll's work which may be labeled with the title of James H. Reid's book *Withdrawal and Re-Emergence*.<sup>45</sup> This seems to be true for the actions themselves, since the villagers in "Die Waage der Baleks" decide for public action, while Sohlweg is more withdrawn. But, as pointed out above, the results of their actions are quite the opposite. If one looks at the events including their results, then "Die Waage der Baleks" still is part of the withdrawal phase, even though it may be a forced withdrawal. "Erwünschte Reportage" is in the public sphere, even though that may not be fully intentional.

In spite of all differences between the stories, the basic contrasts and oppositions remain the same. They share the same 'deep structure.' Both stories are governed by the overriding social opposition between the rich and the poor. Both stories realize this opposition in overt acts of material exchange in which the usual rules governing exchange are broken (cheating, stealing of scales; refusal of money). Both stories are also concerned with the relationship of actions to their public resonance, although "Erwünschte Reportage" is much more overt about it.

The only major difference between the underlying systems of oppositions seems to concern

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the role of religion and the church. In "Die Waage der Baleks" the church plays a vital political role, although it is unclear what side the church will be on in the long run. While it is part of the power structure, it also provides a rallying point for the revolt. In "Erwünschte Reportage" with its lack of a *positive Utopie*, such a rallying point is no longer needed and the church is relegated to the status of a social institution. The lack of positive direction also supports another feature which distinguishes the two stories. The pseudo-documentarist mode that Böll uses in his later works introduces the opposition between story and discourse as a formative element of the narrative, which makes the taking of sides difficult. There are traces of this in "Die Waage der Baleks," however, in the narrator's shying away from the act of the revolt. Böll once said in an interview that he was, perhaps, a "verhinderter Kommunist."<sup>46</sup> The deep opposition between the rich and the poor shows his "Kommunismus," the narrative treatment perhaps shows the impediments.

The underlying oppositional systems are handled in very different ways in the two stories, being 'transformed' into almost opposing types of events. "Die Waage der Baleks" follows a traditional pattern of story development, beginning with a lack of something and continuing with attempts to overcome the lack.<sup>47</sup> The same can hardly be said about "Erwünschte Reportage" with its preponderance of narrative discourse. But these differences may be little more than Böll's adjustment to social and political changes in West Germany. When "Die Waage der Baleks" was written, a hint of social injustice was unsettling enough, even if it was set in distant times.<sup>48</sup> The affirmative years of anti-communism in the Adenauer era were no time to ask nagging questions about fairness and justice of the 'system.' In the mid-seventies, however, pointing out social injustice and unfairness was commonplace, and especially when it applied to history. During the late sixties, Günter Wallraff was among the first to break through the disinterest of the intellectuals and the self-complacency of the official West German labor world with his 'unwanted' reports. In the self-complacent era of the mid-seventies, when there even was talk about the "Modell Deutschland" for others to emulate, Böll showed that a 'wanted' report could be just as unsettling.

If one assumes that one of the primary functions of literary works may be the expression of communicable experience which has not yet been taken up by a dominant ideological system, one may put Böll's development from "Die Waage der Baleks" to "Erwünschte Reportage" into a convenient framework.<sup>49</sup> During the Adenauer years, there may have been a lot more unaccounted-for experience which could be described within an ideological system close to traditional socialism or communism.<sup>50</sup> The story of the Balek scales was practically outside any officially recognized politics. As history progressed, Böll's position as expressed in "Die Waage der Baleks" was easily integrated into the progressively leftward development of ideological systems in the Federal Republic. It became a facile prop, automatized and unproblematic, as can be seen from the shifting treatment of the story in schoolbooks and teachers' handbooks.<sup>51</sup> "Erwünschte Reportage" withdraws from this mould again and charts a new course into experience.<sup>52</sup> The narrator ends "Erwünschte Reportage" with words which can be said of the story itself: "... vielleicht sollte man von der Wahrheit keine Gemütlichkeit erwarten." (p.503) Böll has come from a kind of 'revolutionäre Gemütlichkeit' to the uncertainty of life itself.

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## NOTES

- 1 Böll has made statements to such an effect quite frequently in interviews. See Heinrich Böll, *Werke: Interviews 1, 1961-1978*, ed. Bernd Balzer (Köln: Kiepenheuer, 1978), p.13, in "Werkstattgespräch mit Horst Bienek": "... diese Form, die Kurzgeschichte, ist mir die liebste. ... und sie bleibt für mich die reizvollste Prosaform, weil sie auch am wenigsten schablonisierbar ist." (In the preceding quote a superfluous "-s" has been omitted, since it is obviously a misprint). As late as 1977, Böll said: "Da ich immer noch glaube, von Natur ein Kurzgeschichtenschreiber zu sein, haben mich natürlich die Kurzgeschichtenschreiber unter den Kollegen am meisten interessiert...." ("Ich hab nichts über den Krieg aufgeschrieben. Ein Gespräch mit Heinrich Böll und Hermann Lenz, *Literaturmagazin 7. Nachkriegsliteratur* (1977), p.50; here quoted from Manfred Durzak, *Die deutsche Kurzgeschichte der Gegenwart: Autorenporträts, Werkstattgespräche, Interpretationen* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980), p. 301). On p. 129, Durzak assesses the importance of Böll's stories in *Wanderer, kommst du nach Spa....*: "Unter den fünfundzwanzig Erzählstücken sind nicht wenige, die... den Begriff vom künstlerischen Potential dieser Gattung in der deutschen Nachkriegsliteratur konturieren halfen." As for the idea that short stories are Böll's real genre, cf., among many, Wilhelm Johannes Schwarz, *Der Erzähler Heinrich Böll*, 3rd, enlarged ed. (Bern: Francke, 1973), p.12: "Böll ist eingeborener Erzähler, und die Kurzgeschichte ist die ihm gemäße literarische Form."
- 2 Rainer Nägele, *Heinrich Böll: Einführung in das Werk und in die Forschung*, Fischer Athenäum Taschenbücher Literaturwissenschaft 2084 (Frankfurt/M.: Athenäum Fischer, 1976), p.119, has made the following calculation: "Die 1972 entstandene Sammlung *Erzählungen 1950-1970* enthält 43 Erzählungen, wovon 33 aus den fünfziger Jahren stammen, nur 9 aus den sechziger Jahren und eine von 1970. Von den 33 Erzählungen aus den fünfziger Jahren sind wiederum 23 vor 1955 entstanden."
- 3 "Kein Schreihsal vom Dienst sein: Interview mit Marcel Reich-Ranicki (Die Zeit) am 11.8.1967," *Interviews I*, p.67: "Ich möchte die Kurzgeschichte gern wieder zum 'Mittelpunkt' machen. Aber wenn ich es versuche, gerate ich immer wieder ins eigene Strickmuster. Ich bin eifrig bemüht, diesen Zustand zu ändern. Vielleicht wird mir etwas glücken. Die Kurzgeschichte ist immer noch die schönste aller Prosaformen."
- 4 While this essay adheres to general epistemological and methodological principles of structuralism and subsequent critical developments, we try to avoid two common trends of such criticism, namely the excessive use of jargon and the tendency to turn every critical study into a theoretical treatise. For a general introduction to the general principles observed here, see Umberto Eco, *Einführung in die Semiotik*, trans. Jürgen Trabant, UTB 105 (München: Fink, 1972), which still seems to be the best book on the topic. The best recent summary is in Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 91-150, i.e. the chapters on "Structuralism and Semiotics" and on "Post-Structuralism." As for the more technical aspects, a brief introduction may be provided by Rolf Klopfer, "Zum Problem des 'narrativen Code,'" *LiLi7*, Heft 27/28 (1977), 69-90. For a more thorough treatment, see Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972).
- 5 While the first of these assumptions assigns 'phonemic' status to the observed differences, the latter is axiomatic for the concept of the sign itself. In a way, the manner of proceeding does follow the linguist's procedure (albeit metaphorically): One first finds 'phonetic' differences between the stories, i.e. any differences whatsoever. Then one tries to determine if these differences are indeed meaningful, i.e. if they fit into any additional systems. Cf. the paragraph on p. 46 beginning: "In comparing 'Die Waage der Balesks...'"
- 6 The great popularizer of the term "code" in this context is Roland Barthes in his book *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970). However, Barthes does not sufficiently differentiate between the 'codes of integration' (which are the process/result of understanding) and the 'codes of origin' (which are the presupposition of understanding). This distinction had been made already by the Russian formalists as early as 1927. Jurij Tynjanov writes in "Über die literarische Evolution," in *Russischer Formalismus*, ed. Jurij Streidter,

UTB 40 (München: Fink, 1968), p. 439: "Das Element der Sichtbarkeit, Korrelation: einerseits zu der Reihe entsprechender Elemente anderer Werk-Systeme und sogar zu anderen Reihen, andererseits zu anderen Elementen des vorgegebenen Systems [i.e. literary work] (Autofunktion und Synfunktion)." A very similar idea is proposed by Wolfgang Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens: Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung*, UTB 636 (München: Fink, 1976), p. 115 f, who proposes the term "Textrepertoire." "Im Repertoire präsentieren sich insofern Konventionen, als hier der Text eine ihm vorausliegende Bekanntheit einkapselt. Diese Bekanntheit bezieht sich nicht nur auf vorangegangene Texte, sondern ebenso, wenn nicht sogar in verstärktem Maße, auf soziale und historische Normen. ... Das Repertoire-Element ist ... weder mit seiner Herkunft noch mit seiner Verwendung ausschließlich identisch, und in dem Maße, in dem ein solches Element seine Identität verliert, kommt die individuelle Kontur des Textes zum Vorschein."

- 7 Cf. Umberto Eco, *Einführung in die Semiotik* (as in note 4), p. 132: "Es muß also ein methodologisches Prinzip der semiotischen Forschung sein, daß das Entwerfen von semantischen Feldern und Achsen und die Beschreibung von Codes als gegenwärtig funktionierend fast immer nur bei Gelegenheit der Untersuchung der Kommunikationsumstände einer bestimmten Botschaft durchgeführt werden können. ... Sobald man die Möglichkeit einer Semiotik des Codes behauptet, erkennt man deren ständige Partialität und Revidierbarkeit an: und man muß zugeben, daß sich diese Semiotik nur dann konstituieren kann, wenn die Existenz einer Botschaft sie als ihre Erklärungsbedingung postuliert." (Eco's italics are not reproduced in this quote).
- 8 Jochen Vogt, "Das falsche Gewicht. Oder: Vom armen H.B., der unter die Literaturpädagogien gefallen ist," in *Heinrich Böll: Eine Einführung in das Gesamtwerk in Einzelinterpretationen*, ed. Hanno Beth, Scriptor Taschenbuch S 52 (Kronberg: Scriptor, 1975), pp. 83-102, p.93: "In der sonstigen Interpretationsliteratur wird 'Die Waage der Baleks' ... als Kurzgeschichte oder, diffuser, als Geschichte, Erzählung usw. bezeichnet. Offensichtlich ist vorerst nur, daß ihr sowohl die formalen ("offene Form," "Ausschnittcharakter") wie auch die inhaltlich-ideologischen Charakteristika ("Schicksalhaftigkeit") der Kurzgeschichte abgehen." On general generic questions concerning the *Kurzgeschichte*, see Manfred Durzak's "Gattungsgeschichtlicher Exkurs: Formelemente und Typologie der Kurzgeschichte," in his *Die deutsche Kurzgeschichte der Gegenwart* (as in note 1), pp.301-309, and Hans Christoph Graf v. Nayhauß, ed. *Theorie der Kurzgeschichte. Arbeitstexte für den Unterricht*. Universal-Bibliothek Nr. 9538 (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1977).
- 9 For a brief collection of judgements and opinions on "Die Waage", see Robert C. Conard, *Heinrich Böll*, Twayne's World Authors Series, 622 (Boston: Twayne/Hall, 1981), 60 ff. He offers first hints at a comparison of *Michael Kohlhaas* and "Die Waage" in his article "Böll contra Brecht: 'The Balek Scales' Reassessed," in *Perspectives and Personalities: Studies in Modern German Literature Honoring Claude Hill*, ed. Ralph Ley et al. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1978), 101-109, p. 106. Specific reference to Hebel is made among others by Jochen Vogt in "Das falsche Gewicht" (as in note 8), p.93, while Schwarz, *Der Erzähler Heinrich Böll* (as in note 1), p.35, refers to "Die Waage" as a Brechtian *Kalendergeschichte*.
- 10 As stated by Vogt, "Das falsche Gewicht." (as in note 8), p. 89. The information concerning Böll's popularity in school anthologies is also contained in Vogt's earlier version of this essay, "Vom armen H.B., der unter die Literaturpädagogien gefallen ist: Eine Stichprobe," *Text + Kritik* 33 (1972), 33-41, p.37. More recent statistics are offered by Klaus-Michael Bogdal, "Der Böll: Gedanken über einen Gegenwartsautor in der Schule," *Text + Kritik* 33,3. Aufl., Neufassung (1982), 126-137, p.127: "Eine Durchsicht der im Augenblick gebräuchlichsten Lesebücher und Textsammlungen für die Sekundarstufe I des Gymnasiums belegt auch für Böll diese thematische Verschiebung. Die 'Anekdote zur Senkung der Arbeitsmoral' hat den langjährigen Spitzenreiter 'Die Waage der Baleks' eingeholt. Ansonsten hat sich in den Lesebüchern kaum etwas geändert." Bogdal continues with the statement that Böll's classic for school purposes now is *Katharina Blum* (pp. 130-134).

Jörn Stückrath, "Heinrich Böll: Die Waage der Baleks," in *Deutsche Novellen von Goethe bis Walser: Interpretationen für den Deutschunterricht*, ed. Jakob Lehmann, vol. 2: Scriptor Taschenrechner S 156 (Königstein: Scriptor, 1980), 237-254, gives six reasons why "Die Waage" is so popular for school textbooks: The story is open to various interpretations, its main conflict is ethical in nature and is further mollified by historical distance, justice is a typical topic for school readers, the story combines the unusual with the suspenseful and the touching, it is clearly artistic in its motifs and symbolism, its narrative technique is exemplary in the interweaving of motifs. This article is an excellent companion piece to Vogt's study. Unfortunately it does not even mention Vogt in a footnote in spite of the numerous points of overlap between the two.

- 11 Information about publication dates etc. is taken from Werner Lengning, ed., *Der Schriftsteller Heinrich Böll: Ein biographisch-bibliographischer Abriss*, dtv 530, 5th ed. (München: dtv, 1977). The text of "Die Waage der Baleks" is quoted from Heinrich Böll, *Werke: Romane und Erzählungen 2, 1951-1954*, ed. Bernd Balzer (Köln: Kiepenheuer, 1977), 45-52. Page references are given in the text.
- 12 Jochen Vogt, *Heinrich Böll*, Autorenbücher 12 (München: Beck; Text + Kritik, 1978), p. 45, gives a one-page characterization of the story (based on the essay by Cases, see below, note 32). He has high praise for its simplicity and *Volkstümlichkeit* and regrets Böll's later formal experiments: "...so ist im Rückblick nur zu bedauern, daß Böll diese Traditionslinie in seinem erzählerischen Werk nicht fortgeführt hat."
- 13 Cf. Maurice Benn, "Heinrich Bölls Kurzgeschichten," in *Böll: Untersuchungen zum Werk*, ed. Manfred Jurgensen (Bern: Francke, 1975), 165-179, p. 172, who states, "wie man bei der Interpretation lyrischer Dichtung von 'Rollengedichten' spricht, so könnten die meisten Kurzgeschichten Bölls als *Rollenerzählungen* bezeichnet werden." Since the narrator is involved to a certain degree, one could also see this as an early form of the marginally involved narrator, a figure that dominates the narration of Böll's late works, such as "Erwünschte Reportage."
- 14 Cf. Heinrich Böll, "Zur Verteidigung der Waschküchen," [1959] *Werke, Essayistische Schriften und Reden 1*, 298-300.
- 15 Although the situation in "Die Waage" becomes quite serious, one still feels tempted to characterize it with the words that Theodore Ziolkowski used for a different story: "... the underdog in mild rebellion against 'the system.'" ("Heinrich Böll: Conscience and Craft," *Books Abroad* 34 (1960), 213-222, p. 215).
- 16 On Böll's idyllic tendencies, cf. Nägele, *Einführung...* (as in note 2), p. 78. On the value of poverty, cf. the following remarks by Böll on Léon Bloy, who was very influential for Böll in his youth. "Die Armut ist für ihn nicht nur eine mögliche, sondern die einzige Würde des Menschen.... Er streitet aber den Christen nicht nur das Recht auf Besitz, mit ebensolcher Schärfe das Recht auf Revolution ab: was er schrieb, paßte weder der katholischen Bourgeoisie noch den Marxisten, und kaum jemals ist ein Schriftsteller so gründlich und grausam totgeschwiegen worden wie Bloy." ("Léon Bloy: Über 'Das Heil und die Armut,'" [1953] *Werke: Essayistische Schriften 1*, p. 88 f).
- 17 On the role of the small joys in the peasants' lives, see Conard, "Böll contra Brecht," (as in note 9), p. 102; he also warns against the overemphasis of these happy aspects by John Fetzer, "The Scales of Injustice: Comments on Heinrich Böll's 'Die Waage der Baleks,'" *GQ* 45 (1972), 472-479.
- 18 Cf. Stückrath (as in note 10), p. 249, who remarks about the hymn: "Es ist das Weberlied der empörten Dörfler und bezieht in der Geschichte seine Kraft aus eben jener Tradition, die den Dorfbewohnern allein vertraut war, der christlichen. Andererseits verleiht Böll der Sache der Dörfler mit diesem... Liedanfang eine über den konkreten Konflikt hinausreichende Geltung." On the development of Böll's religious attitude, see Heinz Hengst, "Die Frage nach der 'Diagonale zwischen Gesetz und Barmherzigkeit: Zur Rolle des Katholizismus im Erzählwerk Bölls,'" *Text + Kritik* 33 (1972), 23-32; in the revised edition (1982), 99-113.

- 19 Georg Weerth, *University of Dayton Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2 [1985] Art. 7. See also Weerth et al., *ilv leske republik: Materialien zum Vormärz* (Köln: informationspresse leske/Europ. Verlagsanstalt, 1975), p. 11-14. The text was reprinted in *Einnischung erwünscht: Schriften zur Zeit* (Köln: Kiepenheuer, 1977), 263-266, and has been included in the *Werke: Romane und Erzählungen 5, 1971-1977*, pp. 500-503. Page numbers are quoted in the text of this essay, based on the edition of the *Werke*.
- 20 Böll must have been familiar with Weerth for quite some time, since he makes repeated reference to him in his essay "Karl Marx" [1961] *Essayistische Schriften 1*, 395-413.  
 In a statement during the "Verhandlung vor dem Kölner Landgericht gegen Günter Wallraff am 9.11.1976" Böll makes it clear that he has known Wallraff for a long time: "Ich kenne seine Arbeit von Beginn an. Schon als er noch gar nicht publiziert hatte, habe ich seine Manuskripte gelesen, weil ich damals mit einigen Freunden eine Zeitschrift rausgab, in der wir Wallraff publizieren wollten." (*Interviews I*, p. 676). Böll had addressed his "Brief an einen jungen Nichtkatholiken" [1966] to Wallraff (*Essayistische Schriften 2*, 216-227). He had also written a preface to the 1971 Swedish edition of *13 unerwünschte Reportagen* (*Essayistische Schriften 2*, 490-493), in which he values Wallraff's work so much that he demands: "schaff fünf, sechs, schaff ein Dutzend Wallraffs." (p.493) This is a take-off on the well-known exhortation during the late sixties to create many Vietnams.  
 Why specifically would Wallraff come to mind in writing a preface for a collection of texts by Weerth? The reason may be a collection of *Humoristische Skizzen aus dem deutschen Handelsleben* written by Weerth and included in his *Vergessene Texte*. In the very first scene, a young apprentice is admonished by the old merchant: "eins befehle ich Ihnen vor allem, und ich will, daß Sie dieses eine halten sollen vor allem andern--nämlich, was Sie auch hören und was Sie auch sehen werden auf meinem Comptoir oder auf meinem Lager, kurz, was Ihnen auch begegnet im ganzen Umkreise meines Geschäftes, erwähnen Sie davon nicht das geringste, sobald Sie die Schwelle meines Hauses verlassen haben! Verstehen Sie mich?--Stumm wie ein Fisch!" (p.313) This is exactly the type of privacy that Wallraff fights.
- 21 Erhard Friedrichsmeyer, *Die satirische Kurzprosa Heinrich Bölls*, UNC Studies in the Gmc. Langs. and Lits., 97 (Chapel Hill: Univ. of N. Carolina Press, 1981), p. 191, does not see the ironic nature of the very title: "Wallraff ist Praktikant zersetzender Reportagen über den Gerling-Konzern und Melitta ... und, 1977, sogar Unterwanderer der *Bild*-Zeitung, deren 'unerwünschte' Reportage-Praktiken er aufdeckte; darum ist er Verbündeter Bölls in 'erwünschter' Reportage, wie dieser sie hier vorlegt." It seems to me, however, that the title of Böll's story can only be properly understood as ironic. The interpretation offered here will be based on this premise. Cf. above p. 52. It seems fairly unlikely that Böll had the *Bildzeitung* activities of Wallraff in mind, since Wallraff's story did not appear until two years after the "Erwünschte Reportage" was published (although he had attacked *Bild* before that date).
- 22 This is very reminiscent of the attempts to suppress the miracle at the grave of Rachel the nun in *Gruppenbild mit Dame*. One might also think of the integration of the Gruhls' protest into accepted social behavior (art) in *Ende einer Dienstfahrt*. The big difference is that in the grave-episode in *Gruppenbild* and in "Erwünschte Reportage" the ideal and reality are not in sufficient conflict for the powers that be. (Should one interpret this in Schiller's terms?)  
 The reference to the freedom of the press seems ironic in light of Böll's opinion about the same: "Ja, ich bestreite diese Freiheit. Die Presse ist nicht zensiert oder zensuriert, aber sie wird durch den Einfluß von Interessenverbänden in eine gewisse Richtung gedrängt, und gewisse Tabus gibt es auch in unserer Presse." ("Interview mit Dagobert Lindlau" [1968], *Interviews I*, p. 74 f.
- 23 Especially Stückrath (as in note 10), p. 241 ff. discusses in detail the allegiances of the narrator. His main goal is to see if Fetzer's interpretation (as in note 17) can be maintained; it is rejected outright and for good reason.
- 24 Cf. Nägele, *Einführung* (as in note 2), p. 124: "Eine auffallende allgemeine Tendenz der späteren Kurzgeschichten Bölls ist eine gewisse Abwendung vom reinen Erzählen und eine überwiegende

Tendenz zum Essayistischen und Reflektiven....”

- 25 “Diskurs” is used loosely in the sense of Jürgen Habermas, “Die Bedeutung der Erzählung zu einer Theorie der kommunikativen Kompetenz,” in Habermas and Niklas Luhmann, *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie: Was leistet die Systemforschung?*, Theorie (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971), 101-141, especially towards the end of the essay.
- 26 This famous distinction goes back to Günther Müller, “Die Bedeutung der Zeit in der Erzählkunst” [1946], in *Morphologische Poetik: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. Elena Müller (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1968), 247-268. One should keep in mind that these terms are purely relational. There is not much sense in speaking of an identity of narrated time and narrating time, but only in speaking of relative expansion and condensation.
- 27 James H. Reid, *Heinrich Böll: Withdrawal and Reemergence*, Modern German Authors, N.S. 1 (London: O. Wolff, 1973), p. 71, describes “the characteristic two-part form of Böll’s novels. They begin with a lengthy exposition, the description of a situation in depth, interpreted in relation to the past: this is followed by a relatively brief ‘action,’ in which the situation is developed and a new constellation of circumstances created.” Most of this would easily apply to “Die Waage.”

In terms of narratology, one might want to adduce the category of the “free clause”, i.e. a clause (section) which is true for a large portion of the story and consequently could be moved to other places in the narrative without substantially upsetting it. Narrative clauses, in contrast, are severely restricted as to their possible positions relative to other clauses. The concept was first worked out in an essay that has attracted a great deal of attention in German narratology: William Labov, Joshua Waletzky, “Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience,” in *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*, ed. June Helm (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1967), 12-44. Using a method similar to the one developed by Labov and Waletzky, one should be able to come to a more precise description of the structural characteristics of Böll’s stories.

- 28 There is no point in belaboring what type of narrator one is dealing with here. Shifting to the ‘other side’ is not uncommon among omniscient narrators, who are omniscient because they *know* everything, not necessarily because they *say* everything. There is also no need to claim that the narrator could not know this, although it is technically correct to do so. There is such a phenomenon in everyday narration as ‘obvious surmise.’ The narrator is so sure of his version of the story that he ‘knows’ what the Balesks think and feel and can relate it without further ado.

When the boy refuses the candy after he has first discovered that the scales might be false, the treatment is similar (although not as sharply delineated). The narrator more or less assumes the position of the servant girl trying to give the candy. Other cases of ‘obvious surmise’ concern the priest’s being forced to demonstrate the correctness of the scales. Theoretically, the narrator could not know about it, but he takes the details for granted.

- 29 Cf. Wolfgang Iser, “Die Appellstruktur der Texte: Unbestimmtheit als Wirkungsbedingung literarischer Prosa” [1970], in *Rezeptionsästhetik: Theorie und Praxis*, ed. Rainer Warning, UTB 303 (München: Fink, 1975), 228-252, p.234f.: “Diese elementare Beschaffenheit des literarischen Textes bedeutet, daß die ‘schematisierten Ansichten,’ durch die der Gegenstand entrollt werden soll, oftmals unvermittelt aneinander stoßen. Der Text besitzt dann einen Schnitt. ... Mit anderen Worten: Zwischen den ‘schematisierten Ansichten’ entsteht eine Leerstelle, die sich durch die Bestimmtheit der aneinander stoßenden Ansichten ergibt. Solche Leerstellen eröffnen dann einen Auslegungsspielraum für die Art, in der man die in den Ansichten vorgestellten Aspekte aufeinander beziehen kann. Sie sind durch den Text selbst überhaupt nicht zu beseitigen.”

Stückrath (as in note 10) wants to investigate why a story which seems to be so obvious as “Die Waage” (p.238) has been subject to so many radically divergent interpretations, ranging over “eine gemäßigt konservative, kritisch-skeptische, christlich-engagierte oder dezidiert antikapitalistische



University of Dayton Review, Vol. 17, No. 2 [1985], Art. 7. This *Leerstelle*, since one does not know what the villagers' intentions are, what the Baleks really think (other than their surprise), how the revolt proceeds in detail, and what role Franz Brücher (the boy-hero) and his family play. All this would be necessary for a final ethical evaluation of the events, especially if one wants to exonerate the Baleks in any way.

- 30 Conard, "Böll contra Brecht," (as in note 9), p. 109, reads the "fast" in this sentence as "the typical faint ray of hope which concludes most of Böll's stories."
- 31 One should be careful here not to define the *Hauptsache* of the story in purely quantitative terms. The latter parts of the story, especially the revolt, are narrated at higher levels of abstraction. In this context it is interesting to look at the various synopses of the story in interpretations. The concentrated retelling invariably shortens the first two sections of the narrative, while one cannot abstract as much from the later ones.
- 32 Cesare Cases, "'Die Waage der Baleks,' dreimal gelesen," in *In Sachen Böll: Ansichten und Einsichten*, ed. Marcel Reich-Ranicki, 2nd ed. (Köln: Kiepenheuer, 1968), 224-232. Nägele's comment in *Einführung* (as in note 2), p. 123.
- 33 For criticism of Cases, see Conard, "Böll contra Brecht," p. 102 f., and Stückrath (as in note 10), p. 246 f. Both authors question some of Cases' assertions, especially on the role of cheating in the social system of the story. But both fundamentally agree with Cases' position (Stückrath less so, referring the question ultimately to the unresolved questions about *Widerspiegelungsästhetik*).
- 34 In a way, the count behaves as the Baleks would behave if they were true feudal lords, according to Cases: "...sie würden Pilze usw. einfach einstecken und die Sammler nach ihrem Gutdünken mit Geld oder Fußtritten entlohnen. ... Pilze usw. sind nicht dazu bestimmt, der Baleks eigenen Tisch zu schmücken (wie es bei Feudalherren der Fall wäre) ...." (p.227).
- 35 Both *konzertierte Aktion* and *Mitbestimmung* are concerned with the participation of labor representatives in economic decision making. The former was a regular planning meeting of government, capital, and labor representatives for consultation. The labor unions refused further cooperation in the *konzertierte Aktion* in 1977, when the employers' organization went to court to have the law on *Mithesimmung* stopped. The latter means worker representation on the governing boards of corporations (close to 50%). On the whole, the emphasis is on a cooperative rather than an adversarial relationship.

That Böll does not see West German society as equitable comes out in several statements, such as this one from "Radikale für Demokratie: Rede bei der Kundgebung gegen die Notstandsgesetze im Bonner Hofgarten am 11.5.1968" (*Essayistische Schriften 2*, p.289): "Sie werden herausfinden, daß zwischen 1945 und 1950 die wichtigsten Privilegien verteilt worden sind. Eine Zeitungslicenz war weit mehr als im Mittelalter ein Herzogtum. Es wurden weitere Privilegien bei der Währungsreform verteilt. Es herrscht ein schwer nachzuweisender, aber vorhandener Unterstrom von Feudalismus in diesem Land, und zweifellos muß dieser Zustand verändert werden...."

- 36 On Böll's ideas about *Herrschaft*, cf. his interview "Wie Brüderlichkeit anfängt"[1975](*Interviews I*, pp. 457-465). It should be noted, though, that Sohlweg never defines himself as "Knecht" but only talks about his "Herr," leaving it up to the reader to find the complement of this term. There is also no opposition in the story between "Arbeiter" and "Kapitalist." The feudal setting is unmistakable.
- 37 In this respect, Sohlweg's actions seem a perfect illustration of Böll's satiric technique as described by himself: "Aber im Grunde ist zum Beispiel eine Satire schreiben nichts anderes als die Entwicklung einer ganz simplen mathematischen Form[el], sagen wir, a plus b in Klammern zum Quadrat. Einen Grundgedanken konsequent übertreiben, bis es nicht mehr geht, dann haben Sie eine Satire." This description was given in Böll's interview with Karin Struck in 1973: "Schreiben und Lesen," in *Interviews I*, p. 279.

- 38 Friedrichsmeyer, *Die satirische Kurzprosa* (as in note 21), p. 189 ff., is of this opinion: "Entweder ist Sohlweg ein Irrer, der sein Glück in der Restauration feudalistischer Leibeigenschaft wähnt, oder seine Formel hat gegen den Strich gelesen zu werden. Das erstere ist so gut wie ausgeschlossen, denn seine Familie stützt ihn .... Sohlweg's Aktion bezweckt nicht Restauration feudalistischen Denkens, sondern ein Bewußtmachen, daß dieses Denken noch existiert. ... spiegelt Sohlwegs Tun das des Satirikers, der durch Verstellung zur Wahrheit und Norm führt. ... Sohlweg als Maske Bölls ist nur ein invertierter Paraboliker, aber ein echter Schelm...." The way Sohlweg speaks, it might be more accurate to say that in his mind feudal relationships have not yet ended.
- 39 Friedrichsmeyer, *Die satirische Kurzprosa*, p. 191, claims "[Der Berichterstatter] ist der Sprecher, der im großen und ganzen von der Bewußtseinswarte des Satirikers berichtet, ... aber hier ganz besonders objektiv und zurückhaltend zu sein hat, damit der Leser selber zu einem Bild kommt — anstelle eines verabreichten, wie eben in den Praktiken der *Bild-Zeitung*." The only place in the text in which one can really find a hint that something might not be as it is said to be is in the rather weak disavowal of critical statements about Sohlweg's act by his family members. In every other instance, there is no sign that anybody within the narrative framework speaks 'tongue in cheek.' Cf. also note 21 above.
- 40 On Böll's relationship to poverty, cf. Nägele, *Einführung* (as in note 2), p. 38. Also see note 16 above.
- 41 Heinrich Böll, ed., *Mein Lesebuch*, Fischer Taschenbuch 2077 (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1978). This is a collection of texts individually important to Böll, which he was asked to select for a series of several author *Lesebücher* by the publisher. In his preface he explains: "Mit Südamerika habe ich versucht, was man mit jedem anderen Kontinent versuchen könnte: Darstellung der Kolonisation, Analyse der Folgen bis in die Gegenwart hinein und einige Beispiele der gegenwärtigen Literatur." (p. 12) Texts on South America occupy about a fourth of the book.
- On Böll's attitude regarding the Third World, cf. his statement in "Eine deutsche Erinnerung: Interview mit René Wintzen, Oktober 1976" (*Interviews I*, p. 653): "Diese Form der Schuld, die darin besteht, daß man eigentlich nur immerdaran denkt, seinen eigenen Lebensstandard mindestens zu erhalten, aber möglichst zu erhöhen, ist, glaube ich, noch nicht dargestellt worden in der Literatur. ... Dieses ganze Geschrei über Privateigentum usw. Das sind eigentlich lächerliche Probleme, verglichen mit den Problemen der Welt, wie wir sie im Augenblick sehen müssen. ..." All this is said in the context of the treatment of the former colonies by the first two worlds.
- 42 In contrast to "Die Waage," "Erwünschte Reportage" seems to show a great deal of what Rainer Nägele has called "die Strategie der kleinen Differenz." ("Heinrich Böll. Die große Ordnung und die kleine Anarchie," in *Gegenwartsliteratur und Drittes Reich*, ed. Hans Wagener (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1977), 183-204, p. 202).
- 43 One can see this 'quite early in the advertising slogans in *Und sagte kein einziges Wort*, in "Der Wegwerfer," or in the essay on "Die neuen Probleme der Frau Saubermann" [1975] (*Essayistische Schriften 3*, 196-198). The latter is quite interesting in its status between essay and story.
- 44 Of course, Sohlweg is the only one in "Erwünschte Reportage" who is not a materialist. Everyone else is used to paying for everything. Especially the owner of the local *Wirtschaft* features prominently as someone who benefits from Sohlweg. He has made special accommodations for the pilgrims. One should also note his name: "Heuschneider." This is reminiscent of "Geld wie Heu," but also of "Beutelschneider" and "einen guten Schnitt machen." All of these point to his financial interest and success.
- 45 As in note 27.
- 46 Interview mit Marcel Reich-Ranicki; *Interviews I*, p. 67.
- 47 Vladimir Propp in his *Morphology of the Folktale* in the 1920's was the first to propose this category as one of the first 'functions' of narratives. This is one of the standard categories of later narratological research. "Die Waage" has lack of justice, information, well-being, solidarity, etc. in its initial stage.

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It is characteristic of the best of the West, which distinguishes the story from its 'models' by Hebel or similar writers (Cf. Cases, as in note 32, p. 229).

- 48 This becomes quite clear when one looks at the treatment of "Die Waage" at the hand of school anthology editors and writers of teachers' handbooks, as detailed by Vogt, "Das falsche Gewicht" (as in note 8), and by Stückrath (as in note 10).
- 49 This view, which places itself against the claim for a projective, utopian role of literature, would seem especially adequate for a treatment of Böll. Böll himself has claimed in his statement for the "Verhandlung vor dem Kölner Landgericht gegen Günter Wallraff": "Die Aufgabe eines Autors, ... auch eines Fiktionsschreibers, ist, das zu schreiben und darzustellen, was nicht offiziell dargestellt wird." (*Interviews I*, p. 679) Jochen Vogt, "Der Erinnerungsarbeiter: Zur Charakteristik des Publizisten Böll," *Text + Kritik*, 3rd, revised ed. (1982), 114-125, p. 118 f, speaks about Böll's "sprachdemokratischer Anspruch," his desire to be understood without condescending. "In diesem Sinn ist die Dominanz der Umgangssprache ... in Bölls Aufsätzen ein Merkmal, dessen Bedeutung kaum überschätzt werden kann. ... Indem der Essayist Böll sich konsequent, manchmal halsstarrig gegen Fachterminologien und wissenschaftlich vorgeprägte Erklärungszusammenhänge, gegen Theorie sperrt, verschenkt er gewiß hie und da Möglichkeiten weiter reichender, tiefer greifender Analyse. Zugleich aber verteidigt er die Alltagserfahrung, alltägliche Sprache gegen den Kommunikationsterror spezialisierter und bürokratisierter Disziplinen, Fachsprachen und Institutionen."
- 50 Thus it is no accident that the first collection of Böll stories in the GDR had "Die Waage" as its title story. Cf. the long review by Klaus Kändler, "'Aber es hörte ihnen fast niemand zu.'" *NDL* 8, Heft 6 (1960), p. 129-133. Schwarz, *Der Erzähler Heinrich Böll* (as in note 1), p. 12, writes: "Die Erzählung 'Die Waage der Baleks' prangert Junkertum und aristokratische Ausbeutung an und würde gut in eine kommunistische Schulfibel passen. (Dies ist anerkennend, nicht taktlos gemeint.)"
- 51 Cf. Vogt, "Das falsche Gewicht" (as in note 8), p. 92.
- 52 Much could be said about Böll's politics. What seems most characteristic, though, is the brief sentence which Hanno Beth has coined as a take-off from one of Böll's story titles: "Böll, so scheint es, entfernt sich von jeder Truppe." ("Trauer zu dritt und mehreren: Notizen zum politischen Publizisten Heinrich Böll," *Text + Kritik*, 33 (1972), 10-18, p. 11; also in Beth, ed., *Heinrich Böll*, as in note 8, 139-150, p. 140). This piece must be read together with Fritz J. Raddatz's "Elf Thesen über den politischen Publizisten: Eine Paraphrase der Feuerbachthesen von Karl Marx," which is included in the anthologies of Reich Ranicki and of Jurgensen (as in notes 32 and 13) and is a document of Böll's withdrawal from a left which seemed to win dominance for a while. Cf. also, among other statements to this effect, his espousal of a 'third way' in the interview "Drei Tage im März" (*Interviews I*, p. 424 f).

Böll's desire to break out of the mould has become visible in his biographical statements, in which he has recently claimed a more or less class-less youth. This is refuted at length by Klaus Schröter, *Heinrich Böll*, Rowohlt's Bildmonographien 310 (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1982), pp. 7-54. In light of the swing to more conservative values and politics in West Germany, Böll might redevelop his affinity towards the organized left, unless he should take the side of the Green Party.