

VIRGINAL ASPECTS OF FEMALE CHARACTERS
IN THE NOVELS OF HEINRICH BÖLL

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by

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INTRODUCTION

Although much has been written about the "Menschenbild" in the works of Heinrich Böll, little attention has been focused on the exact role of the female character in relationship to Böll's conception of "true" humanity: universal love within the community of man. In general, Böll's works are populated with alienated figures, victims and witnesses of war's cruelty who continue to live in the post-war aftermath in "self-chosen seclusion, having nothing to do with the accepted mores, fashions and powers of the Bundesrepublik."¹ The female characters of Böll's early works have been categorized into groups of widows, displaced young girls, and disoriented wives struggling to maintain a physical and spiritual existence.² Although the women portrayed in some early works are by no means helpless, their lives appear shattered by the consequences of the war and disoriented by the overwhelming achievements of the post-war "Wirtschaftswunder."

Women in these early novels appear as indicators of social destitution in a society that is determined to forget the horrors of the holocaust by inundating itself in materialistic means and ends. In such works (Und sagte kein einziges Wort, Haus ohne Hüter), the basic relation-

ship between man and woman provides a refuge for sorrow, hurt, and despair caused by external social conditions. The love relationship emerges as one of the only possibilities for restoring to mankind its humanity, dignity, and wholeness.³ On a one-to-one level, this withdrawal into the love relationship is a retreat from the community of man, motivated by an inability to accept resurrected norms and hypocrisies of the post-war society. This withdrawal appears to be a utopian solution; yet, its basis is grounded in reality, the search for solace, strength, and understanding in a relationship with another.

In Böll's later novels, however, the composition and nature of this relationship begins to change because of a new focus on certain dominant characteristics attributed to the female personae. The characteristics that begin to emerge in these figures suggest a mixture of the natural and the metaphysical: innocence, instinctiveness of feeling (physical as well as emotional), and transcendence of superimposed moral and societal boundaries. In that innocence is combined with instinctiveness of feeling, and fused with a metaphysical or religious sense of transcendence (sometimes evoking identification with the Virgin Mary), one can view these characteristics as virginal attributes. This threefold perspective of woman's nature is suggested by Böll in the Frankfurter Vorlesungen, where he proposes a focus on the "Trinität des Weiblichen"--the aspects of Eve, Mary Magdalene, and the Virgin Mary--as a composite and inseparable unity,⁴ a reinstatement of a balance of inner tensions. Eve supplies the carnal image, Mary Magdalene the human and innocent, and the Virgin Mary the spiritual and virginal, thus producing a figure that can be physical (sensuous) and virginal at the same time, since she

functions outside of superimposed, institutional definitions of morality. As a result of Böll's redefined image of woman, the love relationship between man and woman, as one of the possibilities for achieving true humanity, assumes a more universal significance.

In her analysis of the main female character in Gruppenbild mit Dame, Margareta Deschner perceives Leni to be the embodiment of Böll's vision of the threefold nature of woman.⁵ According to Deschner Leni is the incarnation of Eve, Mary Magdalene, and the Virgin Mary, a character capable of "creating an actual community around herself, a community of the unrepentant and the repentant, of sinners and saints illuminated in her light."⁶ But Leni is not a new character for Böll, as Deschner notes:⁷ "She is an act of restoration, of rescuing something that was lost." This "something lost" could also possibly be that something that had not yet been realized in one character, the nature and grace of all-accepting love, embodied in a woman because of her symbolic and archetypal significance as a source, the combination of mother, lover, and wife. Deschner, however, does not mention the origins of this all-inclusive female figure, which I believe are essential for understanding her interpretation of Leni as "an agent who in an instinctive and self-evident way kept faith with herself, who acted and reacted as if 'true' humanity were not only a possibility, but the only possibility."⁸ Taking the figure of Leni in Gruppenbild mit Dame as the ultimate realization of Böll's ideal conception of the female character, one can trace the development of virginal characteristics that are present in the female personae of Billard um Halbzehn and Ansichten eines Clowns⁹ and emerge in a final synthesis in the figure of Leni.

The analysis of the female characters in Billard (Edith and

Johanna Fählmel) and in Ansichten (Henrietta and Marie) under the aspect of the elements of innocence, instinctiveness of feeling, and transcendence (all attributes of a virginal figure) will indicate to what extent Leni can be viewed as a synthesis of these prototypes and how a conception of the threefold nature of the "ideal" woman influences the possibility of alleviating suffering and alienation through an extension of the love relationship.

BILLARD UM HALBZEHN

In Böll's attempt to illuminate certain features of woman's nature, he focuses on a redefined perspective of natural attributes in combination; innocence and instinctiveness of feeling, attributes that survive the external pressures of a hypocritical moral system. In general, the concept of innocence is mundanely associated with virginity in regard to the female, where as an instinctive reaction to physical feelings is associated with sexual immorality. Böll, however, perceives the physical aspects of a relationship to be a sacramental component of a spiritual and physical bond, be it within or outside of the institution of marriage. He consequently portrays characters who may well be considered socially "immoral," but who retain their virginal purity, i.e. their innocence, because they have the capacity to respond instinctively or naturally in a relationship with another. For Böll the basic ingredient of naturalness is simple acceptance of the self-evident, that is, an innocent (pure or childlike) reaction to instinctive feelings in following the order of nature. The combination of these two features (innocence and instinctiveness) in this context is understood as virginal. Beginning with the figure of Edith in Billard one finds more emphasis on virginal naturalness as a highly desirable facet of the female nature (it is possible that these elements are present in earlier female figures, even if only in a latent state).

In conjunction with her ethereal presence in the novel--Edith appears only in the remembrances of the other characters--Edith's nature is a reflection of childlike innocence and womanly purity. She is viewed by the other characters in terms of "Lamm," the name given to those innocent victims of the cruel machinations of those in power who are conversely identified by the symbolic term of "Büffel." The obvious religious significance of this dualistic view of society has been well noted by scholars.¹¹ Basically the "Sakrament des Lammes" represents the biblical good versus the evil of the philistines, those who have partaken of the "Sakrament des Büffels." These two categories are symbolically extended in the novel to include the victims of Nazi terrorism (Lämmer) and the renewed interest in militarism and imperialism experienced in post-war Germany (as reflected in the now powerful positions of former Nazis).¹² Important for this analysis is Edith's portrayal as the Lamb of God incarnate. Although others also belong to this group of "Lämmer" (Schrella and Hugo, the bellboy), Edith is singled out as the representative of the innocence attributed to these victims. Heinrich Fähmel, the patriarch of the Fähmel family, dedicates the legend of his life "im Namen Edith, des einzigen Lammes, das ich je sah" (Billard, 103).

In view of her identification with the Lamb of God, her natural innocence assumes divine proportions (metaphysical); she appears attached to a worldly existence (she has earthly parents and bears children), yet she also appears detached from this existence, an aspect that contributes to her ethereal quality: "Ich konnte nie glauben, daß sie wirklich einen Vater, eine Mutter gehabt hat--einen Bruder. Sie war eine Botin des Königs" (Billard, 179). The ethereal quality of her nature can be understood as

an aspect of the transcendental. She transcends the external, natural boundaries and is viewed as a mediator in the eyes of Heinrich Fähmel: "als sie bei uns lebte, konnte ich seinen Namen /Gott/ wieder denken, ohne zu erröten, konnte den Namen beten" (Billard, 179). Here Edith provides a bridge between man and God.

Although it is not explicitly stated, the transcendental aspect of Edith's nature can be identified with the Virgin Mary, when one considers the figure of Hugo as a reincarnation of Edith in contemporary time. Hugo bears a striking resemblance to Edith (blond, fair, and blue eyes), which is also outwardly projected in his smile, noted by Robert: "Ich habe es /Ediths Lächeln/ gesehn . . . auf dem Gesicht eines Hotelboys, der Hugo heißt" (Billard, 181); and again Robert refers to Hugo as one "der Ediths Lächeln auf dem Gesicht trägt" (Billard, 291). Hugo has been known since childhood as "Lamm Gottes" and is recognized as such in his later encounters with others. One could almost suspect a mysterious maternal relationship between Edith and Hugo, virginal in that Robert Fähmel, Edith's husband, is not the father, yet becomes his adoptive father at the conclusion of the novel. Hugo also symbolically represents the new generation of lambs. Thus the association with the Virgin birth appears to be significant in this respect, contributing further to the fusion of natural and metaphysical features in the female figure.

Edith's innocence and instinctiveness are also portrayed on the earthly plane. She is attached to the worldly through her perceptive understanding of human nature and life. Robert describes this perception as knowledge beyond her years: "sie war blond, sah aus wie sechzehn und hatte kein Backfischlachen im Hals; keine falsche Erwartung von Glück in

in den Augen" (Billard, 144). Her participation in the physical union with Robert reflects this worldly wisdom, and her simple acceptance of the sex act as the consecration of what is natural indicates Böll's vision of human innocence and natural instinct combined. A symbol of this natural acceptance of the self-evident is later suggested by her smile. Roberts's sexual knowledge is attributed to the emergence of "uraltes Wissen" (Billard, 145), and he discovers that Edith, too, is deeply aware of the naturalness and archetypal significance of their union: "Er entdeckte, daß sie sogar lächeln konnte . . . lächeln, als auch sie ihr uraltes Wissen entdeckte" (Billard, 145). The use of the term "uraltes Wissen" provides the key for the combination of the sacredness and, at the same time, naturalness of physical love.

As far as Edith is concerned life and living are in themselves self-evident within the framework of her relationship to biblical religion; all developments in life are explained as the will of God--"der Herr hat dies getan, der Herr hat das getan, der Herr hat es gegeben" (Billard, 136). She appears to relate to the world in a spiritual manner:

Edith war anders /als ihr Bruder Schrella/, ihr biblischer Ernst war so gewichtig, daß sie sich biblischen Humor erlauben durfte; sie lachte mit ihren Kindern inmitten des Bombardments . . . und der Tod barg für sie keine Schrecken. (Billard, 104)

Edith is at once real and unreal, her characteristics natural and transcendental, simple and complex.

Even her relationship with her husband, Robert, reflects real and unreal aspects. It is hard for Robert to imagine Edith as a wife and mother, and he refers to their marriage experience together as "das Ehespiel." He also finds himself unable to relate naturally to Edith, as he once did

in their initial physical encounter out of wedlock. He now has the feeling of committing a sacrilege when he kisses her: "das merkwürdige Gefühl, sie wieder einmal geschändet zu haben" (Billard, 146). This inability to respond naturally within the basic male-female relationship is indicative of the dissolution of its secureness and exclusiveness. It also suggests the denial of retreat into an individual-centered love relationship as a possibility for achieving understanding. Here one sees the dissolution of what is later to rematerialize as a more communally extended relationship in Gruppenbild.

Part of the dissolution of the relationship is due to Robert's own nature ("klug and kühl"), his rational and mathematically abstract manner of dealing with the world (reflected in his profession in the field of statics and his preoccupation with the game of billiards). Spiritually wounded by the cruel consequences of misused power (the death of Ferdi and others) and unable to carry out his duty as "Hirt" (the symbolic command of "Weide meine Lämmer" is repeated constantly in reference to Robert), he has withdrawn into himself, inhibiting any instinctive reaction to Edith's naturalness. But with Edith, Böll has also created a figure whose ethereal qualities make it almost impossible for one to relate to her in an earthly sense. Thus, for Robert and Edith the one-to-one love relationship no longer provides a solution for their individual needs.

While Böll has attempted to embody in Edith the characteristics he felt necessary for a new image of woman, one also finds these features reflected, to some extent, in the figure of Johanna Fähmel on a more realistic and concrete level. Edith's virginal qualities appear as a projection of Johanna's innocent youth, which is identified by the motif of Schiller's

Kabale und Liebe and suggests certain contemplative and harmonious aspects of the concept "schöne Seele."¹³ The motif of Kabale und Liebe serves to emphasize the dominant idea of innocence by suggesting a parallel between Johanna's situation and that of the young girl in Schiller's drama. Both situations reflect the adverse effects of misused power, a power that rejects any concept of natural love and accepts only that which is expressed as duty. In Johanna's case, her instinctiveness is endangered by the traditions and mores of her family and her social class (patrician). She intuitively rejects the code of duty espoused by those who had partaken of the "Sakrament des Büffels," a code which insisted upon "Ehe, Treue, Ehre, Schlafzimmer, wo es nur Pflicht, keine Kür gab" (Billard, 162). She fears that she will have to submit to the "uralte Erbschaft der Dunkelheit und der Gewalt," an inheritance which denies the naturalness of human emotions (Billard, 162).

Johanna is saved from this fate by her insight and an intuitive desire to retain her innocence. This innocence and youthful instinctiveness are also associated with the consummation of sexual love. According to the conventions of the period, sex was regarded as a duty devoid of beauty and joy. Johanna is spared this unfulfilling aberration of the experience through her relationship with Heinrich. Her simple acceptance of Heinrich's promise to free the physical expression of love from its connotations of duty ("du solltest . . . nicht das Gefühl haben, an einer widerwärtigen Turnübung teilzunehmen, zu der du verpflichtet bist" (Billard, 159), is reminiscent of Edith's acceptance and "uraltetes Wissen." Johanna instinctively responds to the consummation of their union in the environment of Nature, making "aus der Pflicht ein Vergnügen," an experience which

disinherits her from the values of her ancestors (Billard, 158). The passing sounds of steamships on the river near by herald the end of her virginity, yet she retains her inherent purity and transcends the constraints of her socialization.

The combination of innocence and instinctiveness also reflect a potential for universal love, a potential that is not fully developed in the figure of Edith. Johanna's instinctive abhorrence of the power of the militarists manifests itself in acts of mercy and magnanimity during the war years. She refuses to accept any privileges awarded her station, cares for the poor and insists on being treated like those who were being persecuted--she attempts to leave on the train which was destined for the concentration camps. Her actions ultimately lead to confinement in a mental institute for her own protection, symbolically the "verwünschenes Schloß" of her memory. This withdrawal from her former social reality and her continuing desire to remain there heightens the contemplative aspects of her nature ("schöne Seele"): Johanna is still able to recognize all men as brothers, "wenn auch feindliche Brüder."¹⁴ The bitterness and revenge that she harbors against the perpetrators of injustice (the contemporary representatives of the "Büffel"), however, indicate that she does not accept life as self-evident. She is painfully aware of society's influence in a world "wo eine Handbewegung das Leben kostet, wo es dich retten oder dich umbringen kann" (Billard, 164). Different from the ethereal Edith, Johanna's world-view is affected by externals, boundaries that she at times cannot transcend.

Yet, Johanna's nature is attributed with certain transcendental qualities. In spite of her physical boundaries, she is able to transcend

the boundaries of time (past, present, future) more freely than her husband or son, since she is not restricted by the pressures of an outside reality.¹⁵ Noting her "Ausnahmeposition der Narrenfreiheit," Klaus Jeziorkowski claims that her manipulation of memory-time is totally conscious and sovereign because she is able to manipulate the memory-associations of both Heinrich and Robert.¹⁶ This ability to rise above temporal boundaries reflects to some extent transcendental aspects of her nature. The motif-like incantations of memories--"muss haben ein Gewehr," "wie böse die Welt ist, wie wenig reine Herzen es gibt," "eine Handbewegung das Leben kostet"--suggest a rather magical/mystical quality in her ability to totally merge the past, present, and future.

Johanna appears to have an all-inclusive concept of the world, since in her seclusion in the institute she stands outside of the accepted view of reality. This position allows her final action of revenge on the present representative of the "Büffel" to assume redemptive proportions. Her action is directed towards the future salvation of the innocent--her grandchildren and those who belong to the fold of the Lamb. The love relationship, once a basic one-to-one relationship between Johanna and Heinrich, begins to extend itself beyond these limits, becoming more communal, more inclusive of others. This new direction is reflected in the acceptance of Hugo into the family, symbolically a commitment to all of the "Lämmer."

The virginal elements of innocence, instinctiveness, and transcendence, both on a worldly and a metaphysical plane, are definitely features of both female characters in Billard. Though these features are divided between Edith and Johanna in differing degrees, a combination of

these features in both characters can be viewed as a prototype of the later figure of Leni in Gruppenbild. The focus on these aspects begins to reflect Böll's view of the female character as possessing redemptive powers in respect to the community of man.

ANSICHTEN EINES CLOWNS

In the novel Ansichten, the focus on the virginal elements of woman's nature is continued in the figures of Henrietta and Marie. As with Edith in Billard, Böll again creates an ethereal character in the figure of Henrietta, the dead sister of the protagonist, Hans Schnier. Like Edith, she belongs to the generation of innocents who were victims of the war, to whom Böll has attributed the characteristics of childlike simplicity and instinctive naturalness. These virginal characteristics are mainly implied by Henrietta's youth and to some extent in the self-evident manner in which she views life. In one instance this viewpoint is reflected in the matter of fact way she leaves for enlistment in the "Flak" effort, which is compared by Hans to a departure on a school excursion: "Sie winkte mir zu und lachte . . . Henrietta sah wirklich aus, als mache sie einen Schulausflug" (Ansichten, 22-23). It was not for duty's sake that she took part in the war effort, but a simple acceptance of the course of events. This provides a contrast to her mother, who was infused with a perverse sense of duty to protect "unsere heilige deutsche Erde" from the aggressions of the "jüdische Yankees" (Ansichten, 24).

In comparison with Edith's character portrayal, that of Henrietta is rather sketchy; however, one can perceive certain transcendental elements

in her character. She has the curious habit of falling into a trance-like state, absenting herself from the realm of reality or consciousness. Hans describes three such instances: She stops playing in the middle of a tennis match--"und blickte träumend in den Himmel," drops her spoon while eating, and lets the cards fall out of her hand during a game (Ansichten, 30). The actual essence of this state is not explained explicitly. When questioned by Hans about the content of her experience she describes it as thinking about "Nichts," "An nichts, ich denke an nichts" (Ansichten, 104). The implication of a somewhat mystical transcendence, however, is present. It suggests a paradoxical feeling of emptiness and fullness and is associated with (spiritual) freedom:

ich bin dann plötzlich ganz leer und doch wie betrunken, und ich möchte am liebsten auch noch die Schuhe abwerfen und die Kleider-- ohne Ballast sein. (Ansichten, 104)

Although her state appears unnatural to others, Henrietta accepts it as part of the natural order of things. She refutes the pseudo-poet Schnitzler's attempt to label her experience as a "mystische Begabung" with the simple and unadulterated retort of "Scheiße!" (Ansichten, 32).

In spite of the significance her character achieves for the protagonist, Hans--she is still "alive" in his memory and he feels a sense of closeness towards her--Henrietta only borders on the possibility of being a character in reality. Her character is developed only to the extent that she functions as a phantom of the past. The virginal elements of her nature have yet to be incorporated into a figure that reflects a fusion of the worldly and metaphysical elements, one that remains pure and naive beyond the stage of youthfulness.

As was the case in Billard, Henrietta can be viewed as a projection

certain features inherent in Marie's nature. Marie's youthfulness in the beginning of her relationship with Hans and her simple childlike acceptance of his sexual advances reflect in her the combination of innocence and instinctive response to feelings. She initially accepts a sexual liaison with Hans as self-evident. Her relationship to the physical world (her body) is also expressed as such: Hans comments on how "selbst-verständlich für sie ihr Körper war" (Ansichten, 51).

However, in the process of growing from "child" to "adult"--the responsibility for her decision to live with Hans--her innocence and instinctiveness are undermined by external forces, the "Ordnungsprinzip" of the Catholic Church. The recognition of this responsibility produces in her a sense of guilt. Actually the seeds of this guilt, the unsanctioned relationship with Hans, are present from the beginning of the relationship. Marie experiences a conflict of conscience between following her instinctive feelings and adhering to the dictates of an outside moral system (Catholic Church). Her statement, "Ich bin doch katholisch," after their first sexual encounter already signifies this conflict. For a while Marie is able to surpress this guilt and relate totally to Hans. However, during this time her inner alienation increases, partially stimulated by the more frequent contact with the Catholic intellectual circle. On one level her alienation is expressed by an experience of "metaphysischer Schrecken," a state similar to Henrietta's trances. Instead of allowing her to transcend external influences, this state inhibits her from going beyond her own ego involvement. As the guilt intensifies she loses more of her naturalness and her ability to relate instinctively to another human being. Marie appears unable to synthesize the natural and spiritual elements of her

own nature. Although she returns to the sanctions of the church, she has lost her "virginal" qualities in the sense of Böll's conception.

Because of her inability to relate "naturally" to her partner, Hans, the relationship is also affected and she ultimately leaves him. The love relationship in this novel appears to be doomed from the beginning. But its failure does not rest totally in Marie's desire to reconcile herself with the Church. Hans, himself, is unable to relate honestly to Marie. It has been noted that the protagonist is experiencing an existential crisis of identity and attempts to discover his inner focus through Marie.¹⁷ Unable to accept the middle-class values that he deems invalid and hypocritical, he assumes the identity of the "Narr," the position of the Clown outside of society.

Hans is an authentic being in the sense that he remains true to his own values; however, his expectations of Marie's role in the relationship are too demanding. He claims that he receives his artistic inspiration from Marie, and without her he can no longer be creative. In other words, he attempts to fill a void in his life with the person of Marie, a void that pre-dates his relationship with her.¹⁸ The basic male-female relationship fails because of the isolation in which Marie is forced to exist, an isolation that is part of Hans' rejection of society. In his study, Hans Bernhard¹⁹ succinctly analyzes the situation:

Im Grunde erträgt Marie die Härte eines Daseins nicht mehr, in dem das Menschliche sich nur in der Abgeschlossenheit, im Widerstand gegen die herrschenden Kräfte in der Gesellschaft bewahren kann.

Hans in a sense imposes upon the freedom of another, denying the necessary human contact with others outside of the relationship. In Ansichten one sees

the final rejection of the one-to-one relationship as too limited, too confined to be the only solution for assuaging misery and preventing misunderstanding. With this denial comes the anticipation of an alternative to the individual-based relationship in Gruppenbild, that of an individual in harmony with a community of relationships.

GRUPPENBILD MIT DAME

An analysis of Leni's nature in Gruppenbild can illustrate that Böll has endowed one character with those features witnessed separately in her prototypes. Embodied in this single character is a synthesis of the natural and metaphysical elements mentioned in the characters above. The love relationship which Böll had formerly offered as a possibility for achieving human fulfillment, and which has appeared to dissolve in his later novels, achieves a new and universal significance through this female figure.

What Böll depicts on an ethereal level in the women of his later novels (specifically Edith and Henrietta) is given concrete form in the figure of Leni, the Lady in the group portrait. Leni, as the embodiment of natural and metaphysical facets of human nature, creates a new dimension for the female character. She is a figure of grace and genuineness, with a strong sense of concrete reasoning power and sensuality, which ultimately fuses the material with the spiritual. Perceiving Leni's uniqueness of character, Deschner notes:

To create a true figure of grace, concrete, full of love and compassion, Böll had to conjure up someone whose whole being would celebrate life as something that takes place here and now, the way we see it, touch it, taste it. She has to repulse abstractness, legalistic ways of thinking, rationalization, as something evil, something that destroys nature and grace.

Leni is definitely a figure who relates to life ("celebrates life") concretely,

translating all that happens to her, all that she experiences, into the self-evident. The elements of innocence and instinctiveness of feeling that have been identified in her prototypes appear in the figure of Leni as a fusion of the pure and the sensuous.

Leni's capacity for sensuality is constantly reiterated by the Verf. ("Verfasser"), the compiler of the various impressions of Leni from those who have had contact with her. Describing an incident--her foot touches a "familiar" uneven spot in the pavement causing an erotic reaction on Leni's part--the Verf. indicates the depth and breadth of Leni's sensuality:

und da Leni eine ungeheuer sinnliche Person ist, die sich alles, aber auch alles sofort ins Erotische umsetzt, erlebt sie vor Entzückung, Wehmut, Erinnerung, totaler Erregtheit jenen Vorgang, der . . . in theologischen Lexika als 'absolute Seineserfüllung' bezeichnet werden könnte. (Gruppenbild, 11)

In all instances, Leni's sensuality is an expression of genuine naturalness, since she can only relate to life in elemental terms. The everyday occurrences in her life are thus associated with the erotic.

As a child Leni displays a "passionate" interest in her bodily functions (Gruppenbild, 27). This interest is later attended to and cultivated by the Jewish nun, Schwester Rahel, from whom Leni receives the desired biological explanations. Her desire for information concerning bodily functions appears insatiable. The simple act of eating fresh "Brötchen" for the morning meal also contains erotic implications because of the intense pleasure derived from this "communion." It is then only natural that she desire this same sensuous pleasure from the "Bread of Life," the sacrament of communion. This expectation remains unfulfilled because the reception of this sacrament has been rendered too abstract by the

institution of the Church:

Leni hatte dieses Stück Brot so heftig begehrt, ihr gesamtes Sensorium war bereit, tatsächlich in Verzückung zu verfallen-- 'Und nun . . . bekam ich dieses blasse, zarte, trockene, nach nichts schmeckende Ding auf die Zunge gelegt--ich war drauf und dran, es wieder auszuspucken!' (Gruppenbild, 33)

It is impossible for Leni to relate to anything that does not resemble (taste or feel) concrete life. Her education also reflects the influence of her sensual nature. She was unable to identify with the abstractness of such subjects as mathematics and religion; however, she excelled in penmanship because it required physical action (Gruppenbild, 26).

Viewing Leni's character in consideration of her innate sensuality, one is able to better understand the projection of other facets of her nature; one that is virginal in that her sensuality is presented as an aspect of inherent purity. Her genuineness and naiveté are not restricted to her youth, but are maintained throughout her adult life. Leni exhibits a very fundamental understanding of physical functions, especially that of physical love. She perceives sex as a natural fulfillment of mutual human needs. Hence, she is incensed when a teacher, a priest, attempts to instruct her about the sex act by employing vague and imprecise analogies, such as "Erdbeeren mit Schlagsahne" (Gruppenbild, 34). This type of abstract and unnatural manner of expressing something that is so natural causes her to feel a sense of shame ("erröten") for being exposed to such misconceptions. This false sense of morality appears as an affront to her innocence and genuineness.

Leni also eagerly awaits an experience in physical love, a chance to give fully of herself and to receive from another the tenderness and warmth necessary for a sense of fulfillment. For her, physical love is a

combination of nature and grace, an expression of human compassion and love. She rejects the advances of a young man--an encounter that she herself had encouraged--because he had "keine zärtlichen Hände" (Gruppenbild, 53). Tenderness belongs to the grace of the union. Finally in her relationship with Boris, "der Sowjetmensch," Leni finds someone to whom she can relate, a man "den sie lieben, dem sie sich bedingungslos hingeben will" (Gruppenbild, 53). Deschner identifies this relationship with that of Adam and Eve, although socially it would be considered illicit.

The combination of Leni's sensuality and innocence also encompasses naiveté, both personal and social. Unlike Marie in Ansichten or Johanna in Billard, she can feel neither guilt nor bitterness and regret: "Leni ist nicht verbittert, und sie ist reuelos" (Gruppenbild, 9). She simply accepts the self-evident in life. On the social level, Leni's own position as an outcast of society reflects her naiveté. Because she has intuitively aligned herself with the socially impoverished people of post-war Germany (mainly "Gastarbeiter"), she cannot understand the political and social consequences of her life-style: "Leni versteht die Welt nicht mehr, sie zweifelt daran, ob sie je verstanden hat, sie begreift die Feindschaft der Umwelt nicht, begreift nicht warum die Leute so böse auf sie . . . sind" (Gruppenbild, 104). Further references to her naiveté illustrate her lack of social and political awareness: "Bis zuletzt hat die Leni gar nicht gewußt, was überhaupt ein Jude oder eine Jüdin ist" (Gruppenbild, 104). It is precisely her naiveté that allows her to remain true to herself and remain above the influences of traditional norms and social conventions. Leni is a woman who is "unzeitgemäß," totally out of step with her time. She neither conforms nor protests, but merely "follows some internal, infallible intuition of her own." It

is for this reason that Leni can become an all-inclusive character for Böll; the other female characters viewed above have been bent or victimized by external social pressure. Leni suffers, though the influences of outside pressures do not touch her essence.

While Leni's entire being and the manner in which she relates to her environment are concretely grounded in the physical plane of existence, her nature also reflects elements that are virginal in a metaphysical sense. Her ability to rise above imposed social boundaries and an implicit identification with the Virgin Mary are illustrative of these elements. The realm of metaphysics is as fundamental to Leni as that of the world. In her own way she is in harmony with both and does not differentiate between them:

Die Metaphysik macht Leni nicht die geringsten Schwierigkeiten. Sie steht mit der Jungfrau Maria auf vertrautem Fuß, empfängt sie auf dem Fernsehschirm fast täglich. . . . Leni und die Jungfrau Maria lächeln sich einfach an. (Gruppenbild, 17-18)

Although Leni is actually viewing her own reflection on the screen, this simple acceptance of the divine further exemplifies her self-evident viewpoint. On the one hand this simple, childlike acceptance and identification can be attributed to her naiveté; on the other hand, references imply that Leni herself is in harmony with the entire universe.

One such reference concerns an early experience of "Glückseligkeit," in which Leni lay outstretched on the "Heidekraut" facing the heavenly bodies (Gruppenbild, 28). She expressed the feeling of "genommen zu werden" and "gegeben zu haben" (Gruppenbild, 28). While of a transcendental/metaphysical nature, this experience has a definite affinity to the virginal conception: Leni stated that she would not have been surprised had she become pregnant (Gruppenbild, 28). Further references suggest a more explicit identification

with the Virgin. Deschner notes that Leni, Boris, and their newly-born son, Lev, are described by the Verf. as living together like the Holy Family.²⁴ This identification of Leni with the Virgin Mary further establishes the transcendental elements of her character.

Leni is able to transcend her own physical nature, yet remain within the realm of the concrete. She is totally unaffected by the conventions of society, and rejects accepted abstractions in favor of the tangible. Böll has endowed other female characters with this naturalness (Edith, Henrietta), but it is only in Leni that this aspect is incorporated in one character who is also grounded in reality. Because of these factors, Leni is capable of projecting universal humanity--total acceptance and compassion. Her act of giving Boris a cup of coffee in the face of other's hostility assumes proportions of making him "human" in their eyes: "Der Boris wurde einfach durch Lenis mutige Tat zum Menschen gemacht, zum Menschen erklärt" (Gruppenbild, 195). Leni is capable of creating a humane situation.

Equipped with her unique and authentic nature and a tremendous capacity for mercy ("Barmherzigkeit"),²⁵ compassion, and love, Leni is the projection of the ideal embodied in the real. Böll's redefined image of woman allows the love relationship to assume new dimensions and significance. Whereas the love relationship in Ansichten had proved too limiting, Leni's relationship with Boris appears as one stage in the progression towards a more extended relationship.

Initially Leni's relationship with Boris provides the possibility of human fulfillment. But its duration is short and her capacity to love transcends the boundaries of any one relationship, as reflected in her unequivocal acceptance of those around her. Her present relationship with

Mehmet, the Turkish "Gastarbeiter," was initiated out of compassion, but does not limit her ability or desire to relate to others. The former nun, Klementina, anticipates Leni's role as a redemptive figure who will restore human nature in those who still suffer: "Eines Tages wird sie alle diese Männer trösten, die durch sie leiden, sie wird sie alle heilen" (Gruppenbild, 349). Who are these men? They are those men who have suffered, who have in some way been touched by her and fallen in "love" with her. Schirtenstein, Scholsdorff, and Pelzer will be the beneficiaries of Leni's warmth and compassion. All of these men have been affected by the radiating grace of this figure. At the conclusion of the novel Schirtenstein is seen with Leni--"Wange an Wange und Hand in Hand"; Scholsdorff meets with her in a cafe and experiences a "Handauflegung"; and even Pelzer, the capitalistic opportunist, experiences Leni's healing compassion. This extension of love, compassion, and understanding beyond the limits of the one-to-one relationship appears to reflect Böll's conception of "true" humanity.

The creation of Leni as the embodiment of the features witnessed in her prototypes (Edith, Johanna, Henrietta, Marie) illustrates Böll's desire to synthesize finally the somewhat paradoxical elements of that which he perceives to constitute the female nature. Elements of the carnal Eve, the sensuous but pure Mary Magdalene, and the virginal Mary are conceived as inseparable aspects of woman's nature and achieve their greatest integration in the character of Leni. Leni is a natural being in the truest sense of the term. She unequivocally accepts her sensuality and therefore retains her innocence. She emerges as the epitome of the virginal character: a balanced tension between innocence, instinctiveness (physical and emotional), and transcendence.

CONCLUSION

In the works mentioned in this analysis, the characters of Edith (Billard) and Henrietta (Ansichten) possess traces of the same features projected in the figure of Leni. Neither of these two female figures are concretely delineated and appear feasible only on the ethereal level. The balance between innocence, instinctiveness and transcendence is therefore not realized, since these elements are not viably integrated into a concretely real figure. While being more concretely and realistically defined, Johanna (Billard) and Marie (Ansichten) are inhibited by their inability to accept life as self-evident. A balanced tension of the virginal characteristics in their nature is hindered by feelings of bitterness and revenge in Johanna's case and by guilt in Marie's. Leni is incapable of any such inhibitions.

In each of the works it appears that the threefold virginal features are divided between countertypes: in Billard between Edith on the ethereal level and Johanna on the realistic, and in Ansichten between Henrietta and Marie respectively. It is as if Böll himself had not yet fully conceived the "ideal" combination in a single character. He appears to have been searching for a figure that encompassed the entirety of woman's nature, one who was able to sustain a balanced tension between what Böll had earlier called the "Trinität des Weiblichen." One finds the full

realization of woman's threefold nature in the character of Leni: She is Eve, Mary Magdalene, and the Virgin Mary.²⁷ In this capacity she functions as a figure of grace and self-evident love through whom others realize a possibility of expressing "true" humanity, of finding solace, warmth, and meaning within the community of man.

The reintegrated vision of woman, as expressed in Leni, also exhibits a profound influence on the basic one-to-one love relationship. Deschner notes a tendency towards the communal in her statement: "She /Leni/ acts like the light behind a transparency: her life in the background illuminates the indistinct . . . features of a . . . crowd around her."²⁸ Leni's capacity for love and compassion is not confined to one relationship but extends beyond the individual, encompassing all those who have contact with her. She illumines and redeems, and in a sense creates a community around herself.²⁹ The dissolution of the individual love relationships portrayed in Billard and Ansichten has experienced an arrest in this novel; love between man and woman still remains a possibility for the realization of "true" humanity, but it is now communally expressed and experienced.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Walter H. Sokel, "Perspective and Dualism in the Novels of Böll," The Contemporary Novel in German: A Symposium, ed. Robert R. Heitner, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), p. 16.
- 2 Wilhelm Johannes Schwarz, Der Erzähler Heinrich Böll. Seine Werke und Gestalten (München: Francke Verlag, 1967), p. 75.
- 3 Hans Joachim Bernhard, Die Romane Heinrich Bölls: Gesellschaftskritik und Gemeinschaftsutopie (Berlin: Rutten & Loening, 1970), p. 311.
- 4 Heinrich Böll, Frankfurter Vorlesungen (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1966), p. 101.
- 5 Margareta Deschner, "Böll's Lady: A New Eve," Unpublished paper, SCMLA, Southern Methodist University 1973, p. 22.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid, p. 21.
- 9 Heinrich Böll, Gruppenbild mit Dame, 3rd ed. (1971; rpt. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1974); Billard um Halbzehn (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1959); Ansichten eines Clowns, 14th ed. (1963; rpt. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1973). Subsequent reference to these works will be Gruppenbild, Billard, and Ansichten.
- 10 Heinrich Böll, "Brief an einen jungen Katholiken," Erzählungen, Hörspiele, Aufsätze (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1961), p. 379.
- 11 Günter Wirth, Heinrich Böll: Essayistische Studie über religiöse und gesellschaftliche Motive im Prosawerk des Dichters (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein Verlag, 1969), p. 125. Also see Horst Haase, "Charakter und Funktion der zentralen Symbolik in Heinrich Bölls Roman 'Billard um Halbzehn,'" Weimarer Beiträge, 2 (1964) 220-221.
- 12 Haase, p. 222.
- 13 Bernhard, p. 284.
- 14 Ibid, p. 282.
- 15 Klaus Jeziorkowski, Rhythmus und Figur: Zur Technik der epischen Konstruktion in Heinrich Bölls "Der Wegwerfer" und "Billard um Halbzehn" (Berlin: Verlag Gehlen, 1968), p. 125.

- 16 Jeziorkowski, p. 125.
- 17 L. L. Duroche, "Böll's 'Ansichten eines Clowns' in Existential Perspective," Symposium 25 (1971), p. 354.
- 18 Ibid, p. 355.
- 19 Bernhard, p. 311.
- 20 Deschner, p. 20.
- 21 Ibid, p. 15.
- 22 Ibid, p. 3.
- 23 Deschner gives an interesting account about Böll's inclusion of the Virgin Mary in the threefold nature of woman. p. 18-20.
- 24 Ibid, p. 19.
- 25 Heinz Ludwig Arnold, "Bölls Poetik des Humanen," Der Schriftsteller Heinrich Böll: Ein biographisch-bibliographischer Abriss, ed. Werner Legning, (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1972), p. 44.
- 26 Böll, Frankfurter Vorlesungen, p. 101.
- 27 Deschner sees these interdependent aspects of Leni's nature projected in Margret (Mary Magdalene) and the somewhat mystical Schwester Rahel (Virgin Mary). p. 15.
- 28 Ibid, p. 4.
- 29 Ibid, p. 21.

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