

TALKING ABOUT THE AESTHETIC OF THE HUMANE: EXPLORING
COMMUNICATION IN THE CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF HEINRICH
BÖLL'S EARLY NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

In his *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* Heinrich Böll attempts to formulate an aesthetic program that explains how the moral content of writing might be inscribed in its structure. This “aesthetic of the humane” would involve the subject-matter and orientation of a work’s content toward the representation of the historically real and the truth content of that reality. The “real” as it is in the historical world and that “reality” that contains the truth content of the experienced world are to be unified in the aesthetic of the humane, and it is the author who is burdened with the task of mediating the two for her reader.

In many of his essays Böll privileges communication as an inherently moral act, and emphasizes the responsibility of the author to use his vocation humanely. In order to understand how Böll realized the concept of the aesthetic of the humane in his own writing we may look to how he uses communication within his texts to demonstrate moral action. Communication between characters at the level of plot corresponds to the author’s obligation to depict the “real” historical component, and communicative structures in the matrix of his novels relate to the “reality” of mediated experience provided as commentary by the author to the reader. This thesis examines how Böll delivers these dual messages using the depiction of communication in three of his early novels.

Böll’s early novels were chosen for analysis because they correspond to a period in his career before his writing entered into a direct dialogue with his detractors and political opponents. His later writing may be seen as responses to “real” historical developments in his life, and as such do not exhibit the balance of the “real” and “reality” that are the goal of the engaged writer according to his own essays. Through a discussion of *Und sagte kein einziges Wort*, *Billard um halb zehn*, and *Ansichten eines Clowns* this thesis concludes that as of the moment that he articulates his

aesthetic program in 1964 Böll harbored doubts about its effectiveness to reach his audience and affect any meaningful change in society.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

David Sebastian Low was born in Columbia, Missouri on November 7, 1978. He graduated from Jefferson City High School in 1997 and attended Truman State University in Kirksville, Missouri. He graduated Cum Laude with History Honors in December, 2002 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and German. He attended the Ludwig Maximilians Universität in Munich, Germany during the 2000-2001 academic year through the Junior Year in Munich study-abroad program organized by Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. In 2002 he completed a business internship at the Volksbank Freiburg in Breisgau, Baden-Wurttemberg organized by the International Business Internship Exchange at Webster University of St. Louis, Missouri and the Berufsakademie Villingen-Schwenningen also in Baden-Wurttemberg. David was awarded a teaching assistantship by the American Fulbright Commission and the Pädagogischer Austauschdienst in 2003, and spent two years working as a language teaching assistant at the Ernst Mach Gymnasium, Haar, and the Gymnasium Grafing in Grafing near Munich, Germany. While working as a teaching assistant he additionally cooperated with the American Consulate in Munich on several public panel discussions and as a private speaker for the Hans Seidel Stiftung.

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Introduction

I

Heinrich Böll's position as one of the most prominent literary figures of the Federal Republic of Germany poses a number of difficulties for those who would analyze his work. Though his status as a major literary figure is undisputed due to both the excellent sales of his books within and outside of Germany, and to his works' positive reception by literary communities across the west, his place among the great artists of German literature is undermined by those who see a discrepancy between the conviction motivating Böll's work, that literature should improve the world, and what Frank Finlay calls "traditional bourgeois aesthetics" which holds that such didactic art is not consistent with art of higher quality.¹ I will not attempt to enter into this debate. Others, most notably Finlay, have written treatises on this subject more sensitive or thorough than anything I might offer in a master's thesis, and I will leave it to them to hash out these greater debates. Böll saw no contradiction between art that expressed a didactic, moral message and art that formally challenges readers far beyond the historical moment of its origin to find universal truths within it. In his early essays Böll pays close attention to the representation of reality in literature. His *Bekennnis zur Trümmerliteratur* is a long justification for the importance of representing reality as it is perceived, both by the author and by the common man. Böll brings out the example of a baker, seen by the artist's eye: a creator of bread, the symbol for sustenance and iconic through the ages. This is the reality seen by the author, but that reality must contain the discrete details of the baker's son killed on the eastern front and his love of the cinema and all the details that make him real for the result of the

¹ Frank Finlay, On the rationality of poetry : Heinrich Böll's aesthetic thinking; Heinrich Böll's aesthetic thinking Amsterdam ; Atlanta, GA : Rodopi, 1996. 284. (65)

writer's efforts to be more than just imagination.² The connection between the basically real and the perception of reality in the larger sense is the basis for literature. Böll adds a few thoughts to the concept of the "real" in *Der Zeitgenosse und die Wirklichkeit*, in which he observes the difference between the adult perception of the passing of time and that of children. In their immediacy children perceive reality in its most pure sense, but without the perception (equally real) of the transience of life. "The reality of the moment is transience, which our children enjoy with such enviable intensity . . . but the lollypop melts away and the balloon pops. With this knowledge we are delivered up to reality."³ Both perceptions are "real" but the adult perception is of the real with the wisdom to interpret what the real means. The author must take the adult perception of reality and present it to the reader couched in a format that imbues the real with reality. This is the interaction of content with form.

Because much of Böll's work deals with the reality from which it came (the first three decades following World War II) many of his critics have made this a point of discussion regarding his ability to create work beyond this scope. Böll himself was intensely concerned with understanding how his work might be organized according to a pre-described program, and his essays frequently address the role of the author in mediating reality (as we have seen) and the connection between form and content. To this end, in 1964 following his most successful work to date, *Ansichten eines Clowns*, Böll gave a series of four lectures at the University of Frankfurt subsequently call the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* that attempt to outline his aesthetic program.

² Heinrich Böll 1917-1985., Erzählungen, Hörspiele, Aufsätze (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1973, 1961) 445. (341)

³ Böll, 445 (345)

This program consists of what Böll describes as the attempt to find a method of writing that emphasizes a moral behavior and outlook that adheres to what are effectively Christianity's most basic teachings: neighborly love, compassion, consolation. Böll defines his attempts alternately as the search for an "habitable language in a habitable land", and the creation of a "language-scape" that embraces morality, the feeling of belonging at home, neighborly-ness, and connectedness.⁴ The concepts that allow his "aesthetic of the humane" to function are "connectedness" (*Gebundenheit*) and "continued-writing" (*Fortschreibung*). These will be discussed in more detail in how they will be important for this thesis later. For now it will suffice to point out that the prerequisite for Böll's aesthetic of the humane is the conviction that morality is inherent to communication. Böll frequently connects the words "authors" and "responsibility" in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*, setting authors in positions of moral obligation against a society increasingly content to delegate moral obligation to groups, governments and ideas that would rather follow their own interests rather than do what is moral.⁵ Böll calls their language "meaningless" [*nichtssagend*] and "helpless."⁶ He goes so far as to describe the requirements for an aesthetic of the humane listed above, and then to offer the Nazi dictatorship (the ultimate immoral order) as the opposite starting point where home, belonging, neighborly-ness and connectedness are replaced with circles, closed societies, and

⁴ Heinrich Böll 1917-1985., Frankfurter Vorlesungen. (Köln, Berlin) Kiepenheuer u. Witsch (1966) 110. (26)

⁵ Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (18)

⁶ Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (19)

secret orders all of which serve to destroy communication.⁷ The value placed on communication is connected with the humane, the moral.

As such, communication is privileged in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* as the medium for moral behavior, and Böll devotes much energy to finding the moment where morality and communication meet. He writes of the need to „collect words, study syntax, analyze and establish rhythms” so that “it would become apparent which syntaxes, which vocabularies in our country are possessed of the humane and the social.”⁸ This fixation with language recurs through the lectures, concentrating on both language in its constituent parts (words, syntax, rhythms) “we have no words to give away, none to lose, for we don’t have that many”⁹ and language between individuals, shown in statements about the inability of politicians and church officials to really communicate anything with the volumes of words they use.¹⁰ This attention to communication will be the focus of the readings of Böll’s novels to come.

It is crucial to the discussion of Böll’s aesthetics that he himself became involved in the critical negotiation of his work, for his attempt in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* to offer an aesthetic program focuses the debate squarely on the question of whether his work is to be understood as immediate calls to social action or transcendent literature independent of the social circumstances under which it was produced. His discussion of a possible “aesthetic of the humane” attempts to outline a form of depiction that draws upon a universal morality that is grounded in an historical

⁷ Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (27)

⁸ Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (14)

⁹ Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (16)

¹⁰ Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (19)

reality. Literature written in such an aesthetic would extol all readers to moral action regardless of their geographical or temporal location, but the books Böll wrote are immediately recognizable as the product of a post World War II experience. To provide examples of his aesthetic of the humane Böll makes lengthy analyses of other authors from across the temporal spectrum including Günter Eich¹¹ H.G. Adler¹² and Günter Grass' *Hundejahre* and Beckett's *Endgame*. The purposes of these excerpts are to point out moments where literature directly engages the hallmark concepts of his aesthetic, the home, travel, trash, and connectedness.¹³ However, the success of the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* in positing an aesthetic system to explain the connection between the moral engagement of literature and abstract form remains in doubt.¹⁴

The critical writing on Böll frequently interacts with the questions about engagement and aesthetics raised in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*: specifically by attempting to use Böll's nebulous directions to outline the components of a possible aesthetic of the humane. Some of Böll's critics out-rightly reject any such proposed aesthetic, claiming as Gregory Just does, that the aesthetic of the humane really just means the destruction of aesthetics in favor of morality.¹⁵ Among the authors who

¹¹ Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (70)

¹² Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (66)

¹³ Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (62)

¹⁴ The *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* meander through descriptions of Böll perceptions of the problems in current German literature and society and cites examples of works that express moral motifs he likes, and eventually attempts to point out what would be the tenets of the aesthetic that would address social issues from a moral perspective without becoming mired in the peculiarities of particular historical events. However, that Böll's own work does not become the object of his analysis is the greatest proof that even he didn't quite understand the means by which his work was to carry out his high-minded expectations of literature in the post-war period.

¹⁵ Böll : Untersuchungen zum Werk, ed. Walter Jurgensen Hinck Manfred Bern ; München : Francke, 1975. 182. (65)

take a skeptical view of the aesthetic of the humane in Wilhelm Johannes Schwarz comes closest to addressing how Böll's status as a writer is impacted by his aesthetics (or possible lack thereof.) Schwarz acknowledges Böll's popularity and financial success, but attributes these primarily to the content of his work. At the end of his introduction he compares Böll's success with that of Wolfgang Borchert who similarly imbued his work with the gritty sense of loss, confusion and nihilism that characterized the German experience of the years following World War II. However, unlike Borchert, whose writing spoke to the experiences of Germans without a moral content that indicated any path forward out of the quagmire of defeat and pain, Böll's instills the occupants of his blasted landscape with an "a simple morality, a dogma-less piety" that provided a means to move beyond the paralyzed cynicism of those early post war years.¹⁶

Though Schwarz may correctly interpret some of the reasons for Böll's success, his evaluation of that success is singularly commercial in nature. He refers to Böll's wide readership in both Germany and in the USSR, but does so disparagingly; after discussing how Böll's writing manages to unify the uncertainty of the difficult post-war years with a sense of moral solidity, Schwarz claims that such an alignment could only be introduced to a work of literature at the cost of a deeper meaning and that on account of such dishonest sentimentality "Böll will have to do without refined aesthetes among his followers."¹⁷ In effect, Böll is writing nice literature for an unsophisticated readership, and his writing has little more to offer than its reassuring content. Schwarz does not think highly of the unity of any of Böll's works, though they may have "adorable spots, nevertheless it seems that in most of his works he

¹⁶ Wilhelm Johannes Schwarz 1929-, Der Erzähler Heinrich Böll. Seine Werke und Gestalten., 2., erw. Aufl. ed. Bern, München, Francke [1968] 139. (12)

¹⁷ "Böll [muss] auf verfeinerte Ästhetiker in seinem Gefolge verzichten." (10)

can't quite manage to accomplish what he sets out to do"¹⁸ His novels sit under a fog of unintentional incoherence, suffer from abrupt style changes, and consist of episodic- rather than unified-narration.¹⁹ In short, due to their moral character Böll's books may be read on the level of content, but not on that of form.

Schwarz' analysis is conspicuous within Böll criticism because of his unequivocal condemnation of Böll and his willful refusal to see moments of formal complexity seen by so many others. However, he does validly address the tension between the moral content and formal aspirations of Böll's work. Reinhard K. Zachau and Albrecht Beckel recommend completely foregoing any attempt at interpreting Böll formally and suggest alternative methods to understand Böll's writing. Zachau is certainly fairer than Schwarz in his depiction of the criticism on Böll until 1994, citing such voices as Joachim Kaiser who claimed that the focus of Böll criticism had always been on the tension of the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic. Nonetheless, he concludes his survey of Böll criticism in America, Germany and the Soviet Union by stating that "political methods" of interpretation will ultimately be more useful in reexamining Böll in the post-unification setting than "purely literary or text-centered methods, since his texts are concerned primarily with political ideas."²⁰ (128) Clearly from both Böll's own attempts at explaining the aesthetic program of his work and the voluminous amount of ink spilled by critics in the interest of clarifying it, Böll's writing is not primarily about political ideas. In fact, its resistance to interpretation as politically oriented in the ideological sense is part of what makes it so difficult to reconcile in interpretation.

¹⁸ Schwarz, 139 (9)

¹⁹ Schwarz, 139 (10)

²⁰ Reinhard K. (Reinhard Konrad) Zachau, Heinrich Böll : forty years of criticism, 1st ed. ed. (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994) 159.

Beckel similarly sees Böll's work as intelligible only through the lens of the then-current theories of sociology, and he writes that Böll must be understood in interaction with developments in modern sociology.²¹ "It is not about literary criticism. Above all not literary interpretation [*literaturwissenschaftliche Interpretation*]." However, what follows is very much a *literaturwissenschaftliche* interpretation, so much so that it seems apparent that Böll's work refuses to allow interpretations that attempt to ignore the interaction of their content with their form.

In his analysis of the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* Michael Butler also directs his attention toward the content of Böll's work, but his research leads him in a different direction than Schwarz or Zachau or Beckel with regards to Böll's aesthetics. Butler finds what he considers to be the center of gravity for Böll's work in its content, specifically in its moral content. However, Butler sees that moral content as the component that unifies Böll's work as a whole rather than a factor that dominates and overshadows other aspects present within it. Butler's analysis leads him to a deeper discussion of what he calls the "mythological/theological" component that he claims unifies Böll's work, and rightly so, for that topic directly concerns how Böll manages to address topics far beyond his petty bourgeois milieu from within it. Butler attributes Böll's accomplishment of this precisely to his "close attention to often tedious detail" and his discussion considers briefly whether the moral component in Böll's work is complimented with a structural component that further adheres to the moral character so important to the meaning of the work.²²

²¹ Albrecht Beckel, Mensch, Gesellschaft, Kirche, bei Heinrich Böll. Mit., ed. Böll, Heinrich, 1917-1985. Interview mit mir selbst. Osnabrück, Fromm (1966) 109. (28)

²² Beckel, 109 (15)

In the remaining criticism on Böll that acknowledges the possibility of simultaneous moral content and aesthetics in his work, most accept Böll's principle that "morality and aesthetics prove themselves to be congruent."²³ While it may be questionable to uncritically employ a principle created by an author to evaluate his work, the possibility that a balance of moral content and aesthetic form can be the defining principle of some literature will be at the foundation of this thesis. It is from the authors who entertained the possibility of this principle that this thesis will draw much inspiration. Jochen Vogt's analysis of Böll asserts that through some concepts introduced in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* Böll manages to walk the fine line between the historical and the aesthetic and notes the difficulty this presents to the widely-accepted idea of the autonomy of art. Rainer Nägele addresses this same difficulty with his analysis of the "discrepancy between conscious intent and implicit tendency"²⁴ in the construction of Böll's work, and the "dilemma between artistic demand and popularity"²⁵ which corresponds to the aesthetic-versus-moral debate, and directly engages the maxim that art resists understanding, making it unlikely to be widely popular.

In order to explore how Böll's work combines moral content and form, Frank Finlay formulates an approach that "seeks to understand the autonomy of the literary work in its dialectical relationship with reality that provides its background, but from which it [the work of art] differs."²⁶ Finlay uses this technique to analyze Böll's

²³ Böll, 110 (75)

²⁴ Rainer Nägele, Heinrich Böll : Einf. in d. Werk u. in d. Forschung Frankfurt am Main : Athenäum-Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1976. 209. (18)

²⁵ Rainer Nägele and Marc D. Silberman, "Aspects of the Reception of Heinrich Böll," New German Critique.7 (1976): 45-68,. (73)

²⁶ Finlay, 284 (27)

theoretical writings, bringing his discussion to bear on one of the loudest voices in the debates on the autonomy of art by directly engaging Theodor Adorno's writings on the subject. Finlay points out that Adorno's writing is arrayed against engaged art because of its propaganda-like didactic nature, but that autonomous art, too, may have an "it should be other" message in its form and that such a delivery system is ultimately more effective than the more obvious alternative.²⁷ Finlay argues that Adorno himself was aware of the contradiction inherent in his belief that the autonomy of art alone is what allowed it to become socially potent, and that Böll suggested a compromise between autonomy and engagement that addressed this contradiction.

For this thesis Finlay's analysis of Böll's writings on the aesthetic/moral problem in his own work will be of primary interest. Finlay points out that Böll's observations of how the Nazis manipulated the German language led him to conclude that "language is a constitutive element of human consciousness." The claim that in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* that it is the goal of German literature after World War II to find a "habitable language" is a result of what Finlay calls the poisoning of the German language by the Nazis.²⁸ In an age of mass communication via television, print media and radio, it is all too easy for language to be used to alter the perceptions of the masses, and thus for those who have access to the controls of such manipulations the act of communication itself becomes "subject to a moral imperative."²⁹ The constitutive power of language works both ways, of course. Language can murder just as it can nurture. This "dialectic of language" requires that the communicative act also be a moral one. Böll's belief that communication is necessarily moral or immoral has implications that will relate directly to how his work

²⁷ Finlay, 284 (189)

²⁸ Finlay, 284 (61)

²⁹ Finlay, 284 (80)

combines the moral and the aesthetic.³⁰ This thesis will look closely at Böll's novels to illustrate how communication within them emphasizes the moral tenets of the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* in both the content and the form.

II

The trajectory of Böll's career took home from complete obscurity as a writer in 1947 to literary superstardom in 1963. Because of this Archimedean trajectory and Böll's afore-mentioned interest in the moral obligation of art it will be useful to look at how his status changed in order to delimit the scope of this thesis' survey of Böll's work. In 1947 Böll began publishing short stories and radio plays dealing mainly with the individual's experience in World War II and then opened his work up to deal with the wider subject matter of everyday life in the early Federal Republic of Germany. From the beginning Böll's texts focus on the absurdity of the war experience and highlight the myriad ways the humane was ignored and repressed by both civil and military culture during the war. His attitude was not unique in this regard and the parallels between early Böll and Borchert are justified. The social critique he exercised on war-time organizations and attitudes reflect the wider social transition Germany experienced as it was transformed from the Nazi empire into occupied Germany and later East and West Germany.

In 1953 with the publication of his first successful novel, *Und Sagte Kein einziges Wort*, Böll's subject matter broadened to include the post-war experience. However, in contrast with public rhetoric that sought to create a new beginning for the two Germanys, Böll's work continued to focus on the suspension of humane action in German society and unrelentingly depicted not only the morally questionable

³⁰ Finlay, 284 (81)

developments of Germany's reconstruction but also uncomfortable and embarrassing continuities of thought and attitude reaching back before Germany's defeat. The continuity of wealth in *Das Brot der Frühen Jahren* and the unchanging cast of the intellectual elite in *Haus ohne Hüter* exemplify the elements in Böll's early work that emphasize the awkward realities of the incomplete de-Nazification. Böll's use of a realist palette to depict the society in which he lived contrasts greatly with his contemporary Günter Grass. Where Böll addresses German society with stark sober depictions of it that foreground the actions of everyday men to make moral and philosophical points, Grass renders German society refracted through characters and events that defy reality and allow the interplay of setting and action to make the statements about society. Grass employs a new language of symbols to accomplish his commentary on society and history while Böll for the most part does not make use of such conceits. It is perhaps the lack of such delivery systems that caused Schwarz to conclude that Böll's success comes from the content of his work and not its form. This thesis will argue this point later, but for now we will concentrate on the development of Böll's career.

If Böll was "never a systematic thinker" as Schwarz suggests and played second fiddle to Grass in terms of narrative sophistication it begs the question, why has he consistently been cited as the most important German author of the post war period?³¹ Why was it Böll and not Grass who was to be the first German to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature after World War II, and why was Böll chosen as

³¹ The Narrative fiction of Heinrich Böll : social conscience and literary achievement, ed. Michael Butler 1935-2007. Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1994. 280. (12)

fourth among ten of the most influential Germans in 1977 after Helmut Schmidt, Willy Brandt and Franz-Josef Strauss?³²

With his next highly successful novel after *Und sagte Kein einziges Wort*, *Billard um halb zehn*, Böll attained a high profile and star-like recognition. This book comes close to approaching Grass' use of symbols to mediate the message of the novel, but ultimately prove inconsistent and, as I will argue in part two of this thesis, it is the modes of communication that ultimately deliver the book's moral content. This book broadened the scope of Böll writing yet further, taking a half century of German history as its subject matter and dealt with the continuities of militarism and hypocrisy starting in the Wilhelmine Empire and continuing into the Federal Republic of Germany. Böll's point-blank confrontation of such ugly realities and his work's resistance to interpretation along ideological lines earned him the title "conscience of the nation" by *Der Spiegel* in 1961. This reputation for realistic depiction, sober reflection and uncompromising ethical consistency led to the development of Böll's formidable media personality, and Böll's reception of Nobel Prize for literature in 1972 crowned the transition from engaged writer to national figure, making him the first German to receive that award since World War II and enshrining him as a representative of Germany to the world.

Böll's arrival as media personality sparked a change in his writing that began in the early sixties and culminated in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*. During the years following the 1959 publication of *Billard um halb zehn* Böll entered in to a more direct dialogue with his critics, which encouraged in Böll's work a directness of address that marks his writing starting in the early 1960's.

³² Reinhard K. (Reinhard Konrad) Zachau, Heinrich Böll : forty years of criticism, 1st ed. ed. (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994) 159. (2)

Böll's increased publication of essays and articles in the early 1960's as well as his reactions to the pointed criticism of organized Catholic society in *Ansichten eines Clowns* mark a shift in the orientation of Böll's work. He began writing essays in the early 1950's producing one or two per year until 1959 when he started writing them copiously. He wrote four in 1959, nine in 1960, four in 1961, just one in 1962 and then at least four every year until 1965 when he published ten. His title as conscience of the nation must be attributed to his early writings, which are apolitical in as much as they do not attack discrete institutions or individuals, but rather deal with the themes listed above via the stories of common people. Following this period his writing takes on a polemic that overshadows the delicate balancing of his earlier works. This balance was struck between addressing the nature of Germany's social problems and naming them by their proper Christian names.

Following the publication of *Ansichten eines Clowns* Böll entered into direct dialogue with many of his critics within both the Catholic Church and the Bonn government who reacted with great hostility to the book's perceived anti-Catholicism. In this period Böll's essays and Feuilleton articles deal with topics from the re-armament of Germany in 1958 to the weak nature of the German political left, and as the sixties radicalized social debates Böll's positions perforce came to appear radical in the context of their creation. Most notable regarding the "radicalized" public persona that emerged in the 1960's is his 1972 *Der Spiegel* article about Ulrike Meinhof, the content of which was received as far more radical than the text actually is and started a campaign against him in the Springer press that drew him into direct confrontation with his political critics and would eventually be the inspiration for *Die Verlorene Ehre von Katharina Blum*. The origin of this work illustrates the point cited earlier in this introduction from Böll's 1953 essay "*Der Zeitgenosse und die*

Wirklichkeit.” With his engagement in the battle with the Springer press I would assert that Böll lost the distance from the object of his writing that allowed him to deal with *reality* rather than the simply *real*. The tendency to this loss of distance began with *Ansichten eines Clowns* and the war of words between Böll and the CDU/Catholic Church power complex that followed it. This thesis will read three of Böll’s novels to show how communication illuminates the moral tenets of the Frankfurter Vorlesungen and serve as the delivery mechanism for their main themes. These three novels all come from the early period of his career, when Böll was still identifying the *reality* of the moral landscape of the FRG, rather than the individuals inhabiting it. The survey period will end with *Ansichten eines Clowns* because after this novel, Böll’s work bears resemblances to literature-as-communication rather than literature that employs the concept of communication as a means to deliver a depiction of *reality*.

III

Three of Böll’s early novels named above will offer study cases to examine how Böll uses communication between the characters in his texts to emphasize the moral tenets of the Frankfurter Vorlesungen in both content and form. Those tenets include language “*Sprache*”, love, (*Liebe*) and “connectedness” (*Gebundenheit*). Böll explains that “I operate from the assumption that language, love, and connectedness are what make humans human. That they set humans into relation with themselves, others, and God – monologue, dialogue, and prayer.”³³ This quote is particularly important because it states the prominence of communication in Böll’s work. Communication here is understood as the open and honest traffic of ideas and feelings that are constitutive of community in the sense of *communion*. Expressed another

³³ Böll, Frankfurter 110 (14)

way, communication is the interaction of two people that is un-contaminated by questions of means and ends that would cause them to regard one another as anything but mere people. All three concepts will emerge in varying constellations in the analyses of *Und sagte kein einziges Wort*, *Billard um halb zehn*, and *Ansichten eines Clowns*.

In the first of these, Böll's story draws its crisis from the transitional economic landscape that arose from the currency reform that created the deutschmark in 1948. The family featured in the story, the Bogners, represent on the social categories that Böll says exemplify the aesthetic of the humane, "the discarded" (*Abfall*). Language, love, and connectedness are challenged by the disrupted communication between husband and wife due to their economic circumstances, and the redemption of these essential moral tenets of the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* is expressed not only in the events of the story, but in the mode of delivery chosen by Böll.

The second book, *Billard um halb zehn* also deals with the challenges presented to the family as a loving unit, this time from both within and without. Challenged by the social forces that fractured their family over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, the Fähmel family must struggle to repair communication and cohesion simultaneously disrupted by their own inability to come to terms with the past. Love must be given and acknowledged, connectedness reestablished according to the moral dictates of the aesthetic of the humane.

The final novel of interest to this thesis is *Ansichten eines Clowns*. Here we will see the return of the discarded [Abfall] as well as family themes similar to those in both preceding novels. The main character finds himself in a crisis of communication, this time imposed on him by both the social groups dominating German society in the

early sixties and from his own interests, which isolate him in surprising and ominous ways. In the discussion of this novel we will broaden our analysis to bring the implications of the book's depiction of disrupted communication to bear on the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* itself.

It is not my intention here to redefine the debate surrounding the success or failure of the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* to clarify Böll's aesthetic program, if indeed he has one. Rather, I hope to offer a rebuttal for those like Finlay, Bulter, Balzer and Joachim Kaiser who have argued that Böll was more than a politically-oriented, didactic, pamphlet writer. In order to do so, this thesis will show how communication as a moral act is depicted in both the content of Böll's work, but also in its structure.

Part 1: Und sagte kein einziges Wort

With the currency reform of 1948 everyone living in the western occupations zones received DM 40 and a fresh economic beginning, at least in theory. However, the currency reform left the disparity between the rich and the poor largely in place by allowing the retention of private property holdings.³⁴ This superficial new economic beginning marked for Böll the first failure to take advantage of the opportunity the zero-hour that followed World War II presented to create a more egalitarian and moral Germany from the ashes of the failed governments that preceded it. Rainer Nägele observes that in his 1968 speech “Radicals for Democracy” Böll asserts that with the currency reform Germany missed the opportunity “an almost democratic equality of chances and existence . . . to perceive as a gifted-revolution” and that in the currency reform we can observe the “original sin of the Federal Republic of Germany.”³⁵

The consequences of that original sin may be traced through the 1950’s and into the 1960’s as the subject matter of Böll’s writing progresses through the development of West German society from the initial stages of reconstruction and economic stabilization and into the prosperity of the economic miracle. One example of Böll’s interaction with this fall from grace is the relationship between economic and political power as seen in *Ansichten eines Clowns*. The coal mines retained by Hans Schnier’s family allows them to rebuild the family fortune which in turn allows them to remain prominent in the church and thus indirectly politically influential despite their unapologetic attitude to their Nazi past.

³⁴ Juergen Weber, Deutsche Geschichte 1945 bis 1990 (Munich: Bayerische Landeszentrale Fuer Politische Bildungsarbeit, 2004) 396. (41)

³⁵ Nägele, 209 (25)

However, Böll is not only interested in the currency reform's failure to level the social playing field in the young BRD because of its political ramifications. As Finlay indicates in his analysis of the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*, Böll is intensely concerned with humane moral behavior as it is expressed in terms of communication. In the 1960 essay *Hierzulande* Böll attempts to explain to foreign guests the nature of German society but says "our conversation miscarried", and his answer centers the economic situation.³⁶ Böll describes the importance of the currency reform in the perceptions of Germans and calls the society that grew from it as "a people of consumers"³⁷ *Hierzulande* depicts a society in which the economic stability resulting from the Currency reform comes at the price of trust, hope, and intellectual stagnation, and which the narrator is himself apparently unable to communicate about. After a lengthy description of how Germany got to where it is with all the attendant forgetfulness and injustice, Böll writes, "I had wanted to tell the visitor all of this, but in the conversation I didn't find the words."³⁸ The connection between communication and economic status in Böll's works of the early 1950's exercises a critique of the BRD during the currency reform. It showcases the shortcomings of the immediate policies of state while illuminating the struggle to maintain a sense of personal dignity in the face of material want that is applicable far beyond the painful transition from the cigarette-market to the D-Mark. In the following we will consider how this is accomplished not only via the mechanisms of plot, but also how the disrupted structures of communication are depicted by the form of Böll's works.

³⁶ Heinrich Böll 1917-1985., Erzählungen, Hörspiele, Aufsätze (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1973, 1961) 445. (429)

³⁷ Böll, 445 (431)

³⁸ Böll, 445 (436)

Once the resurgent cash economy replaced the highly fluid black-market, Böll managed to find his niche as an author by changing the focus of his writing from the war experience to the hardships of making ends meet in the currency reform economy. Böll's currency reform-era work continues to emphasize moral behavior and perception in the same manner as seen in his war novellas and short stories; by foregrounding interpersonal relationships that demonstrate genuine concern for individuals as people rather than as representatives of ideas or as means. In *Der Zug war Pünktlich* and *Wo warst du, Adam?* that relationship is typified by romantic love between two people, who in both cases is notably the enemy. The main characters find in spontaneous romantic relationships the meaningful Christian love (*Nächstenliebe*) that is absent in their roles as soldiers. Similarly does the main character of the 1955-published *Das Brot der frühen Jahre* find in spontaneous romance the human value lacking in his economic relationship with his employers, whose daughter he leaves in favor of his new, more fulfilling love. The exemplary relationships in all three books is the same, but the flawed relationships that act as its foil (military hierarchy, the employer/employee relationship) is updated to correspond to the then-current economic reality.

Böll's first major success from the currency reform period, *Und sagte kein einziges Wort*, also uses economic relations as counterpoint for exemplary relationships that carry its moral content, but it shifts the relationships that demonstrate the moral orientation of the novel from burgeoning love to static filial relationships. This relationship is placed under strain by the economic forces at work in its setting, which provides the conflict for the novel. In the following I will show how the crisis in *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* is expressed in terms of communication not only at the level of plot, but in the structure of those novels as well.

In *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* Böll tells the story of two days in the lives of the Bogners, a poor catholic family that is slowly disintegrating under the dual strains of a miserably cramped living situation and an overbearing and judgmental church community. It is told by the parents of the family, Fred and Käte Bogner, as internal monologues in consecutive chapters that follow one another roughly chronologically. At the beginning of the story we learn that Fred Bogner has been separated from his family for some two months, having moved out because he has become unable to control his temper toward his children due to his frustration with their poverty. The love shared by Fred and his wife, Käte is never questioned in the novel: he gives Käte all of the money he earns as a telephone operator for the Catholic diocese office, and they meet regularly to spend the night together in a failing attempt to keep their marriage alive. Fred lives as a more or less homeless person, sleeping in train stations or at friends' homes and survives by tutoring *Gymnasium* students and begging his friends and acquaintances for the money he needs to eat, meet with Käte, and get drunk. Käte, on the other hand, lives in their one room apartment with their infant and two children and must deal with the humiliation of her holier-than-thou neighbors, the Frankes and the task of holding their family together. She has come the conclusion that the current situation cannot continue, partially because she cannot survive the stress of raising their three children alone, but also because the scrutiny of their church community will not abide such an arrangement.

Much of the secondary literature about *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* focuses on the book's criticism of the Catholic Church, since the church lies at the root of many of the Bogner's problems. The church provides the Bogners' apartment, and it is Fred's irreverence and drinking habit that have raised the ire of their neighbor, Frau Franke, who through her prominent position in the diocese has made it difficult for the

Bogners to obtain larger accommodations. Both Fred and Käte express frustration with the diocese administration and an alienation from the church resulting from the apparent hypocrisy of those close to the centers of power in the church, but that alienation does not apply to their own senses of faith, only to the structures that permit people so lacking in Christian love to remain so privileged.

Vogt names the “contradictory connection of criticism of the church authority and of a Christian lifestyle based singularly on a faith” as Böll’s central concern in *Und Sagte kein einziges Wort*³⁹ and Schwarz observes that Böll confronts Catholicism’s form as an external routine as seen in Frau Franke or as religious aestheticism as seen in the bishop.⁴⁰ Rainer Nägele similarly points to the problematic relationship between religious and social components as the book’s primary concern, not only because of the church’s role as housing provider but also on account of the tension between the druggist’s convention that disrupts religious processions with contraceptive advertisements.⁴¹ All of these observations about the depiction of the Catholic church in *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* are valid, but they limit the scope of the book’s engagement to the interaction of the individual with the church. There is ultimately much more at stake in *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* than merely this, though the above listed concerns do touch upon the themes that we will explore in the following pages.

The subordination of the most basic teachings of Christianity (here brotherly love) to superficial social piety most certainly is a theme in the book, as is the church’s

³⁹ Jochen Vogt, Heinrich Böll, 1. Aufl. ed. München : Beck ; [München] : Edition Text u. Kritik, 1978. (47)

⁴⁰ Schwarz, 139 (57)

⁴¹ Nägele, 209 (131)

involvement in secular affairs such as providing housing for diocese members. However, poverty is the primary problem for the Bogners, and its impact on moral behavior is the book's most central idea. Because of their poverty the Bogners are forced to rely on the church to provide them with housing in the housing shortage of the destroyed Cologne where the book takes place. The church becomes a part of the problem by limiting their access to what living spaces are available but the root remains the Bogners' lack of means.

Poverty and the housing shortage are the first junctures where we may see the interaction of material circumstances and the larger problematic of communication in *Und sagte kein einziges Wort*. In his book, *Die Romane Heinrich Bölls*, Hans Joachim Bernhard pinpoints the origin of the spiritual problems Böll deals with in *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* within the material considerations of the early 1950's. According to Bernhard, the Catholic Church was one of the structures used to ensure the success of both the currency reform and the economic miracle, which is the root of the problem of a church supposed founded on Christian values that rather pursues cynical political goals or reflects capitalist competition morality. Bernhard writes of the relationship between the church and capitalist interests, "from the outset the forces of monopoly capitalism have rested their goal of restoring their power upon Christianity."⁴² Bernhard argues that "the ready availability of an already strongly-developed organizational form in German Catholicism" and the "freedom of movement given it by the occupying powers" allowed the Catholic Church to be a "considerable help for the restoration powers."⁴³ In Bernhard's analysis Böll's attempts

⁴² Hans Joachim Bernhard, *Die Romane Heinrich Bölls; Gesellschaftskritik und*, [2., durchgesehene Aufl.] ed. Berlin, Rütten & Loening [1973] 424. (106)

⁴³ Bernhard, 424 (108)

to create an aesthetic of the humane leads the subject matter of his work directly to the inconsistency born of a Catholic Church that serves the reestablishment of a moral-less capitalist order rather than the creation of a new humanist society reflecting the morality of Christian teaching. Because Böll refuses to ignore this inconsistency, “he increasingly manages to interrelate meaningful social and moral questions into his creations.”⁴⁴ Bernhard’s analysis is that the moral problematic that drives *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* is powered by the economic structures to which Böll was reacting. While the other critics would place Böll’s criticism of the church at the center of discussion, Bernhard demonstrates that the discussion of the church relates to an economic context that allows the social and moral question to enter the form of the story. For my discussion Bernhard’s economic context and the communication that is interrupted by it illuminates the moral crux of the book.

Beyond the analysis of secondary literature we can observe the primacy of the economic in *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* in the statements of the two story tellers, Fred and Käte Bogner. Fred and Käte both directly address their poverty as a defining characteristic of their lives. Böll uses the first-person perspective of the novel to emphasize the reality of their poverty by providing revelatory means for the characters to confront their economic situation. On the second page of the book Fred is faced with the first of many mirrors that demonstrate the effects of his poverty to him and his wife.⁴⁵ Fred does not recognize himself in the mirror of a snack shop, and is amazed to see that his reflection resembles one of the tramps that his mother was unable to turn away when they came peddling soap, razor blades and shoelaces. Fred is similarly shocked to see the shabby condition of his son in the church

⁴⁴ Bernhard, 424 (111)

⁴⁵ Heinrich Böll 1917-1985., *Works. 2002; Werke : Kölner Ausgabe*, ed. Árpád Bernáth 1941- Köln : Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2002. (334)

processional in chapter five. Fred's shock is intensified by his separation from his family and Böll emphasizes the primacy of their poverty by making Fred's last thought upon seeing them concern their lack of means. "And in these, my children who holding candles walked slowly and celebratorially through my tiny field of view, in them I recognized what I've always believed that I grasped but for the first time really understood: that we are poor."⁴⁶

Though Fred needs a revelation to face the reality of their poverty, Käte lives with it every day in their one room apartment. In chapter four she continues her battle against the most tangible physical evidence of their situation; the dust that falls from the crumbling walls of their building. Just as hopeless as her struggle against the ever-falling dust is her outlook on the reality of their lives when she remembers her dead twins and stoically concludes that it is better that they died when they did, rather than face the bitterness of this life.⁴⁷ Käte's awareness of the reasons for her misery – her poverty – is evidenced in her reference to her "sisters" who she sees beyond her reflection in the mirror; women all over the world who also toil hopelessly in a constant condition of want. "I see women back there – yellow women at slowly flowing streams washing their laundry . . . I see the black women digging in brittle earth, . . . I see brown women, how they grind their grain in stone troughs . . . and my white sisters in the boarding houses of London, New York, Berlin, in the dark canyons of the Paris alleys . . ."⁴⁸ Later, in chapter ten Fred makes the most explicit statement about the roots of their problems, saying in reference to his myriad shortcomings as a

⁴⁶ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (376)

⁴⁷ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (363)

⁴⁸ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (367)

husband “poverty has made me sick.”⁴⁹ The ultimate result of Fred’s sickness is his separation from his wife and children, which in turn is the crisis of the novel. Fred thinks he can hold his family together by meeting occasionally with his wife, but Käte realizes that this strategy will only lead to the eventual destruction of their family. Käte forces the issue at the climax of the story, asking Fred to either come home or accept a divorce. The state of their marriage up until this point is marked by Käte and Fred’s estrangement from one another and, significantly, from the God via the institution of the Catholic Church. The majority of *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* is devoted to demonstrating their estrangement by depicting the disrupted communication that is the result of the Bogners’ fractured family.

Communication as it is disrupted by poverty in *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* is demonstrated in both the content and the structure of the novel. First and foremost we see the communication within the Bogner family disrupted by Fred’s absence. Unable to bear the noise of his children (notably their *voices*) and fearing he will beat them, Fred removes himself from his family, contacting them via telephone to organize rendezvous with Käte and occasionally dropping by to observe his family from afar. Böll lets Fred and Käte speak of their inability to communicate directly a number of times throughout the book, most notably when in chapter seven Fred reflects upon the isolation he faces when attempting to make others understand why he has left his family and why he so desperately needs money to meet with her. “It was terrible for me, that I couldn’t talk with anyone about it, that I couldn’t tell anyone how it really was, but I only needed the money so that I could sleep together with my wife.”⁵⁰ In the second chapter Käte similarly describes how she sometimes retreats to

⁴⁹ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (422)

⁵⁰ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (388)

the apartment in fear of the cold greed of her wealthy neighbor, Frau Franke. Her children do not understand why she is suddenly home again, nor is she able to tell them why but they nonetheless comprehend somehow through their mutual experience of poverty what has taken place. “And the children looked at us . . . comprehending and yet not understanding, and only hesitantly do they join me in the prayers that I begin to speak.”⁵¹

Even the Bogner Children have been stripped of their means for communication by their poverty. In chapter two Käte says “[I] let the children play and observe with horror that they are aren’t even capable of being loud anymore.”⁵² (347) Though Käte is unable to communicate the nature of her fear to her children, she can at least commune (if not *communicate*) with them in prayer. Such is not the case for Fred, and given the connection between morality, communication and the realization of a humanist Christian community for Böll, the spiritual communication that is disrupted by the Bogner’s poverty is especially important.

Both Fred and Käte’s difficulty maintaining spiritual communication in the form of the sacraments of prayer and communion stems at least in part from their material want. Fred states in chapter eleven that he has lost the ability to pray due apparently to his overwhelming world-weariness.⁵³ That world weariness is born of his experiences in the war and the heavy toll of the hand-to-mouth lifestyle that he leads. In chapter five while still engaged in the desperate task of borrowing money so that he can meet with Käte, Böll describes a man at the end of his powers, for whom the task of making a phone call to borrow money causes him to break out in sweats

⁵¹ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (350)

⁵² Böll, Werke Vol 6 (346)

⁵³ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (447)

and admit that he is too ashamed to pray that someone lends him money.⁵⁴ Käte can still pray and urges Fred to do so, but her ability to take part in the traffic of faith in the form of communion is shaken by the combination of their poverty and the Church's social apparatus.

Through her prominent position within the diocese Frau Franke is responsible for the miserable living situation that is destroying the Bogner family, and in chapter two Käte states that since observing the startling coldness that Frau Franke's daily communion has caused in her, she is afraid to take the sacrament. Though she cannot take communion, Käte does attempt a confession, but this results initially in a harsh rebuff, though in a statement that serves as a cutting criticism of church hierarchy he later apologizes for denying her absolution and justifies her anger at the priesthood. The role that poverty plays in Käte's interrupted communion and confession is highlighted by the fact that she is able to confess to the "priest with the farmer's face" about her hatred for priests with "faces . . . like the labels for skin cream."⁵⁵

The alienation from the church that disrupts her taking part in the sacraments is generated partially by the spectacle of an affluent priesthood that would appear offensive and hypocritical to those stricken with poverty. Fred has a similar reaction to the bishop he sees in the same processional in which he sees his children. Fred says of him, "his acetic's face was photogenic. It was well suited for the cover of religious illustrated magazines."⁵⁶ Fred later reveals he has often suffered through this bishop's sermons in extreme boredom because the bishop has the ability to transmute the truth,

⁵⁴ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (369)

⁵⁵ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (398)

⁵⁶ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (373)

something that never bores according to Fred, into half-truths. He manages this by building his sermons out of “theological indexes,” in effect, robbing the words of their meaning and impact. Fred uses the adjective “dumb” to describe the bishop, but from his description of how the bishop turns “keywords” into “phrases” and “half-truths” another possible option might be “meaningless.”⁵⁷ Fred’s distance from the church and the spiritual communication that is essential for it to have any meaning is due at least in part to the meaninglessness of the clergy’s half of the conversation.

The meaninglessness and pettiness at work within the church is demonstrated again in Fred’s work, where, as a telephone operator at the diocese headquarters he is able to eavesdrop on the conversations of the clergy. He observes that the conversations he hears at work are no more meaningful than those he heard during the war as a telephone operator of a command post. They are only more banal in that their contents do not deal with the horrors of war, but rather with the petty squabbling of priests, such as the battle Deacon Wupp wages against the bishop by using vinegar in his salad dressing instead of lemon juice.⁵⁸ Even in the church there is apparently no communication of any meaning going on. However, it is important that Fred, who is isolated from his wife and children and cannot speak to anyone about his predicament, should have such an affinity with the means of communication; the telephone. Fred tries twice unsuccessfully to borrow money in person for his date with Käte, but is immediately successful when he makes his third attempt over the telephone. Fred’s connection with communication brings the contrast of his inability to communicate through human contact into high relief, emphasizing the missing human (humane) component that Böll found so necessary as a part of communication.

⁵⁷ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (386)

⁵⁸ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (466)

Böll also fills the space of the novel with perceived but un-comprehended signs and signals that emphasize communication like an incomplete circuit, most notably aural stimuli that both Fred and Käte hear but cannot decipher. These occur in locations that are emblematic of Fred and Käte's lifestyles: Fred hears "melodies" created by the chrome balls of pinball machines in taverns and his perambulations through the poorest parts of the city seem as though they are controlled by a "mysterious rhythms".⁵⁹ He believes he can recognize the rhythm of gambling automat's tumblers and patronizes only bars that have such machines, but he admits that he is always wrong, that he understands nothing and only loses his money.⁶⁰

Käte similarly recognizes the broken melody of a piano as she walks through the depressingly described confines of their tenement neighborhood,⁶¹ and "a secret melody" in the cacophony of sights, sounds, and smells of a street carnival.⁶² The fragmented and undefined pieces of communication that Fred and Käte grope to understand throughout the novel are not only the evidence of an irreconcilable alienation wrought between them by their poverty-fractured marriage. The sounds and signs that they try to understand are redeemed in a profound manner by the appearance of Bernhard, the retarded younger brother of the snack shop girl whom both Fred and Käte meet independently of one another.

Fred recognizes rhythms and melodies in his utterances, saying that Bernhard "made sounds every now and then, truncated speech fragments that all began with "z"

⁵⁹ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (378)

⁶⁰ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (391)

⁶¹ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (394)

⁶² Böll, Werke Vol 6 (417)

and seemed to contain a melody - zu zu-za za-zozu, a wild secret rhythm filled this hissing babbling.”⁶³ Bernhard’s father tells Käte that Bernhard “doesn’t understand the language of people . . . nor that of animals, not a single word can he speak, only the dsu-das-dse and we . . . imitate it, unskilled and hard . . . we can’t do it.” and yet his is the single most intact family unit in the novel.⁶⁴ Two others are exhibited in the first chapter while Fred is trying to borrow money, the unmarried Bückler couple who cannot bear to be alone with one another, and an un-named schoolmate who’s interaction with his wife consists only of nagging and terse reproaches.⁶⁵ The snack shop family’s genuine love for one another parallels the love and devotion found between Käte and Fred, and the snack shop family’s cohesion and attempts at communication despite its obvious impossibility rehabilitates the Bogners through their devotion to one another and search for meaning among mysterious rhythms and secret melodies.

The snack shop family’s success reflects back upon the Bogner’s attempts at saving their own family and offers a glimmer of hope for the protagonists. Böll uses structures throughout *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* to make such hints and statements, such as the interaction of the two families, and couches communication not only in the objects and situations with which Fred and Käte interact, but in the ways their interactions with such devices interact with each other.

Fred and Käte frequently come into contact with the same elements in the story and how they deal with those elements in turn reflects back upon the problematic of

⁶³ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (360)

⁶⁴ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (403)

⁶⁵ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (342)

communication in the novels. It has already been shown that there is parity between Käte and Fred with regards to their mutual search for meaning in the sounds and signs that echo through their environment, and the repeated appearances of mirrors in the narration has also been mentioned, but there are yet more such paired reflections upon ideas, places and characters throughout the book that show how closely Fred and Käte are linked to one another in spite of their separation. When viewed as dialogues with one another, these shared observations, reflections and interactions form constellations that offer resolutions on a structural level to problems presented at the text's narrative level. These "structural dialogues" demonstrate a communication embedded in the structure of the book that does not take place at the level of plot.⁶⁶

Communication is inlaid *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* at many levels. The title refers directly to a lack of communication, and it appears twice in the novel, once as the lyrics of a song sung by a negro, and once in the description given of Bernard the retarded boy by this father. In the first instance the song is heard amidst the cacophony of the tenement court yard and is the only thing that manages to reach Käte: "from the courtyard I hear the echos of three religious services, two concerts, one lecture and the eager singing of a negro that cuts through it all and singularly touched me."⁶⁷ In all the meaningless sound that fills the homes of the poor, the only

⁶⁶ The structural dialogues and mirroring of perceptions that I propose here bear a resemblance to a feature pointed out by Leslie Adelson in her analysis of Emine Sevgi Özdamar's short story "The Courtyard." Adelson observes what she calls "reciprocal referentiality" in references to the deaths of a nun seen by the main character and the death of that character's mother. Where the death of the mother takes place in far-off Istanbul, the nun's death is in the immediate vicinity, just across the courtyard. Adelson describes a "transubstantiation" in the narrator's mind in which the mother and the nun meld together, and the reality of one informs the reality of the other, just as for the reader of *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* Fred and Käte's experiences of their realities undergo similar over-lapping. Leslie A. Adelson, The Turkish turn in contemporary German literature : toward a new critical grammar of migration, 1st ed. ed. New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 264. (48)

⁶⁷ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (367)

one that reaches the protagonist, and through her the reader, is a spoken message of silence that emphasizes the repression of speech and communication. Instead of a community that is united in interaction through speech, this is a depiction of total dumb isolation. The second appearance of the phrase redirects its vector, this time saying of Bernhard “not a single word can he speak.”⁶⁸ Instead of creating a silence of isolation Bernhard speaks constantly but with *no words* and though his father and sister are incapable of understanding him, they nonetheless represent a healthy family social unit. Their lack of communication hinders their understanding of Bernhard but not their ability to act humanely toward him. The initial isolation of the phrase “not a single word” is replaced with its use by Bernhard’s family, which in turn installs it in a context of connectedness and compassion. Here we see the first instance where Böll uses recurring signs and ideas that form “structural dialogues” that demonstrate relationships and connections that defy isolation and separation.

Two simple examples of this are Fred and Käte’s shared reaction to the coffee Bernhard’s sister makes and the dust that permeates their apartment. Fred exclaims that the coffee is “wonderful . . . you coffee is wonderful”⁶⁹ and forty-four pages later Käte “Oh, is your coffee good!”⁷⁰, just as Käte’s excursus on dust in chapter two is met by Fred’s memory of the dust, which corresponds closely to Käte’s own fears about their baby breathing it in.⁷¹ In a more complex example of these structural dialogues Fred and Käte also react similarly to and comment upon the shock of viewing their children from afar. Käte’s reaction is one of identification and pity,

⁶⁸ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (403)

⁶⁹ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (360)

⁷⁰ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (404)

⁷¹ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (372)

“and I always got sad because I saw myself . . . I didn’t see the children anymore, saw only myself, saw myself from above.”⁷² Fred also sees himself in his children, “the little one who has my dark hair, my round face and my delicate build smiled a little.”⁷³ In both instances Fred and Käte react similarly to their children, though their reactions are not ones that connect them to one another in their thoughts. It is not too surprising that this is the case; after all, the conflict of the book lies in the crisis of their separated lives, and their thoughts are turned toward self preservation as much as the preservation of their marriage. Another instance of a structural dialogue directly concerns the conflicts that have caused Fred to move out of the family’s apartment is situated in Fred and Käte’s interaction with Bernhard.

The reason Fred gives for leaving his family is that he can no longer stand the noise his children make in their cramped apartment, “because their noise agitated me when I came home tired from work.”⁷⁴ Käte is skeptical of his sensitivity, saying that the children worry her precisely because they have become so quiet. Their differing attitudes toward their children is mirrored by their differing reactions to Bernhard. Fred says that “to be alone with the idiot filled me with a strange agitation“ and uses the word “disgusting” to describe the boy’s manner of eating his lollypop. Käte is unperturbed by Bernhard, though she describes his messiness no less vividly than Fred does. Bernhard’s sister and father are both afraid that he will disgust her, but she puts them at ease three times, finally saying that he “he’s like an infant.”⁷⁵

⁷² Böll, Werke Vol 6 (460)

⁷³ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (376)

⁷⁴ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (376)

⁷⁵ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (404)

Fred and Käte's structural conversation about Bernhard and about their children as the cause for Fred's flight from their communal home is finally dealt with directly when Fred and Käte are talking in their hotel room after their date. Käte has let the situation come to a head, telling Fred that they cannot go on meeting they way they have been and that the children are beginning to suffer. Fred, in reference to their small apartment as the root of his frustration with the children promises to do his best to get them a larger one, but Käte counters that the apartment is only a red herring, which Fred denies. For Fred the realization that he could lose his family is the beginning of a turning point that will conclude in the last chapter when he sees Käte from afar on the street and decides to return home. The conversation that began between the two characters across the divide of their respective chapters comes together here and eventually resolves the central conflict of the book.

Another structural dialogue that takes place between Käte and Fred involves their need for solace and support, but this one exhibits a more hopeful similarity between the couple than their divergent reactions to their children or Bernhard. In their movements around the city both Käte and Fred come into contact with the priest with the farmer's face, and in their interactions with this priest Fred and Käte mirror one another's spiritual doubts as well as spiritual needs.

Fred introduces us to his spiritual crisis by telling us that he has trouble praying, and that he feels like a hypocrite when he kneels before the passing bishop in the processional in which he unexpectedly sees his children.⁷⁶ His estrangement stems partially from his dislike of authority and his constant forced interaction with that authority at his work in the diocese office, and is expressed in his aesthetic

⁷⁶ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (373)

evaluation of church authority figures. He observes that the bishop in the processional is photogenic and, as has already been noted, has a pointedly low opinion of him and his particular brand of addressing his flock.⁷⁷ In one of the last scenes of the novel Fred absolves his manger Serge, a priest and marriage councilor who lent him the money to meet Käte and who is generally on his side, of being so clean. Fred says “I see in his face goodness and intellegence, I would like to speak with him but I can’t bring myself to do it.”⁷⁸ Then Fred offers us an insight that so late in the novel seems to refer backwards: „sometimes I think that I could talk with a filthy priest, could maybe even confess.”⁷⁹ The priest with the peasant’s face is introduced in the shabbiest of environments and with the shabbiest of appearances. Fred meets the priest first when he enters the Church of Mary’s Seven Sorrows in search of warmth on a cold morning and says of the church, “in some places the walls weren’t even repaired with stone, they were made of ply-wood sheets that had just been put together and the adhesives poured out of them as the sheets began to warp and dissolve into individual layers. Dirty swellings dripped with moisture and I stayed hesitating next to a pillar.”⁸⁰ He finds the priest with Bernhard and his sister, and describes him as an “angular and pale farmer”⁸¹ and later when he sees him in the snack shop as “pale” and with an “average face.”⁸² It would stand to reason that if Fred could talk to *anyone* it would be this priest, but this is not the case. Fred goes on to say that priests in

⁷⁷ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (373)

⁷⁸ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (467)

⁷⁹ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (467)

⁸⁰ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (353)

⁸¹ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (353)

⁸² Böll, Werke Vol 6 (357)

general make him feel the same “feeling of mixed rage and sympathy that my children also fill me with.”⁸³ Fred is not yet ready to talk, having not yet realized the real crisis his marriage is in, but as we have already seen he will arrive at this point later and the intervening interaction between Käte and this priest make it clear that when he is ready, Fred will have no trouble finding his “filthy priest”.

In spite of her devoutness, Kate’s bitterness toward her neighbor, Frau Franke, leads to an alienation from the church that is similar to but not as extreme as Fred’s. Her alienation finds expression in Käte’s inability to take communion but Käte is still able to take part in the other sacraments and goes to confess before her date with Fred, which brings her into contact with the priest with the farmer’s face. Kate meets him for the first time while she is inspecting the neglected statue of an angel in a dark corner of the Church of Maries Seven Sorrows and something about the dilapidated surroundings awakens a desire in her to confess to him.⁸⁴ Here we are reminded of Fred’s frustration with the affluent, clean and photogenic clerics and his suspicion that he could talk to a dirty priest. Echoing Fred’s desire for a shabby clergy, Käte’s initial fascination with the dirty angel statue turns to disappointment as she brushes the dust away: “but I kept blowing and cleaned the exquisite curls, the breast . . . my happiness disappeared the more the bright colors became visible, the awful paint of the piety-industry, and I turned slowly away.”⁸⁵ Her desire to confess is also connected with the dilapidated surroundings, for when the priest suggests that they leave the dark corner where they have met Käte says “with the distant eternal light in my eyes I was lured in

⁸³ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (357)

⁸⁴ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (396)

⁸⁵ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (395)

this dark drafty portal, close to the plaster angel to tell the priest, to whisper to him here in the dark, and to receive the absolution whispered back.”⁸⁶

Fred’s desire for a dirty priest is fulfilled with the priest with the farmer’s face. Käte describes him with lusterless blonde hair, dimly shining eyes, and yellowed, nicotine-stained hands, and he is the one who is able to hear her confession.⁸⁷ This confession again closely resembles Fred’s complaints about the clergy, much to the horror of the priest. “I told him ov my hatred of the priests who live in great houses and who have faces like the advertisements for skin cream.”⁸⁸ Käte tells him, and he responds with by telling her that he cannot absolve her, or perhaps can do so only conditionally. The question of Fred and Käte’s absolution hangs unanswered until the twelfth chapter when during their breakfast at the snack shop the priest makes his last appearance. The snack shop as a location that both Fred and Käte visit and reflect upon is itself a parallel structural conversation to the priest with the peasant’s face, and the resolution of Käte and Fred’s independent experiences of it is unified in this scene when they enter it together. When the priest re-appears he immediately approaches Käte and apologizes to her for denying her complete absolution the day before. Fred’s many complaints about the church and the corresponding complaints that Käte confesses are both tied up together by their symmetry: Fred’s desire to speak to a priest and his stipulations for its occurrence, his hatred for the bishop’s photogenic appearance are fulfilled and seconded by Käte and the absolution that she receives from the priest by extension may count for him. The hopefulness implicit in this structural dialogue is that Käte’s absolution may be possible for Fred too. The end of

⁸⁶ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (396)

⁸⁷ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (396)

⁸⁸ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (398)

the novel gestures toward his return to his family and eventual reconciliation with the church, ending the discussion that has been negotiated over the course of the novel by both Fred and Käte's interaction with the church. The theme of communication is bricked into the events of the book as they reference and intertwine with one another. At this point it will be useful to pan back from the minute discussion of the structural dialogues that take place between the events of the various chapters of *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* and look at the book's larger structure for evidence of how communication is imbedded in its form.

The book's division into chapters alternating between two narrators itself mirrors the exchange of a conversation, albeit one that in this book is best described by the phrase "*Und sagte kein einziges Wort.*" Böll's doubled use of the phrase "*kein einziges Wort*" is a dialogue between the two impacts of disturbed communication shown in this book. One is seen in the isolation of the Bogners and the other is depicted by unity of Bernhard's family, and the dialogue they create informs the book's depiction of a humane aesthetic. The Bogners must overcome the isolation created by their poverty just as Bernhard's family has transcended the obstacles of his retardation. The extent of their triumph over the difficulties their poverty and the basic physical failure of communication with one another is exhibited time and again in their open, honest and kind interactions with the Bogners. In the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* Böll states that "it isn't my task here to research how an aesthetic of the humane would be expressed in spoken language . . ." ⁸⁹ and in *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* keeps true to his intention by demonstrating what an aesthetic of the humane looks like in human interaction but not in speech. Bernhard's family is open to both Fred and Käte, as are a number of other characters who behave with generosity and

⁸⁹ Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (14)

kindness that are labeled in conspicuously non-linguistic ways. Bernhard's sister gives Fred far more butter than he requests out of sheer good will, and gives Käte her entire meal on credit, although Käte protests "but you don't even know me."⁹⁰ The only response she gets is a smile and a murmured "oh, don't worry." Käte's landlord, Frau Rödner also gives Käte her lipstick, as well as a healthy dose of sympathy, on credit⁹¹ and Fred too understands one of his pupil's mother's request that she be able to pay the next week before she manages to utter the request.⁹² The disrupted communication of all these characters is accompanied by the presence of humane behavior that demonstrates an understanding and interconnectedness with each other that corresponds to the last two criteria for the humane that Böll names in the *Frankfurter Vorlesung*: love and connectedness within their community.

In the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* Böll writes, "I believe humanity, caring, connectedness are impossible without the home. Home, whose name includes neighborliness and trust without allowing the most basic component of society, the family, to become just a hostile, poisoned fortress, a circle, a group that rejects and isolates the uninitiated."⁹³ [*„Humanes, Soziales, Gebundenes, so glaube ich, ist ohne Heimat nicht möglich, Heimat, deren Name Nachbarschaft, Vertrauen einschliesst, ohne dass die urstufe der Gesellschaft, die Familie, nur zu einer feindseligen, vergifteten Festung wird, zum Kreis, zum Kränzchen, das Nichteingeweihte ausschliesst, abstösst.“*] In *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* the depiction of communication rooted in the poverty of the Bogner family, whose home (*Heim*) if not

⁹⁰ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (403)

⁹¹ Böll, Werke Vol 6 (384)

⁹² Böll, Werke Vol 6 (340)

⁹³ Böll, Frankfurter 110 (26)

homeland (*Heimat*) has been disrupted by their economic situation, demonstrates the primacy of the humane. The difficulties in communicating across their material wants in the content of the book and their resolution in the geography of that content as it is distributed through the contrapuntal rhythm of their telling of the story. The content alone does not resolve the tensions between Fred and Käte's outlooks and desires. Only the understanding won from observing the share signs and ideas in the structural dialogue with one another can do this. The details of Böll's *Currency reform* story carry the musty smell of the rubble and dust that are the hallmarks of its historical setting, but its form depicts the individual's struggle to retain the capacity for love and understanding in the face of the bitterness born of poverty and callous indifference that is still the plight of millions in shanty towns and slums the world over today.

Part II: *Billard um halb zehn*

For the average German of 1959, things were looking pretty good. The economic miracle was at its height, and jobs were easy to come by and well paying. Just four years earlier the demand for workers had become so great that the first call for foreign laborers had gone out to the less prosperous countries of the Mediterranean, and factories were working full tilt, turning out automobiles, ships, and the Federal Bank's foreign currency reserves were up to 1.7 billion US dollars. The following year unemployment would hit rock bottom at 1.2 percent, and the last thing anyone wanted was to be reminded of death camps, bomb shelters, or the secret police.

The politicians were ready to oblige. With the resurgence of Nazi ideology on the political landscape safely quelled back in 1952 by the ban of the Socialist Imperial Party (*Sozialistische Reichspartei*) by constitutional court those ex-party members were ready to be allowed back into polite society, and 150,000 former NSDAP members previously fired from their civil servant positions received permission to resume working for the government. Leftist politicians such as SPD party chairperson Kurt Schumacher and Berlin mayor Ernst Reuter continued speaking out about the evils of National Socialism, but they too toed the line when it came to not interrupting West Germany's new-found prosperity. And why not? The *Bundeswehr* had been reassembled and re-armed for six years; it was plain to see that West Germany was a world class nation, on par with any other on the planet. In such an atmosphere the "zero hour" must have seemed very real, and connections with the pre-defeat past very weak. In this cultural landscape of hope and forgetfulness Heinrich Böll set his novel *Billard um halb zehn* and attempted to reconcile this wide-spread amnesia with its moral implications.

The next novel this thesis will consider in terms of how Böll's writing straddles the gulf between the aesthetic and the historical via its depiction of communication has been called his "most ambitious attempt"⁹⁴ and "most challenging work"⁹⁵ on account of the challenging narrative structure and broad temporal span of the novel. *Billard um halb zehn* illuminates the historical continuities that bind the fractured political history of Germany in the first half of the twentieth century by telling the story of three generations of the the Fähmel family, a bourgeois family of architects in a large Rhenish city. It tells of the events centering around the family patriarch's eightieth birthday celebration on the ninth of September, 1958 from the perspectives of the various members of the Fähmel family and the people who come into contact with them. This offers a range of depictions of the day's events, which are further informed by the characters' memories of the events of the last fifty years. The narrative style is a further development of techniques already developed by Böll in earlier novels such as *Wo warst du, Adam?*, which used multiple perspectives to paint a complete picture, and *Und sagte kein einziges Wort*, which employs a stricter form of the same technique. In *Billard um halb zehn* Böll complicates the technique by maintaining a narrative driven primarily by internal monologue, offering little background information by which the reader might orient herself, though later in the novel Böll violates this style by mediating interactions between the characters via the introduction of a third person narrator.

In order to navigate the disjointed and often-confusing leaps of narration provided by the characters from three generations of Fähmels, the text offers a series of common events, motifs, symbols and quotes that surface in many of the chapters and which, through their mediation in memory, weave a tapestry showing the larger

⁹⁴ Vogt, (73)

⁹⁵ Schwarz, 139 (37)

picture of the family's history. In Vogt's opinion these function as "the load-bearing members of the epic construction" that clarify the integration of the various perspectives by taking on "simultaneously structuring and interpretive functions."⁹⁶

Any attempt to summarize the secondary literature about this novel is made particularly frustrating by its sheer volume. Due to its challenging structure, ambitious time-span and controversial content *Billard um halb zehn* can be approached (and attacked) from myriad angles because it offers so much fodder for discussion. The book's narrative strategy has been criticized by Werner Hoffmeister as "painfully obvious", as have the central opposing symbols of the book, the buffaloes and the lambs, called "least convincing" by Wilhelm Johannes Schwarz.^{97 98} No less controversial is the resolution of the book's content in the assault on a politician in its final chapter called by Durzak "failed",⁹⁹ and even the projection of the wide scope of the book's material onto the Fähmel family has been attacked by Frank Trommler as "artificial."¹⁰⁰ However, the book's focus on the primary importance of memory for moral action has remained uncontested in its secondary literature.

Billard um halb zehn is unique among Böll's novels in that the majority of the development takes place in the past and is reported in a present that primarily serves as its delivery vehicle. The past informs the decisions of the characters in the present to the utmost, and though the developments in the present do finally present the book's main point of articulation they only make sense when the plot is backfilled with the

⁹⁶ Vogt, (67)

⁹⁷ Vogt, (135)

⁹⁸ Schwarz, 139, Schwarz, 139 (37)

⁹⁹ Manfred Durzak, Der deutsche Roman der Gegenwart, 2., erw. Aufl. ed. Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer [1973] 422. (52)

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Koebner 1941-, Tendenzen der deutschen Literatur seit 1945, hrsg. von Stuttgart, A. Kröner [c1971] 559. (224)

memories of its characters. Hans Joachim Bernhard frames the novel with the concept of the “greatest novel” of the post-war period, which is more or less confirmed by Böll in a 1957 interview in which he stated that his next novel “should be the story of a fifty-year-old man and should filter the time between 1900 and today.”¹⁰¹ Bernhard also rightly observes that the decisions the characters in the novel must make are informed more by their past experiences than by their present concerns.¹⁰² He concludes that these decisions “concern for the older generations of the Fähmel family the question of the meaning and value of a life stretching over seven decades, for the middle generation represented by Robert Fähmel they concern the rejection of a social isolation and for the youngest of the characters their relationship to the future.”¹⁰³ I can only agree with Bernhard in his concise and penetrating summation of the importance of memory for each generation of the Fähmel family, however, he continues his analysis of memory in *Billard um halb zehn* not in this same vein focused on morality and the family, but rather on morality and economy. “The social criticism here is the criticism of capitalism in its national form in Germany since the beginning of the twentieth century.”¹⁰⁴ The problems posed by attempting to read the motifs, symbols, and quotes that unify the various narrative perspectives as purely economic or political are confounding and Bernhard does a commendable job creating a reading that fits *Billard um halb zehn* solely within its historical setting. The difficulties the text presents to such an endeavor will be dealt with later on in this section, but for now the issue most important for our focus on morality and communication is the way Bernhard’s reading (and any other that would make an ideological statement out of *Billard um halb zehn*) ignores the focus on family.

¹⁰¹ Bernhard, 424 (207)

¹⁰² Bernhard, 424 (209)

¹⁰³ Bernhard, 424 (209)

¹⁰⁴ Bernhard, 424 (210)

For Bernhard the fact that a family is the social group chosen for the novel might well be coincidental; a *Stammtisch* or a knitting circle including members of the three generations he mentions would function equally well in this regard. If we look at the continuity of Böll's writing, however, we find that the family is anything but a coincidental social group in his work. In the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* Böll calls the family the "most basic form of society" and he is primarily interested in families in most of his novels: *Und sagte kein einziges Wort*, *Haus ohne Hüter*, *Ansichten eines Clowns*, *Ende einer Dienstfahrt* all deal directly with the effects of social forces on the cohesion of the family.¹⁰⁵ Most importantly, for Böll the family is fundamentally connected with "homeland" [*Heimat*] without which the underpinnings of morality the humane, social and connected, are impossible.¹⁰⁶ Family considerations are moral considerations, and in *Billard um halb zehn* we are presented with a family fractured by their interaction with the past.

Butler's analysis of the novel is much more applicable to our project. He writes, "the central question explored in the novel is how [. . .] a basic, humane stance can be translated into effective action in a society dedicated not to an honest confrontation with the past but to its efficient obliteration."¹⁰⁷ Though the novel highlights the continuities between the then-current Bonn government and the Nazi government that preceded it, *Billard um halb zehn* is ultimately interested something deeper in human societies, of which National Socialism and the unspeakable horrors that it allowed is only one manifestation. By emphasizing the continuities of the entire first half of the twentieth century Böll includes the end of the Wilhelmine period and

¹⁰⁵ Böll, *Frankfurter* 110, (26)

¹⁰⁶ Böll, *Frankfurter* 110, (26)

¹⁰⁷ The Narrative fiction of Heinrich Böll : social conscience and literary achievement 280 (113)

the Weimar Republic in his analysis and by means of a dual system of symbols, the Lambs and the Buffaloes, creates a constellation of ideas and ideologies that elevates above the historical the struggle between a humane and moral view of the individual's place in society and a view that subordinates the individual to ideas of belonging and duty. The insidious chameleon-like ability of these ideas to adapt to supposedly new political environments is addressed in this book's focus on memory. It is in this memory of the past that we find the connection to communication in *Billard um halb zehn*. What sets the Fähmel family apart from the rest of their city in *Billard um halb zehn* is their ability to recognize the continuities of these ideas through their chameleon camouflage. The members of the Fähmel family have great difficulty coming to terms with their recognition of these continuities, and the effects of these problems on their family is the moral focus of the novel. *Billard um halb zehn* is more than just the novel of the first half of the 20th century envisioned by Böll because of its focus on family. Certainly the events of the time in which it is set provide the conflict of the novel, but the book does not find its conclusion in an affirmation or rejection of those events, but in the re-establishment of harmony within the family. The focus on the family connects the essence [*Gehalt*] of this novel to the rest of Böll's work because of the moral component of the family in his work. This section will focus on how Böll uses communication within the Fähmel family to analyze the moral component of memory beyond the historical setting of the novel. In order to do this, we will look at how the quotes and symbols are used by different characters in the Fähmel family, we will consider the nature of their individual isolation (i.e. lack of communication about memory) as it relates to their memories, and we will interrogate the effects of the Fähmel family's memory on their children, and finally we will try to understand the meaning of the family's reunion at the end of the novel.

Billard um halb zehn's focus on the family can be recognized in the ways the novel resists interpretation along economic lines, as Bernhard would prefer, or along political lines as initially seems appropriate. The events, motifs, symbols and quotes that according to Vogt offer the supporting structure for the novel initially seem to beg for political or economic interpretation, but they actually serve another function in *Billard um halb zehn*: they display sympathies and antagonisms between the ways members of the Fähmel family interact with their memories, and they destabilize the idea that memory can be mediated via ideology.

Though many of the quotes used by the characters in the novel have their origins in religious or political texts or songs, they are not used to directly reference their origins, but rather to reference the interactions of the characters who use them with an experience or idea. The use of these quotes and symbols as references to character's experiences is further employed to show the interaction of multiple characters within the Fähmel family with one another or with their differing memories.

The quote "The old bones quake" [*Es zittern die morsche Knochen*] from the Hitler Youth hymn of the same name reflects definite meaning back onto the situation and characters that are connected with it. In the mind of Robert Fähmel *Es zittern die morsche Knochen* is connected to the St. Anton monastery, which hosted a Hitler Youth summer equinox ceremony and thereby contaminated itself beyond all rehabilitation. The first line from this song surfaces repeatedly in his internal monologue when he recalls his interaction with the monastery, signaling the nature of his relationship with the monastery and explicating the motives for his past actions. However, for Johanna Fähmel, the *morsche Knochen* quote does not signal the proof of the monastery's betrayal of Christian values, but rather the alienation between herself and her youngest son, Otto, that resulted from his indoctrination by the Hitler

Youth. Similarly the phrase “blood’s voice” [*die Stimme des Blutes*] demonstrates similarities of perception between the otherwise un-connected characters Marianne and Schrella, both of whom intone the phrase to discount the meaningless social bonds that are used by those who would conveniently forget the past to justify their amnesia.

The most potent and common motif in the book appears to lend it self to ideological interpretation, but here too the focus of these motifs is to offer counterbalance to the role of the family in memory. The buffalo/lamb symbol, which is employed by Robert, Heinrich, Johanna, Hugo, and Schrella, has no immediately clear referent that remains unproblematic. Certainly over its course of the novel indicates a close connection between Hindenburg and his motto “respect, respect, loyalty, honor” [*Anständig, anständig, Treue, Ehre*], and the buffaloes, but it is not limited to any Wilhelmine ideology in the strict sense, nor to Nazi ideology or any aspect of new republicanism in the FRG, though it is connected with characters that adhere at different points in the novel to all three, Nettlinger and Wakiera. The origin and meaning of lamb symbol is similarly difficult to orient by its origin or ideology. The lamb bears strong Christian connotations and these are reinforced by the repeated quote from the book of John 21: 15 “Take my lambs to pasture” [*Weide meine Lämmer*] used by Johanna and Robert in their incrimination of the Catholic Church for failing to protect the lambs that suffer at the hands of the buffalo-honoring villains in the novel. However, the lamb as a Christian reference does not function for a number of reasons. First of all, the buffalo / lamb dichotomy makes little sense, as the biblical juxtaposition is that of a wolf and a lamb. In Christianity the lamb symbol is used to signify a sacrificial animal, specifically Jesus Christ the *agnus dei*, which through its death accomplishes something for those it leaves behind. This certainly does not apply to *Billard um halb zehn*, for there is no transaction of any kind taking place and

no Christ-figure; the suffering of the “lambs” accomplishes nothing. Johanna Fähmel does not see the lambs and the buffaloes according to a good/bad dichotomy, or she would not mock Robert’s dead wife Edith’s faith in the lamb idea, saying “excuse me for laughing . . . she always had those saying on her tongue: the Lord has done this, the Lord has given it, the Lord has taken it; the Lord, the Lord!”¹⁰⁸ Finally, the lambs are not at all passive, but become violent in their own right through their juvenile and harmless bomb attack on the perceived root of their torment, the Nazi school teacher, Wakiera. That their attack was physically harmless does not alter the fact that it was intended to incite fear: a form of violence and the most basic form of terrorism. Böll further muddies the waters around the meaning of the lamb symbol by choosing the lamb as the symbol for a strange personality cult that harbors a threatening lust for Hugo (himself described as a “lamb of God”) and from whom Hugo is dramatically rescued by Robert’s adoption of him.

Critics of *Billard um halb zehn* have found much fault with the buffalo / lamb motif, not just on the grounds named above but also because of the black-and-white dichotomy that such a construct implicitly accepts. In 1977 Böll himself admitted the problematic nature of reducing fifty years of history including World War I and the Nazi period into such a tight symbolic construct in *Billard um halb zehn*, saying, “you really can’t do that anymore . . . I wouldn’t do that today, no.“ [*das ist wirklich nicht mehr zu machen . . . ich würde es heute nich mehr gebrauchen, nein.*”]^{109 110} Without

¹⁰⁸ Heinrich Böll, Billard um halb zehn (Munich: Droemersche Verlagsanstalt Th. Knaur Nachf., 1959) 237. (106)

¹⁰⁹ ‘Ich hab nicht über den Krieg aufgeschrieben’. Ein Gespräch mit Heinrich Böll und Hermann Lenz, in: N. Born/J. Manthey (Hg.): *Nachkriegsliteratur* (Literaturmagazin 7), Reinbek 1977, S. 30ff.

¹¹⁰ For detailed discussions of the *Büffel / Lämmer* symbolic see Schwarz, Wilhelm Johannes, *Der Erzähler Heinrich Böll. Seine Werke und Gestalten*, Bern: Francke 1967. Kurz Paul Konrad, „Heinrich Böll: Die Denunziation des Krieges und der Katholiken“ in *Stimmen der Zeit* 96 (1971) and Horst Hasse, „Charakter und Funktion der zentralen Symbolik in Heinrich Böll’s Roman ‚Billard um halb zehn‘“, in *Weimarer Beiträge* 10, 1964.

going too much deeper into the discussion of the buffaloes and lambs, I assert that despite Böll's own discomfort with the symbols that most prominently mark his novel, their asymmetry as opposing symbols is their most valuable feature. *Billard um halb zehn* is primarily a story about a family resisting the forces of history that have traumatized them and fractured their relationships with one another. The ideas and ideologies that shaped history are responsible for this, and it is no wonder that the buffaloes (who torture and kill) as well as the lambs (who are not pacifist, and yet cannot protect themselves from torture and destruction) as representatives of ideas and ideologies do not balance opposite one another on a scale of morality. Rather than opposing one another, they find themselves positioned on the same side of a scale weighing ideology against humanity. Johanna Fähmel observes that bomb-shrapnel kills Lambs just as easily as buffaloes¹¹¹, or that the sinister continuity of the buffaloes that is to be found in Nettlinger's republicanism-from-conviction is mirrored by the lamb-cult that would redeem the world through "sheep's wool, sheep's milk, sheep leather – and through knitting."¹¹² The adherence to either lambs or buffaloes is deceptive and mindless, and for this thesis these symbols are most useful because they offer a means by which to understand which forces in history have traumatized the Fähmel family. These symbols' resistance to alignment with any one ideology is an expression of the suspicion of ideology [*Ideologieverdacht*] that marks all of Böll's work, and which is one of the features in his *oeuvre* that has allowed it to remain pertinent for readers well beyond the time of its writing. An understanding of the forces that have traumatized the Fähmel family will help us to understand the

¹¹¹ Böll, *Billard* 237 (106)

¹¹² Böll, *Billard* 237 (41)

rehabilitation that occurs at the end of the novel and allows the Fähmels to re-establish communication and filial cohesiveness with one another.

As with *Und sagte kein einziges Wort*, *Billard um halb zehn* uses the family unit as the setting to highlight the relationships that have been placed under duress by its central object of discussion: memory. Like the Bogners, the Fähmels are a fractured family, but in this case it is not their economic circumstances that have fractured them, but rather their inability to come to terms with their past. Their struggle to reconcile themselves with their pasts without falling into the immoral amnesia that they see driving the society around them forward is what finally allows the reunion of the family as a moral unit at the end of the novel. Heinrich, the patriarch of the family, states the central connection between memory and morality when she observes, “a person without sadness is no person at all.” [*ein Mensch ohne trauer is kein Mensch*] To begin, let us first establish how the members of the Fähmel family are isolated from one another and fail to communicate. The novel introduces us to the Fähmel family initially through the eyes of outsiders. Their perceptions of the odd behavior of Robert Fähmel offer the first insights into the nature of his idiosyncrasies, which center around his intense emotional isolation from others and his fanatical devotion to routine. The first chapter begins with a telephone call between Robert and his secretary, Leonore, whose internal monologue makes up the narration. Their interaction is not a pleasant one. After having disobeyed his long-standing but never explained instructions that between nine-thirty and eleven o’clock in the morning he should be available only to family members and “for no one else” Robert breaks his otherwise impervious façade of polite distance and calls Leonore “*dummes Stück*”.¹¹³ The degree of his distance from her, a person he has seen every weekday for

¹¹³ Böll, *Billard* 237 (5)

the past four years, is so great that his insult seems “almost like a tender gesture” to her.¹¹⁴ Leonore goes on to reflect on their interactions, realizing that he hardly seems human at all to her. She cannot remember that he has ever made any request of her beyond the most basic responsibilities of her minimal job. Never has he asked for a cup of coffee or tea, or a piece of cake from the nearby café, nor has he for that matter ever eaten in her presence.¹¹⁵ To Leonore he is by all practical measures not a person at all, living a parallel existence not only to her to but the other partners in his firm as well. These men she has never seen face to face and when problems arise regarding demolition calculations that their firm proofs it is received by Robert without any hint of emotion, as are her own mistakes. It would appear that the only way to elicit any reaction from him at all is to violate the simple and strict prohibitions he has created to ensure his own isolation. Leonore was never told just what Robert does or where he was to be found between the mysterious hours of nine-thirty and eleven on weekdays, and the curiosity that led her to trace down the address corresponding to the phone number on the little red card listing the people for whom he is available seems to offend Robert every bit as much as the fact that she disobeyed his instructions and gave out the address to a person not listed on the card.¹¹⁶ Leonore is well aware that something is wrong with Robert, but she has no clue about why Robert lives in such isolation. Such is not the case with Jochen Kuhlgamme, the old porter at the Hotel Prinz Heinrich.

In his years of service to the hotel, Jochen has gained a vast knowledge of polite society and knows the Fähmel family quite well. His conversation with the

¹¹⁴ Böll, *Billard* 237 (5)

¹¹⁵ Böll, *Billard* 237 (8)

¹¹⁶ Böll, *Billard* 237 (7)

younger porter he relieves from duty at the front desk is the first information *Billard um halb zehn* provides about Robert's past, and in it we learn that Robert was politically active during the 1930's, was forced to leave the country and had his first child at the age of twenty with the sister of Schrella, whose name we have learned from the ominous red cards possessed by both Leonore and Jochen. Jochen's understanding of Robert is respectful, perhaps even awed, but remains primarily professional in its orientation. Robert's odd habit of playing Billards each morning and requiring the presence of the bellhop Hugo makes Jochen's younger colleague suspect the worst: "trouble or vice" [*Unheil oder Laster*], but Jochen dismisses his concerns citing the high moral character of the Fähmel family and Robert in particular.¹¹⁷ Jochen apparently is so used to humoring the odd requests of their guests that Robert's pathological need for isolation does not phase him, but he is aware that not all is well with Robert. Jochen's statement "he won't damage anything, at most he will lose his temper" diminishes the severity of Robert's condition, but acknowledges that one exists, especially in reference to his use of the same verb *überschnappen* to describe Robert's mother, who actually is insane.¹¹⁸

Robert's father, Heinrich is every bit as ignorant of what Robert does with his late mornings as Leonore, whom he asks emphatically, "what is he at, what does he do, my son, the one one left to me, Leonore? What does he do every morning between nine-thirty and eleven in hte Prinz Heinrich?" Interestingly, Heinrich is also in the habit of visiting his son's office when his son is not there, which is the situation in which he comes to talk with Leonore, who is a non-member of the family and relative

¹¹⁷ Böll, *Billard* 237 (18)

¹¹⁸ Böll, *Billard* 237 (22)

stranger, about it son.¹¹⁹ In a very real way Heinrich and Robert miss one another [*verpassen sich*] both physically and emotionally. The only scene in which they converse with one another at any length is in chapter six, while they wait on Robert's daughter Ruth in the Denklingen train station. The scene opens with reported narration of Robert's thoughts as he sees his father getting off the bus and coming to the station café where they will meet. Robert's alienation from his father is the first thing on his mind: "a half hour, as far as he could remember he had never been alone with his father for so long: he had hoped his visit would last longer and he would be spared the necessity of a father-son conversation."¹²⁰ The description of their relationship that follows focuses on the silence that permeated the Fährmel home as Robert grew up, and which reached its most profound expression with Robert's exile and return following his involvement in a juvenile and harmless bombing attack on a Nazi teacher: "embarrassed conversation about architecture; . . . no word when he had disappeared, none when he had returned."¹²¹ Robert wonders to himself before his father enters the pub, "did he know everything? Or would he yet find out? . . . Silence was better than recording the thoughts and feelings and delivering them to the psychologists."¹²² The "silence" under discussion here is Robert's destruction of the monastery his father built; one of the many traumas suffered by the various family members but left un-discussed by them as a family. In the conversation that follows, they begin for the first time to talk about the traumas they both suffered in the aftermath of Robert's exile, but their conversation is interrupted by the intrusion of the

¹¹⁹ Böll, *Billard* 237 (13)

¹²⁰ Böll, *Billard* 237 (131)

¹²¹ Böll, *Billard* 237 (131)

¹²² Böll, *Billard* 237 (135)

barkeeper before it can become a more meaningful exchange. Robert apparently does feel the urge to confess his guilt to his father and even makes an attempt at doing so, but their alienation is so much an established part of their relationship that his father is the one who stops him, saying “I know, you don’t have to say it out loud.” though Robert obviously does not believe that Heinrich suspects anything.¹²³ The interruption caused by the barkeeper and the ensuing conversation between him and Heinrich nicely illustrates how memory and the traumas of the past have isolated Heinrich and Robert from one another.

When Robert plays Billards in the Hotel Prinz Heinrich every day, he does so in the presence of Hugo, a bellhop whose experiences being tormented by the boys of the very village where Robert and Heinrich meet to wait on Ruth’s arrival are very similar to Robert’s own experiences with persecution and the persecution of his friend, Schrella. Robert’s affinity for Hugo on account of their shared memory of persecution is so great that at the end of the book Robert adopts him, and during his conversation with his father in the train station pub Robert tells Heinrich of the boy what was done to him, and that he is from this very village. Hugo has told Robert that the boys who tormented him called him “lamb of God” and Robert confirms his status as one of the lambs by telling his father of the resemblance of Hugo’s smile to that of Edith and the carpenter’s apprentice who acted as go-between for himself and his parents while he was in exile and who disappeared as the result of his aid to them. Although Heinrich has now learned all of this, he fails to comprehend that the friendly barkeeper who interrupts their conversation to honor his long-standing prominence in the community and give him a round on the house might be one of the people responsible for Hugo’s torment, or that the boys he had admired in the street before entering the pub might be

¹²³ Böll, *Billard* 237 (143)

the very ones who tortured him. The immediate proximity of memory for Robert creates a gulf between himself and his father, who, for all his regret over his inability to act over the course of his lifetime still does not seem to comprehend the burden of memory that the friendly people around him obscenely and immorally fail to bear. Robert asks his father if he has no fear of such people, and Heinrich replies, “While you were away and waited on word from you I was afraid of everyone – but to be afraid of trash? Now? Are *you* afraid of him?” Robert’s reply exposes the constant presence of the past for him: “I ask myself about every person, if I would like to be at their mercy, and there aren’t many about whom I would say ‘yes.’”¹²⁴

Robert has still not come to terms with the horrors inflicted on himself and his friends before his exile. The torture of himself and Schrella at the hands of Nettlinger, the execution of Ferdi following their absurd bombing attempt, his wife’s death in the allied bombing have all caused him to recoil from the world privately into the safety of the Billard room of the Hotel Prinz Heinrich and publicly into the world of pure statistics and formulas of his business. However, he is not completely inactive in his hermitage. Robert has never forgotten the hypocrisy and immorality that ruled the world of his youth, and which he sees still in power in the present. As has already been mentioned Robert repeatedly intones *Es zittern die morsche Knochen* in reference to the hypocrisy of the monks of St. Anton, and in what was more an act of revenge than following orders Robert destroyed that edifice in retaliation. We learn from Joseph that his father was merciless in his advocacy of dynamiting old structures in the years of clean up just after the war replying to his father’s attempts at mediation “I even understand their feelings, but I don’t respect them.”¹²⁵ Robert’s

¹²⁴ Böll, Billard 237 (143)

¹²⁵ Böll, Billard 237 (173)

enthusiasm for destroying the structures that connect the post war city to its history in the middle ages or Roman Empire is a continuation of the revenge he took on St. Anton. He is denying those who would forget their past transgressions any trace of a past upon which they would found the myth of their new state. If they will not take the Nazi past, they shall not have what lies beyond it either. Unfortunately Robert's revenge is without catharsis. He is no longer interacting with life, only with forms. The description of Robert's Billard playing demonstrates his withdrawal from any sort of action or development beyond his vengeful bitterness; he cannot even complete the action of a game: "He had long since stopped playing by the rules, he just wanted to play in order, collect points . . . he would often play for a half an hour with just one ball . . . music without melody, painting without image; barely color, just form."¹²⁶

The separation between Robert and his father, Heinrich, is repeated between the other members of the Fähmel family, each time stemming from their unresolved relationships to the past. Heinrich is similarly isolated from the developments of history and thus from his family, locked as he is in the myth he built for himself upon his arrival in the city in 1907. In chapter four Heinrich ruminates at length upon the circumstances of how he has arrived at his eightieth birthday, starting from the day he arrived in the city and ordered in Café Kroner his Paprika-cheese for the first time, and how his plans have always been completed. With forty-three pages, this chapter is one of the longest in the book, and his description of himself turns into a complex self-incrimination that culminates in his order to Leonore to spit on any monument raised to him for his reliability and accomplishments as an exemplary gentleman of society.¹²⁷ The criticism of himself arises precisely from his exemplary fulfillment of

¹²⁶ Böll, *Billard* 237 (30)

¹²⁷ Böll, *Billard* 237 (80)

that role, one which he did not have the courage or strength to break out of, caught as he was in the momentum of his myth: “I’m just an old fool who plays the blind man with his wife; we take turns closing our eyes for one another, switch eras like the discs in a machine that throws images onto a screen.”¹²⁸ The reality of time is no more substantial for Heinrich than projected images, and even these he has not always had the courage or strength to see.

If Robert has recoiled from the world, Heinrich has let himself be carried passively with the flow and lost any will of his own. For him the unfolding of events is every bit as abstract as the formulas that Robert has filled his life with. “again I saw the future more clearly than the present, which sank into a dark area the moment that it was accomplished. . .” explains Heinrich, and the result is the inaction that allows his first son to become possessed with the spirit of militarism that is so foreign to him, his second son to be banished into exile (it is the actions of his wife that eventually succeed in bringing Robert back, not Heinrich’s) and the third son to become an enthusiastic Nazi.¹²⁹ It is little wonder that Robert and Heinrich are unable to connect with one another: one is has retreated from the world because he cannot reconcile the events beyond his control that have taken place, and the other cannot reconcile himself with the events he did not act to prevent, he cannot even bring himself into temporal synchronization with the events as they take place. The quotes that occur repeatedly in Heinrich’s internal monologues are far more external than the recurring quotes of his son. Heinrich remembers “higher powers” against which he is apparently powerless (or powerless to act) imposing itself again and again in his world when his

¹²⁸ Böll, *Billard* 237 (139)

¹²⁹ Böll, *Billard* 237 (69)

eldest son becomes enraptured with the militarism of the First World War¹³⁰ and when he watches his wife dealing with the messenger who carries their money to Robert in exile.¹³¹ Heinrich remembers those around him who conspired to build bombs and aid his missing children reading *Kabale und Liebe* by Schiller, a story shot through with intriguing groups: cabals of which Heinrich, doomed to inaction by his own myth, is not a part. (59, 81, 91, 100) Perhaps the worst aspect of Robert's paralysis is that though he cannot bring himself to act, he is not blind to the immorality surrounding him. It is one of the hallmarks of the elder two generations of the Fählmel family that they are intensely aware of hypocrisy and immorality. The quotes that circulate through Heinrich, Johanna, Robert and Schrella's internal speech resound with this moral consciousness. Heinrich is well aware of the adherence to the golden bull (golden buffalo?) of nationalism or militarism or Nazism, as we see in the recurrence of the quote from psalm 25: 10 "their right hand shall bear gifts" which speaks of the temptations of unjust power and wealth. Heinrich's isolation from his family lies in the stance he has taken toward the sacrament of the buffalo. He has never partaken of it, but he has never actively fought against it. His resistance from the very beginning when he arrived in the city as an unknown architect intent on undermining the system of wealth and privilege from within had been ironic, but as he himself observes, "[I] knew, that irony wouldn't suffice, that it would never suffice"¹³² Heinrich joined the home guard, wore a uniform, and looked on as his youngest son at the age of seven become brainwashed by the meaningless promises of Hindenburg's *Anständig, Treue, Ehre* and his youngest son become a devoted Nazi. Yet even at the age of eighty after

¹³⁰ Böll, Billard 237 (71)

¹³¹ Böll, Billard 237 (80)

¹³² Böll, Billard 237 (73)

witnessing the failure of his great plan to found a “great clan” Heinrich still cannot alter his path to take the moral action that might have saved his sons and family years before. Heinrich will overcome his paralysis by the end of the novel, but until the day of his eightieth birthday his inability to learn from the past and the mistakes he made in it isolates him from his wife and children.

Johanna Fähmel, Heinrich’s wife represents the opposite relationship to the past as her husband, but she too is isolated, cut off from communication with her family. In fact, Johanna is doubly isolated; first by her physical separation in the sanitarium that resulted from her inability to come to terms with so much loss in the two world wars, and secondly by her refusal to look away from or forget the events that overpowered her. Neither her son or husband can endure such a direct confrontation with the past. While Heinrich cannot see the present because of his terminally future-oriented perspective, Johanna cannot separate the present from the past, a condition that has made her the resident of a sanitarium for the sixteen years preceding the events of *Billard um halb zehn*, and which is the cause of her very literal isolation from her family. Her thought stream in the book consists of memories of all of her children regardless of when their deaths occurred. This makes her perhaps the most perceptive of all the characters since her ability to connect the causes of events is not hampered by the narrowing of mean temporal cause and effect.

Johanna’s speech contains more quotes and signs than any other character’s in the novel, combining them across time and origin such that the terrible continuities that bind the sorrowful fates of her children are unmistakably presented. As has already been mentioned, it is with Johanna that the sacrament of the buffalo is employed most effectively as she describes the alienation that it caused between herself and her eldest and youngest sons. The echoes of the nationalist/militarist

orientation of the buffalo symbol reverberate in the other quotes she has adopted to describe her actions against the forces she holds responsible for the destruction of her family. Johanna, like both Robert and Heinrich, repeats “their right hand shall bear gifts” but unlike Heinrich’s ineffective protests through irony, Johanna translates her disgust into action, striving to fulfill to the utmost the rhetoric of personal sacrifice to the buffalo Hindenburg. On top of two of her sons, she refuses to benefit from the “gifts” that her station entitles her to in times of want. She refuses to take honey or bread or butter from the family’s farm holdings in Denklingen or from the monks of St. Anton who hold their family in such high esteem. To Robert during his visit she says, “one has to lay down the saber and stomp it with your foot, like all privileges, son: *their right hand shall bear gifts*. Eat what everyone eats; read what everyone reads; wear the clothes that everyone wears; then you will come close to the truth; the obligations of the noble oblige you to eat sawdust if everyone else must eat it.”¹³³ Johanna’s directly confronts the hypocrisy of a system that preaches sacrifice but underhandedly rewards its elites, even though it is her grandchildren who suffer. This frontal confrontation is typical of her uncompromising attitude toward the truth.

In much the same vein Johanna confronts the awful continuities she has seen in her past. It is precisely Johanna’s immediate confrontation with the past that fractures her relationships with her son and husband. In chapter five Robert and Heinrich come separately to visit Johanna and she begins her conversation with Robert with a lengthy memory stream about all their family members who have died in the fifty years of the book’s historical survey. This begins with her two brothers, fallen in the World War I, and continues to her first son Heinrich, her third son Otto, and her

¹³³Böll, Billard 237 (109)

daughter-in-law Edith who was also Robert's wife. All of their deaths are placed in reference to the wars that took them and the cultural forces she uses to define them; in the case of her sons the sacrament of the buffalo and in the case of Edith the sacrament of the lamb. It is clear from her mode of address what sort of effect her rambling has on Robert after she graphically describes the death of his wife; "Try to smile, boy."¹³⁴ Robert is certainly not smiling. As merciless and clear as his memory is, Robert does not confront the past with the directness that his mother does. His discomfort in her presence is palpable though she never speaks a word in the chapter, for he is unable to even touch his tea, for which his mother admonishes him twice.^{135 136} Often in the chapter she intones, "I had to laugh" about memories that are anything but funny, but her reaction is that of recognition of the absurdity of life, which, given the circumstances, is possibly the only plausible attitude with which to honestly confront the events of her life.

Her conversation with her husband is similar in that Johanna fearlessly and doggedly parades her memories before her husband's unwilling gaze. Her treatment of their past is so brutal that he begs for mercy, "you don't want to hear any more?" she asks, and in the end it is she who must comfort her crying husband.¹³⁷ At the conclusion of this chapter Johanna appears to be the one with the best grip on the past, and potentially the best grip on the present and future, though she has not yet paid the price to enter that future: by entering the sanitarium she has chosen not to live in a world "where a movement of the hand can cost a life" but which refuses to admit it,

¹³⁴ Böll, *Billard* 237 (106)

¹³⁵ Böll, *Billard* 237 (109)

¹³⁶ Böll, *Billard* 237 (120)

¹³⁷ Böll, *Billard* 237 (130)

choosing instead to live in a world where all the sorrows of her life recur in constant simultaneity.

But Johanna is approaching the moment where she will leave her retreat from the present and again act to change the world around her, just as she did when she begged on Robert's behalf and when she protected Edith. As he is leaving Johanna tells Heinrich, "pay the ransom and I'll come back from the cursed castle: *I must have a rifle, must a rifle have.*"¹³⁸ The ransom is a weapon with which she will affect a change to that world by killing the men who tortured her son and son-in-law and who represent the ideas that led her sons Otto and Heinrich away from her. This does not turn out to be the answer to her difficulty reconciling herself with life in a world where the buffalos still march unafraid with the blessing of politicians, for it would have been the same revenge without catharsis that Robert is caught in, destroying the signs of the past for a society that refuses to face that past in total. Rather than shooting an old criminal Johanna shoots a new politician. Johanna realizes that those who's limited understanding of their own memories prevent them from perceiving the dangerous continuities embodied in Wakiera, the Nazi-cum-police chief, and Nettlinger, the Hitler Youth-cum-minister, endanger the present and future. This is the resolution that she and her family require before they can begin to move on and return into the trajectory of history that offers hope rather than eternal bitterness.

Schrella, Robert's brother-in-law, confronts his past with the same mercilessness as Johanna and like her he has not yet overcome his past sufficiently to move on and resume relationships within the structure of his family. The Fähmels are all the family that Schrella has left, though he has met only Robert and Johanna ever in

¹³⁸ Böll, *Billard* 237 (130)

his life. His exile began with Robert in the Netherlands, but without anyone to intervene on his behalf at home, his exile continued in Great Britain. In both countries his memory of the sacrament of the buffalo got him into trouble, landing him in prison for threatening politicians he saw to partake of the same militarism and nationalism that proved so deadly to his friends and sister. His return to Germany only confirms his belief that the buffaloes are still in control, as he is immediately arrested for his twenty-year-old crimes against an adherent to the buffalo, Wakiera, who has found a place of even greater prominence in the new order than he had in the old one.

The quotes and signs that mark Schrella's thoughts in the book are fewer in number than Robert or his parents, primarily because much of his appearance in the book is dominated by a narrator-moderated conversation that allows little of the internal monologue that bears many of these highly personal references to song and scripture. However, the scope of these quotes and signs that Schrella does use are as wide as any other character in the novel, focusing on the same few as Robert (due to their shared experiences in persecution and exile) and suggesting an integration within the family that would be impossible to show without the mechanism of the quotes and signs.

Schrella's bitterness exhibits the same intensity as his mother-in-law's, but while she experiences a dynamic change in her perceptions that allows her to return to her family, Schrella does not. Where Johanna's engagement with the past has kept it current for her, Schrella has preserved and isolated the past, constantly comparing it with the present. He is thus well aware of the continued power of the sacrament of the buffalo. His activity in *Billard um halb zehn* focuses on the pure continuity of the city he visits in 1958 with the one he left in 1935. His interaction with Nettlinger

depressingly confirms his suspicions as does his immediate arrest upon entering the country. However, perhaps because of his isolation through the death of his nuclear family, Schrella is unable to reach out to make contact with his past in order to come to terms with it, and perhaps he does not want to. Besides the Fähmels, the only contacts with his past left are Nettlinger, whom it is clear Schrella has not forgiven, and his friend Ferdi's younger sister, who he meets working at the snack shop of the train station in his old neighborhood. He remembers her immediately, though like the rest of the neighborhood, she has forgotten him and his family completely. When she appears to have an inkling of recognition for him, he soundly convinces her that she is mistaken and thereby avoids a real interaction with her and with his past. Like Johanna, Schrella is caught in the past, for though he is capable of separating it from the present, he willfully refuses to enter into contact with that present, fearing to melt the "ice-flowers." That Schrella's use of the word *Eisblumen*, which one might expect to be beautiful, delicate and precious, to refer to his memories is surprising, since none of the memories he recalls are in the least bit beautiful. Their delicacy and preciousness betray Schrella's desperation to cling not only to the memories of facts, but to the memories of emotions. Schrella's travels through the city before his arrival at the Hotel Prinz Heinrich take him to locations pregnant with personal meaning, each of which he finds altered such that either he does not remember it (the waterfront) or it does not remember him (his old neighborhood). His interactions with these places are described negatively; Schrella *erschrak* at the sight of the new bridge in place of an old friend's home, and he is *angstvoll* at the thought of being followed by someone curious about his identity in his old neighborhood, for he does not wish

his memories to be disturbed.¹³⁹¹⁴⁰ He is not afraid of Robert's house because he had been there only one time before, stating, "here memory was in no danger."¹⁴¹ Schrella's desire to keep the past completely intact disallows coming to terms with it. He chooses to stay in a third-rate hotel rather than stay with Robert, saying, "I'm afraid of houses that people move into and let themselves be convinced by the banal fact that life goes on and time can reconcile."¹⁴² In a book focused on the ills that can come of a lack of memory, it would at first appear that Schrella's statement represents the stand that the Fämel's are taking against "coming to terms" with the past in such a way that betrays its lessons. However, Schrella's isolation from the family and his complete unwillingness to melt the preserved *Eisblume* of the past contradicts one of Böll's strongest statements about *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*. "Great words were spoken by Theodor Adorno in this city: one cannot write poems after Auschwitz. I would like to modulate these words. After Auschwitz one cannot breathe, eat, love, read – whoever takes the first breath, lights up a cigarette, has decided to survive, to read to write to love. A survivor: as such I address you, who presumes more familiar landscapes, language-scapes than apparently could be presumed . . . Everything become serious and easy, nothing wants to remain, certainly not put down roots, and least of all made into a monument. Lost homeland, lost context, no familiar landscape – in the next hour I will speak to you of this, for I

¹³⁹ Böll, *Billard* 237 (184)

¹⁴⁰ Böll, *Billard* 237 (185)

¹⁴¹ Böll, *Billard* 237 (190)

¹⁴² Böll, *Billard* 237 (227)

believe that the humane, the social and the connected are impossible without it.”¹⁴³

Schrella still has not decided to live, and without that decision he cannot become a part of the *Heimat* that is the basis for a moral society; one which Schrella is the first to confirm does not yet exist in the Germany of *Billard um halb zehn*.

His interaction with Nettlinger also extends Schrella’s reluctance to interact with his past, though in this case his reasons for such reluctance are well founded. Nonetheless there is something disturbing in their interaction when Nettlinger invites Schrella to dinner at Café Kroner. Nettlinger embodies the continuity of the sacrament of the buffalo in *Billard um halb zehn*. He is powerful, privileged, completely mercenary and most dangerous of all, so completely convinced of the “respectability” that marks the sacrament of the buffalo that he cannot recognize it for what it is; an idea that enables all manner of excess and immorality. The aspect of their interaction that is disturbing is not Schrella’s continued hatred of Nettlinger or his righteous rejection of all of Nettlinger’s attempts to extend the olive branch to him, but rather the ineffectiveness of Schrella’s words and actions upon Nettlinger. Though Schrella demonstrates the obvious continuities between the concepts of honor and state between the FRG and the Nazi government Nettlinger simply will not see what is set before him. This state of affairs attains its real threat later in chapter nine when Schrella imagines Nettlinger’s idyllic domestic existence in which a filial atmosphere

¹⁴³ „Es ist in dieser Stadt von Theodor W. Adorno ein grosses Wort gesagt worden: man kann nach Auschwitz keine Gedichte mehr schreiben. Ich moduliere das Wort: man kann nach Auschwitz nicht mehr atmen, essen, lieben, lesen – wer den ersten Atemzug getan hat, sich nur eine Zigarette ansteckt, hat sich entschlossen, zu überleben, zu lesen, zu schreiben, zu essen, zu lieben. Ein Überlebender, als solche spreche ich zu Ihnen, der mehr vertrautes Gelände Sprachgelände voraussetzte, als offenbar voraussetzen war. . . Ernst und leicht wird alles, nichts will bleiben, schon gar nicht Wurzel schlagen, und am wenigseten mit Blei an den Füßen monumentiert werden; verlorene Heimat, verlorene Zusammenhänge, kein vertrautes Gelände – ich werde in der nächsten Stunde noch darüber sprechen, denn Humanes, Soziales, Gebundenes, so glaube ich, ist ohne Heimat nicht möglich.“ Böll, Frankfurter 110 (26)

of harmony and happiness becomes the medium for the transmission of the hypocrisy implicit in Nettlinger's views.¹⁴⁴ The juxtaposition between Nettlinger's children, who receive explicit indoctrination into the social theory of militarist/nationalist culture, and the Fähmel children, who receive only vague signals regarding the truth about the past demonstrates a continuity of its own, in which the Fähmels continue to be the inward-turning exception to the social rule when it comes to fidelity to memory. Böll's warning from *The Frankfurter Vorlesungen* that without the decision to interact with the past the present and future is not possible comes into high relief in the example of the Fähmel children. The lack of communication between the generations within the Fähmel family is dealt another serious blow when Schrella chooses to leave the family group at the end of the novel. In the third generation of the Fähmels one would hope to find the preservation of the morality in memory demonstrated by their father, uncle and grandparents, but to judge by their thoughts and actions in the book, the inability of the elder two generations to talk about the past to one another, let alone their children, has rendered this difficult.

This should be no surprise, of course. With Johanna Fähmel sequestered in a sanitarium, Heinrich Fähmel the prisoner of his own myth, Robert Fähmel retracted into a Billard-room bunker from which he attempts to dynamite a world he does not trust, and their uncle Schrella completely absent from their lives the two Fähmel children, Joseph and Ruth, understand very little of the history that has produced the filial constellation in which they grew up. I should hasten to add that the Fähmel family is not in the same danger of dissolution as the Bogners of *Und sagte kein einziges Wort*. On the contrary, Joseph's description of his childhood to his girlfriend Marianne is for the most part very happy. Robert was a loving, if mysterious, parent

¹⁴⁴ Böll, *Billard* 237 (187)

taking his children out buy chocolate on the black market or offering them strict guidance about their studies as needed.¹⁴⁵ But it is also clear that his children were never given to understand what sort of effect his past had on Robert, though that past was ever present in their lives due to both his work and his behavior. Joseph says of Robert's work destroying as much of the city as he could that "we always were a little afraid of him, when he stood in front of the map with this black chalk and said: 'Blast! Get rid of it!'"¹⁴⁶ Yet more confusing for the children and more indicative for them that their father was somehow still caught in the war were his jovial good-morning greetings. "Sometimes he was even funny, which he no longer is today. In the morning when we would crawl out of our beds he would already be standing in front of the window shaving himself and he would call to us, 'The war is over, kids!' – though the war had been over for four or five years."¹⁴⁷ Of course, Robert's funny reminder that the war was over accomplished precisely the opposite of reminding the children that it was peacetime. Rather, his remark served to keep the war in immediate proximity, eliminating a lengthening sense of peace and stability that would have come from its passage into deeper memory. This appears to have been Robert's only attempt at impressing upon his children the importance of remembering the horrors of the past, but he has long since ceased to make any more such attempts, being no longer "funny," and his children have been left to make sense of the past on their own. The conclusions they have come to unfortunately do not reflect the important lessons that their elders hold dear, and in the children's drift from these

¹⁴⁵ Böll, *Billard* 237 (173)

¹⁴⁶ Böll, *Billard* 237 (173)

¹⁴⁷ Böll, *Billard* 237 (174)

moral lessons lies *Billard um halb zehn*'s most pressing point; that without communication, the moral nature of memory can do no good.

Take Joseph's perception of Johanna's effort to chastise a society over-come with the ideas of the sacrament of the buffalo by refusing to partake of the rewards of her social position. Without an understanding of her actions, Joseph tells Marianne that he had been certain until after this mother's death that they were a very poor family and that was the cause for their meager diet of ration food and the cause for their shabby clothing.¹⁴⁸ He recalls how "we had to watch as she gave the good stuff away to complete strangers, bread, butter and honey, from the monastery and from our lands; we had to eat artificial honey " and can only refer to her actions as "foolishness", though his lack of comprehension of her protest did not change his feelings toward her.¹⁴⁹ Such was not the case with his sister, who also missed the point of Johanna's actions and grew to resent her for making them suffer. As of the ninth of September, 1958, Ruth still bears resentment toward her grandmother for making them go without the bounties available to them. While visiting St. Anton Ruth ducks away from the group to have a solitary cigarette, and she considers the beautiful gifts that her grandfather has given her. This leads her to think about her grandmother of whom she says, "I don't want to understand grandmother . . . she gave us nothing to eat and I was happy when she went away and we finally got something. It may be that you're right and she was great, and is great, but I don't want to know anything about greatness . . . she may come back and sit with us in the evening but please don't give her the key to the kitchen."¹⁵⁰ Ruth is interested in prosperity, and the moral issues

¹⁴⁸ Böll, *Billard* 237 (170)

¹⁴⁹ Böll, *Billard* 237 (171)

¹⁵⁰ Böll, *Billard* 237 (198)

that accompany it are of no consequence to her whatsoever. The butcher family Gretz who has their shop across the street from the Fähmel home appears repeatedly throughout the book as symbol of the immorality of the sacrament of the buffalo; their son denounced his own mother to the Nazis and to the present day he fails to clean up the blood that drips from the slaughtered hog in front of their shop from the pavement, a sign of the blood that still stains his hands. Ruth either knows nothing of this, or does not care, for she remarks of his parties, “of course I won’t say no if Konrad Gretz throws a party; there will be fantastic foie gras with herbed butter and white bread.”¹⁵¹ Regardless of whether her willingness to socialize with the Gretz family comes from an ignorance of their past or indifference to it, her family, for whom memory is everything, have completely failed to communicate with her about it, and their memories have thereby lost their moral content for anyone but themselves.

The motifs, quotes and symbols that are instrumental in understanding the moral vectors that define the elder Generation’s interactions with their memories are almost wholly missing from the internal monologues of Joseph, Ruth, and Marianne. This suggests that the tight bundling of memory with morality absent in their understanding of the past. Joseph has memories of his grandfather and the people of Denklingen intoning “whatforwhatforwhatforwhatfor” [*wozuwozuwozu*] but does not appear to employ the utterance in any critical manner of his own,¹⁵² and Ruth uses *Kabale und Liebe* polemically while mocking her family’s fixation with the past. None of the three characters seems to understand the oppositional nature of sacrament of the buffalo / lamb to their family, and the absence of these motifs for memories in

¹⁵¹ Böll, *Billard* 237 (199)

¹⁵² Böll, *Billard* 237 (171)

their internal monologues indicates just how little of the moral content of their father's and grandparents' memories have been communicated to them.

The Fählmel children's lack of understanding of the past is also evidenced by Joseph's trauma at discovering that his father blew up the monastery, and by Ruth's complete lack of interest in the fact. The weight of the discovery of his father's demolition markings at the ruins of St. Anton upon Joseph is clear during the driving episode in chapter eight. Here Joseph loses himself in thought while playing chicken with a warning sign bearing a skull and crossbones, ruminating on the importance of his father's implication in the destruction of the symbol that seems to be the major unifying element in his family's history. Thinking of his duty to protect family cohesion by shielding his grandfather from his father's betrayal, Joseph thinks, "he won't find it, never discover, won't find out from me."¹⁵³ The fact that Heinrich has already admitted to himself that the destruction of the monastery means very little to him only underscores the degree of Joseph's misunderstanding of his family, though his dedication to their cohesion evidences his understanding of the weight of memory for them. Ruth on the other hand could not care less about the destruction of the monastery or who does or doesn't know about it. She rejects her family's obsession with the past completely, saying, "Mourning behind these walls, I know that. Make myself drunk with it all the time and swim lies to it: the court behind Modestgasse 8, inhabited by ghosts. Grandfather built the monastery, father blew it up, Joseph rebuilt it. Whatever. You'll be disappointed how little that bothers me."¹⁵⁴ Ruth's indifferent attitude toward the memory of the past is perhaps a result of her generation and the

¹⁵³ Böll, *Billard* 237 (172)

¹⁵⁴ Böll, *Billard* 237 (198)

environment in which they have grown up. In order to understand how this generational difference is addressed it will be useful here to briefly switch gears.

This analysis of *Billard um halb zehn* has thus far concentrated on the thoughts and actions of the characters in the story. This is primarily because these make up much of the content of *Billard um halb zehn*. The intense use of internal monologue to tell the story makes imagery and setting a fairly minor part of the book, which should make us that much more aware of it when it is presented, as is the case with the beginning of chapter eight, in which Joseph Fähmel and his girlfriend Marianne tell one another about their families. Böll begins this chapter with a lengthy description of a park on the banks of the Rhine where Joseph and Marianne sit talking. The scene is a sort of bourgeois idyll painted upon the background of a bombed out bridge that once spanned the Rhine, and which still represents a deadly threat as is advertized by the skull and crossbones sign already mentioned above. The inhabitants of this landscape are presented with the combination of a monument to the violent destruction of war and the spectacle of complete serenity bound without apparent contradiction. “Toward this death’s head the hardworking adepts of driving schools practiced changing gears . . . toward this dyke upon which cleanly dressed men and women with happy-hour faces stream toward the ramp with the threatening sign“ and „the destruction had not touched the bombastic steps, and they served now in the evening summer warmth as seats for the tired strollers . . .“¹⁵⁵ Böll’s attention to the presence of the war as the background for tranquil normality reflects the ubiquity of the war to Joseph and Ruth’s generation: it is quite literally *background*. That they cannot communicate about the events of the war, for them mere background, is not at all surprising. Nor is the fact that the moral content of the memories of that war are not

¹⁵⁵ Böll, *Billard* 237 (161)

accessible to them, especially when their parents and grandparents have not been able to communicate their own understanding of the moral content of memory due to their inability to come to terms with it.

The bitterness that fractured the Fährmel family by forcing the older generation to retreat into various safe zones is also that which has fractured them from their offspring. To Ruth their inability to come to terms with the past is simply incomprehensible, and though Joseph is not so critical of them as his sister, he appears to have learned that the past is not something that one can communicate openly about. Joseph's inheritance of this inability to deal with the past is exhibited in both his inability to talk with Marianne about his discovery of his father's complicity in the destruction of St. Anton.

In chapter eight when Joseph tells his girlfriend Marianne of his father the things he reports to her are mostly what we already know. His father is distant, is primarily interested in the formulaic aspects of the things in his life, and that in the interest of creating new spaces for building in the city after the war he was merciless in his will to demolish as much of the city as possible. Joseph is ignorant of any of his father's motivations for such behavior, just as he is ignorant of his father's age.¹⁵⁶ He has recently learned of his father's involvement in the destruction of the monastery his grandfather built, but is so disturbed by the discovery that he cannot talk about it, even with this girlfriend. This inability to communicate about their interaction with the family past is the central theme for both of Robert's children, and it has already been pointed out that this can be traced back to the lack of mediation of the past within the Fährmel family. Thus, Joseph cannot talk at all with his father or grandfather about his

¹⁵⁶ Böll, *Billard* 237 (165)

involvement in the reconstruction of St. Anton, which is his sole means of interacting with the family past. The effect of the obstruction placed before knowing the past is so great that when he does force himself to talk about it with Marianne, he can only do so by refusing to allow her a complete view of him. Before he begins to tell Marianne about his family he instructs her, "Please, turn around, we can talk with each other better that way." "We can lie better" she replies, and his telling response is "Maybe, or rather: we can better be silent."¹⁵⁷ Joseph lays bare the result of his family's taboo about speaking of the past: communication and separation go hand in hand. This is complete opposite of Böll's conception of the family as the basis for social connectedness and humane relations. The Fähmel family has got the right attitude, remembering the past and holding dear the truths they have seen because of their brave resistance to the convenient forgetfulness that surrounds them, but they have missed the crucial point of their endeavor; to pass their knowledge on and thereby make a difference.

Their failure to pass on their knowledge places their children in danger of joining in on the forgetfulness that surrounds them, in which the war is simply background without bearing on the present. Ruth's lack of concern regarding the weight of memory has been shown already, and it is ominously augmented with the degree to which Marianne is affected by the theatrical false-memory of the roman children's graves located beneath the Hotel Prinz Heinrich in chapter thirteen.

Böll carefully narrates the tour of the archeological find produced by Robert's demolitions from the perspective of the bored tour guide who leads Ruth, Marianne and Joseph through it, paying careful attention to the dramaturgical considerations of

¹⁵⁷ Böll, Billard 237 (163)

leading such a tour. He provides the directions of the trainer who taught the tour guide from her memory “Here the course teacher had said to walk first silently around and wait for the first wave of emotion to ebb before you begin with the explanation. My ladies it is purely a matter of instinct how long your silence should last, it depends on the composition of the group. In any case, don’t let yourself be brought into a discussion of the fact that they aren’t really roman children’s graves but rather grave stones that weren’t even found at this site.”¹⁵⁸ While Joseph and Ruth remain composed, Marianne is moved to tears by the cynical false-history performed by the tour guide. Marianne’s reaction is very surprising, since of the three youths she is the one with the best grasp of her own past, remembering as she does the murder of her brother at the hands of her Nazi parents. Marianne’s reaction stands out as a clear warning about the moral content of memory, for perhaps it is precisely her memory of the past, of the tragedy of a child’s death, that makes her susceptible to the fantastic false history that Robert with his destruction of old structures has been attempting to deny a society without real memories. Without mediation even Marianne, who remembers her story, can be taken in. Robert’s efforts outside of the family sphere have done nothing to stop the illusion, indeed have provided it with another tool for the production of false memory.

It would appear that the solution to the central problem in *Billard um halb zehn* as asserted by Butler, „how a basic, humane stance can be translated into effective action”¹⁵⁹ is far out of reach for the Fähmels, who’s failure to communicate has negated the value of their humane labors of memory. However, as the novel nears its end the arc of *Billard um halb zehn*’s plot acquires a gravity-like acceleration as

¹⁵⁸ Böll, *Billard* 237 (217)

¹⁵⁹ Böll, *Billard* 237 (113)

chapters shorten and begin to contain more and more characters, mirroring their physical proximity to one another in the immediate vicinity of the Hotel Prinz Heinrich. The conclusion toward which the novel speeds sees both the physical reunification of the Fähmel family at Heinrich's eightieth birthday party and the figurative release of the elder generation from the various holding patterns that have isolated them from their children and one another. This reunification takes place at Heinrich Fähmel's birthday party, but the psychic changes that take place in Johanna, Heinrich, and Robert stem from two events in particular; Johanna's assault upon the politician and Schrella's arrival at the Billard room of the Hotel Prinz Heinrich.

Johanna is the most isolated character in *Billard um halb zehn*, which is demonstrated structurally in the text by the complete isolation of her monologues from those of any other character. In chapters five and ten Johanna has her most verbose passages, both of which occur in the presence of others. She talks with her son, her husband, and a general who has also been placed in the sanitarium, and under whose command Robert found the opportunity to dynamite St. Anton. Johanna speaks with all three characters, but in every case the reader is presented only with her side of the conversation. Her isolation and the inwardness of her thoughts are emphasized by the exclusion of her interlocutors from the text. Beginning with her return from her "isolated castle", as she calls the sanitarium, Johanna's monologue becomes a dialogue, indicating that she is now interacting with the people around her, and not just her memories. In chapter twelve Johanna deliberates with Heinrich who in the parade of the old soldiers she will kill, and for the first time her interlocutor's speech is reported in the book. The opening of her perspective is accompanied by the decision to shoot one of the new politicians who hope to profit by their tacit endorsement of the marchers, rather than taking revenge on the tormentor of their son

and son-in-law, Wakiera. By aiming and firing her pistol, Johanna completes her return from the world of simultaneous present and past in which she has lost herself for the past sixteen years. Rather than taking aim at the murderers of her children, she for the first time looks to the future, to the importance of her memories for her grandchildren and decides instead to shoot, “the murder of my grandchildren” who she describes in the term used by the buffaloes, “respectability” [*Anständigkeit.*]¹⁶⁰

Just before making her move, however, Johanna extracts from Heinrich a promise to cancel his birthday party in Café Kroner, and to cancel forever his breakfasts there. She is well aware of what she is asking him to do, “destroy your legend, don’t demand that your grandchildren spit on your monument, but rather prevent that you should receive one” and he does so.¹⁶¹ Johanna’s mention of their grandchildren and the consequences of Heinrich’s actions on them is the most direct indication in the novel that the youngest generation is still held in thrall by the degree to which their elders manage to come to terms with their pasts and to communicate the lessons of memory to them. Johanna’s demand is for nothing less than the re-mediation of memory for her grandchildren. They will not be asked to reject the official memory of their grandfather; they will be given a true memory of him. Without Johanna’s help it is certain that Heinrich would have remained locked in his myth, for it is she who must make the phone call to cancel the birthday dinner. However, the joy with which Heinrich addresses his family in the last paragraphs of the novel proves the success of Johanna’s liberation of him, and the re-establishment of real communication between both spouses and their children.

¹⁶⁰ Böll, *Billard* 237 (215)

¹⁶¹ Böll, *Billard* 237 (213)

Schrella's return has a similar liberating effect upon Robert, though the release from his holding patterns of formality and distance come from within Robert himself rather than from any demand or action on Schrella's part. The moment of Robert's return to life is delivered in the narration of Hugo, who, as always, is present while Robert plays billiards in the Hotel Prinz Heinrich, this time accompanied by Schrella. Hugo recognizes subtle differences in Robert's playing and demeanor: "the geometrical figures seemed to him less precise, the rhythm of the balls disturbed "and credits Schrella with the change;" was it Schrella, who brought the constant presentness of time, who broke the spell?"¹⁶² Hugo also recognizes Schrella as the immediate cause of the changes in Robert, but it is Robert who finally ends the perpetual Billard game that has been his refuge and his prison as his immersion in its pure form dissolves. „the spell had evaporated, the precision less, the rhythm disturbed, while the clock answer the *When?* so exactly: six fifty-one PM on September the sixth, 1958. 'Oh,' said Robert, forget it, we aren't in Amsterdam anymore."¹⁶³ Robert's purely formal interaction with his secretary Leonore is broken shortly thereafter, when he receives her warning that something has gone wrong with an account, using a very *human* register when he says "I'm glad that my father invited you, and please excuse what I said to you this morning, Leonore."¹⁶⁴

Robert returns to real time, leaving his game and immediately takes up the role outside of the Buffaloes/Lambs system that was assigned to him by Schrella earlier in the novel: he becomes the shepherd.¹⁶⁵ Marianne alludes to his potential in this role, saying prior to the final Billard game that she feels "protected in his presence", but

¹⁶² Böll, *Billard* 237 (225)

¹⁶³ Böll, *Billard* 237 (226)

¹⁶⁴ Böll, *Billard* 237 (232)

¹⁶⁵ Böll, *Billard* 237 (39)

Robert truly becomes the shepherd with his first act following the end of the game.¹⁶⁶ He brings Hugo under his protection by presenting him with the adoption papers that will make him a Fähmel, and (226) soon after comes literally to Hugo's rescue, saving him from the Buffaloes/Lambs view of history represented by the leader of the Lamb-cult who has cornered him in his room.¹⁶⁷

Thus far the returns of Johanna and Schrella at end of the novel have brought an alteration in the memory of history the children will receive from their grandfather, and from their father protection from the ideas that dominate the historical memory of their forgetful society. On the final page these returns will also re-establish communication between the members of the two older generations of the Fähmel family. In the final scene of the novel the whole family (minus Johanna) are gathered around Heinrich in his studio. He names and accepts the new members of the family, Schrella and Hugo, and attentively names Marianne and Leonore too, acknowledging the completeness of the family. He directs everyone to take seats significantly upon the stacks of files Leonore has arranged according to year; upon the history of their family, and jokes with Robert about whether he should receive the birthday greeting of the Gretz family from the butcher shop below. He makes direct reference to the butcher's complicity with the Nazis in a joke to Robert, a first indication of the dissolution of the silence about the past that has been the rule between them.¹⁶⁸ This start toward reconciliation is completed with the surprise delivery of the cake made for him by the staff of the Café Kroner, which is a model of the St. Anton monastery. Heinrich bristles at the symbol of both his past and his myth, and initially balls up his

¹⁶⁶ Böll, *Billard* 237 (220)

¹⁶⁷ Böll, *Billard* 237 (234)

¹⁶⁸ Böll, *Billard* 237 (235)

fists as if to destroy it with his bare hands, only to maintain his reserve and reenact his son's destruction of the monastery with a serving knife. His reconciliation with Robert is communicated in Heinrich's presentation of him with the monastery's "head"; "He cut the tower's helmet [*Turmhelm*] of the abbey and handed the plate over to Robert."¹⁶⁹ With the lines of communication within the older generation thus repaired the Fähmel family seems at last ready to function as the "home" [*Heimat*] that binds its members and provides the basis for moral action and moral memory.

However, *Billard um halb zehn* does not end with the complete reunification of the family or the complete rehabilitation of communication between its members. Böll does not close his book with a happily-ever-after, but rather employs gestures that point to developments beyond the pages of the novel. In *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* the reunification of the Bogner family is implied with Fred's revelation upon seeing Käte on the street, and his fevered return to work. In much the same way *Billard um halb zehn*'s ending gestures toward a family more whole at the end of the book than it was at the beginning, with a father returned to the present, a grandmother returned from the sanitarium and the past, and a grandfather finally released of his own myth. However, Schrella's continued inability to find a way to live implies a continued fracture of communication, and a persistent difficulty with the moral content of memory.

Schrella's return from isolation into the ranks of his family where his memory might help mediate the past for his niece and nephew is only temporary, for he sees no way to keep his memories alive in the city where his family lives. He cannot conceive of a way to continue living [*weiterleben*"] as Böll calls it in his reference to Adorno.

¹⁶⁹ Böll, *Billard* 237 (237)

Unlike Heinrich's liberation through Johanna's return, Schrella himself is not liberated from his doggedness [*Verbissenheit*] in his memories of the past. On page 227 he tells Robert of his misgivings about Germany and the city that was his home, and that he cannot stay: "I cannot live in this city because it isn't foreign enough to me. I was born here, went to school here; I wanted to release the Gruffelstrasse from its orbit, but I didn't have the word that I never spoke in me, Robert. Even in conversations with you, the only thing in this world that I've kept for myself, and I'll not say it now." This refusal to stay will not only again remove him from the filial circle, it will also remove his memories and his wisdom from his nieces and nephews and make impossible his integration in the present and future. His refusal to stay is also a refusal to speak, to communicate something vital about his memories that he perhaps does not yet know how to put into words, or which he cannot bear to.

Ironically, Schrella's explanation for why he cannot stay in the city is that it is not the actions of those with no memories, but rather the absence of those with memories at all, of which he himself is one. Schrella fears that there are none like himself in the city, but there are none like himself in the city because he will not stay. Here we have the crux of *Billard um halb zehn*'s interest in memory and communication; without communication memory is useless. Schrella's inability to come to terms with his past remains one of the novel's most frustrating developments, for it denies the ending in filial unity that the book seems to race toward in its last three chapters. Schrella's refusal to stay and inability to speak, is also, however, the most important development in the book, for it places the irreconcilability of memory in the spotlight, and denies the tidy ending that the rest of society in the book has already found. *Billard um halb zehn* does not posit a concept of memory that allows its simple employment for comfort by ideology or personal conclusion. It posits a

memory that is forever in tension with the present and which never allows itself to be completely integrated into the present.

In *Billard um halb zehn* the interaction of the morality of the content and that morality's enshrinement in the book's form is more difficult to map than in *Und sagte kein einziges Wort*. *Billard um halb zehn* is not as clearly divided between narrators or narrative style, and often the formal elements seem to become the content of the book and vice versa, as seen in the importance placed on arrival and departure, and the historical origins of quotes and signs that serve structural functions in the text. Since this is the case, the aspects of the novel's content and form that allow it to be more than a novel about coming to terms with the past are wrapped up both in the social form that is most central to the novel, the family, and the care with which Böll has taken to emphasize the unimportance of the labels attached to the forces that fractured the Fähmel family. The restoration of communication within and unity of that filial group's ability to interpret their memories and set them into meaningful action is the moment that illuminates how communication emphasizes the moral tenets of the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*. The Fähmels manage to create that "home" [*Heimat*] that is the basis for moral action via the re-establishment of communication. The answer the book provides a nuanced answer to Butler's central interrogation of it; how can honest confrontation with the past be translated into effective action. Schrella's departure from the family seems to answer that there is no way, but it makes that answer true by its own action, and the state of communication within the Fähmel family gestures toward the answer that of moral communication of memory itself is the answer. Böll conspicuously leaves both answers unchallenged, which perhaps is the most transcendent and important aspect of the book.

Part III *Ansichten eines Clowns*

To end the survey period of this thesis we turn our attention to Böll's best known work, *Die Ansichten eines Clowns*. In the introduction of this paper this book was cited as the moment in which Böll's work began to involve itself directly in the politics of its time, naming directly the causes of the problems dealt with in his writing rather than depicting individuals' attempts at dealing with them. In *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* the causes of the poverty that threatened the Bogner family's existence are left for the most part un-examined, and in *Billard um halb zehn* the names of the political parties who attempt to take advantage of the old-guard's military march are not only left out, they are dismissed as completely unimportant. In *Ansichten eines Clowns* Böll changes his tune and relentlessly indicts the Catholic Church and the CDU for their regementalization of West German civil society along religious-political lines. This straight-forward approach to social criticism was preceded by the increase of Böll's political commentary in pointed essays beginning around the same time as the publication of *Billard um halb zehn* in 1959, and continued following *Ansichten eines Clowns* throughout the rest of Böll's writing career. The increased emphasis on direct social criticism is the reason that *Ansichten eines Clowns* marks the end of this analysis of Böll's aesthetic program. As will be shown in the summary of the criticism on *Ansichten . . .* in the following pages, *Ansichten . . .* unifies the themes Böll's preceding books dealt with, and does so exemplifying the aesthetic of the humane as laid out in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*. However, *Ansichten . . .* does not limit itself to the topics already covered in Böll's earlier books. This thesis is interested in how communication in Böll's early work reflects the humane morality that is the basis of the aesthetic of the humane, and has thus far shown how Böll's novels have confronted social structures that threaten that communication. *Ansichten*

eines Clowns expands the list of structures detrimental to communication and by extension humane morality, concentrating on artificial social interest groups as a threat to direct person-to-person communication. In the following we will look at Böll's focus on these groups in his essays and in *Ansichten . . .* and at how the structural shift in his writing in *Ansichten . . .* emphasizes the importance of communication.

The reasons for this shift in Böll's writing were conveniently provided by the author himself in the program notes for the premier of the stage version of *Ansichten . . .* at the Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus on January 23, 1970. In these notes Böll states that the idea for *Ansichten . . .* came from the failure of the journal *Labyrinth* on which Böll had collaborated with Werner von Trott zu Solz, Walter Warnach and HAP Grieshaber from 1960 to 1962. Butler succinctly lists the goals of the journal as "to pursue and develop the principles of Christian socialism in the context of a divided Germany caught between the conflicting ideologies of capitalism and communism."¹⁷⁰ (132) Böll likens the negotiation of the territory between these two ideologies to the minotaur's labyrinth from which the journal drew its name, and describes the plot of *Ansichten . . .* as a modern day Theseus story in which the protagonist must navigate the maze of West Germany society in order to survive.

For much of the literature on *Ansichten . . .* the financial failure of this journal marks not only the origin of the book, as Böll himself admits, but also the origin of the shift in Böll's social criticism toward polemics aimed at specific groups and individuals that would typify his later work in the 1970's. Vogt cites the failure of Böll's writing leading up to *Ansichten . . .* to produce meaningful changes in German society as the cause of the frustration and bitterness that are voiced in the novel,

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stating that „Disillusionment and resignation express themselves in the technical transformation of *Ansichten . . .*“¹⁷¹ Balzer similarly asserts that *Ansichten . . .* is the result of Böll’s awareness that ”socially-determined obstacles to individual happiness/fulfillment led to the necessary creation of a new approach.”¹⁷² Bernhard echoes these analyses of *Ansichten . . .*, saying that the “maturation of Böll's writing is by no means a subjectively grounded or personal development, but rather is rooted in Böll’s literary-political experiences in the early 1960’s that challenged him to change his writing.”¹⁷³ The changes in Böll’s writing that inspired his critics to declare *Ansichten . . .* to be the watershed creation in his oeuvre involve the content of the book to a surprisingly small degree.

In terms of content, *Ansichten . . .* is hardly different at all from Böll’s other books up until 1963. The involvement in the Catholic Church in undermining Hans’ relationship with Marie mirrors closely the failure of the church to uphold its moral responsibilities in real-world terms in *Und sagte kein einziges Wort*. Hans’ mother and a number of other characters seem unable to draw clear continuities between the present and the past, recalling the problem of memory in West German society from *Billard um halb zehn*. *Ansichten . . .* depicts a romantic relationship in crisis similar to both the individual love and the family as a humane structure of society found in both of the previously mentioned novels as well as *Das Brot der frühen Jahren* and *Haus ohne Hüter*. All this being said, where is the massive shift that is of so much concern to the critics? Structurally it is in the mode of narration, which created a new opportunity for Böll to change the nature of his social criticism. Regarding content it

¹⁷¹ Vogt, (79)

¹⁷² Heinrich Böll : e. Einf. in d. Gesamtwerk in Einzelinterpretationen, ed. Hanno Beth, 2., überarb. u. erw. Aufl. ed. Königstein/Ts. : Scriptor-Verlag, 1980. 255. (49)

¹⁷³ Bernhard, 424 (292)

is the specificity with which Hans Schnier attacks both the Catholic Church and the CDU. This thesis will concentrate on the former in order to access the novel's interaction with communication.

Bernhard observes that the structural change in Böll's writing consists of a move away from the objective perspective created by multiple narrators, and toward the completely subjective "views" of a single individual which break the hitherto didactic spell upon the reader provided by characters viewed from a distance.¹⁷⁴ No longer could readers compare the facts from different viewpoints to create an objective perspective, being forced to see only one "view." The new immediately personal narrative perspective provides Böll with a sharpened and more precise tool to criticize society, for it discards the need to present objective truth about reality because it reflects only the subjective perception of reality, but it does so at the cost alienating the reader from the narrator.¹⁷⁵ The extreme subjectivity of the narrator also isolates him from society, as is seen in the isolation of Hans Schnier in his apartment for the duration of the novel, and necessarily creates a separation of the book's perspective from the "utopian" perspective that was the ultimate guiding principle in his earlier novels.¹⁷⁶ Rather than returning to a family unit that promises inclusion in a moral microcosm of society, Hans is faced with complete isolation. This drastic shift in the trajectory of Böll's writing is the evidence of his dissolution with the ability of his work to impact West German society. The artist's inability to affect the world around himself through his art bears immediate similarity to Hans Schnier's attitude toward his own profession as clown.

¹⁷⁴ Bernhard, 424 (292)

¹⁷⁵ Bernhard, 424 (293)

¹⁷⁶ Bernhard, 424 (299)

The figure of the clown is central to the expression of this frustration. Karl-Heinz Götze describes this figure as it functions in *Ansichten* . . . as the court jester whose privilege to tell the truth is purchased with the loss of the ability to affect any changes in the society he reports on. Hans Schnier reflects on precisely the same point in chapter seven when he performs impressions of leading CDU politicians for his grandfather's friends.¹⁷⁷ They are completely imperviousness to its critique and enjoy it greatly: “. . . and as mean-spirited as I tried to make [the impressions] they laughed themselves to death, ‘deliciously amused’ . . .”¹⁷⁸ Böll makes the same point in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* when he writes of what artificial social organizations like political parties, religious circles and professional organizations expect from artists like himself: “they don't expect flattery . . . they expect something cheeky, something saucy, they expect something socially critical . . . I'd almost say they expect a row, and since I realized this, I'm no longer ready to deliver a row, not even one just for show.”¹⁷⁹ Böll's reaction to his frustrated role as court jester of the Bonn-republic is to cease to play the role as it has functioned thus far, hence the alteration of his narrative technique.

Balzer, too, observes the narrative shift in *Ansichten* . . . , but sees a deeper internal function in that shift than Bernhard or Götze. Like Bernhard, Balzer sees that the essence of the shift to the first person perspective in *Ansichten* . . . is the move away from satire; however, the function of that shift is not only to affect greater social impact, but also to articulate the tenets of the aesthetic program that were to be laid out

¹⁷⁷ Karl-Heinz Götze, Heinrich Böll, "Ansichten eines Clowns" (München: W. Fink, 1985). (24)

¹⁷⁸ Heinrich Böll, Ansichten eines Clowns (Munich: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 1967) 253. (57)

¹⁷⁹ Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (12)

explicitly in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*. He writes, “in ‘Clown’ Böll realizes the theoretical concept of an aesthetic of the humane in the role of the artist.”¹⁸⁰ The shift to a subjective narrative strategy introduces a double interrogation of the social content and literary form of his work: Böll is testing his maxim that the moral and aesthetic are congruent concepts.¹⁸¹ By using the “views” of a single person, Böll is able to isolate the world view of an individual, and posit the possibility of an individual’s realization of a truly humane perception and behavior. Hans Schnier’s “views” are definitively *not* objective reality, but his interaction with them is the negotiation of an individual amidst difficult circumstances to find the humane and moral path forward in his life.¹⁸² Balzer argues that despite Hans Schnier’s grudges, frustrations and explosions toward those he contacts from his apartment, he ultimately manages to find as an artist the expression of humane resistance to the ills that beset him and on a larger scale, society. In doing so he exemplifies the tenets of the aesthetic of the humane.

Balzer’s interpretation focuses on Hans’ refusal to cooperate with social forces that privilege abstract wealth (his parents) or abstract principles of order (the Catholic Church) and his final descent into ruin as a begging musician on the steps of the Bonn train station. The decision to sink to the “gutter”, as Hans repeatedly refers to it in the book, fulfills the *Frankfurter Vorlesung*’s tenet that art must represent the that which society discards (*Abfall*) in order to correctly represent what is worthy of empathy and humane love. Rather than represent some false sentiment with his performance, Hans makes himself the subject of humane art, and does so in the plainest view available to

¹⁸⁰ Heinrich Böll : e. Einf. in d. Gesamtwerk in Einzelinterpretationen 255 (58)

¹⁸¹ Heinrich Böll : e. Einf. in d. Gesamtwerk in Einzelinterpretationen 255 (49)

¹⁸² Heinrich Böll : e. Einf. in d. Gesamtwerk in Einzelinterpretationen 255 (51)

him, the ultra-public space of the train station.¹⁸³ Marie, on the other hand represents “the possibility of humane life outside of the artistic existence.”¹⁸⁴ Her innate compassion [*Barmherzigkeit*] for Hans’ suffering and her ability to empathize with nearly everyone (evidenced by her repeated weeping when faced with the conflict situations in which Hans’ stubbornness and insensitivity places them) is the pattern by which humane action would be carried out. Balzer is careful to emphasize that Marie only represents the possibility of such action, as her natural tendency to such action is thwarted by the unnatural “principles of order” espoused by the lay Catholic circle of which she is a member, and which cannot tolerate her holistic marriage with Hans.¹⁸⁵

Balzer’s impressive analysis of *Ansichten eines Clowns* is of interest for this thesis because it attempts to demonstrate how *Ansichten eines Clowns* conforms to and carries out the aesthetic principles described one year later by Böll in his *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*. We will use Balzer’s analysis as a basis to look more closely at how communication functions in *Ansichten . . .*, and to interpret how it functions affects the meaning of the aesthetic of the humane.

Hans Schnier’s struggle to find a humane mode of expression in the novel connects with this thesis’ concern for the unifying thread of communication in Böll’s novels. Hans’ primary difficulty in the book is his inability to communicate with others, especially when that communication is frustrated by the intrusion of social groups into what might otherwise be direct communication between individuals. This analysis of *Ansichten . . .* will look at two separate causes for Hans’ difficulty with

¹⁸³ Heinrich Böll : e. Einf. in d. Gesamtwerk in Einzelinterpretationen 255 (59)

¹⁸⁴ Heinrich Böll : e. Einf. in d. Gesamtwerk in Einzelinterpretationen 255 (60)

¹⁸⁵ Heinrich Böll : e. Einf. in d. Gesamtwerk in Einzelinterpretationen 255 (60)

communication and it will show that the subjective narrative strategy Böll uses requires that we rethink Balzer's conclusion that *Ansichten . . .* and the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* are a homologous pair expressing a closed aesthetic program.

The theme of basic humane communication interrupted by artificial social structures recurs in Böll's essays leading up to *Ansichten eines Clowns* and receives special attention in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*. Heinrich Böll clearly had social groups on his mind in the years preceding the publication of *Ansichten . . .* and wrote a number of essays and feuilleton articles featuring social groups, the ideas of which occasionally resurface in the book. In 1961 he published the Feuilleton "Cocktail-Party" in which the putting-on-airs and artificial nobility of the boorish attendees of this apparently new social function are criticized for their absurdity. Böll aims his barbs primarily at parties to which the attendees are asked to wear their medals, should they have any. He wonders whether it would be completely inappropriate for the servers as such functions to wear *their* medals too, since being the recipient of medals is a fairly democratic affair in a society in which almost every able bodied man of two generations served in the military. Böll's musings bring to light the degree to which the request that all guests wear their medals and distinctions is intended solely to create a definitive separation between the people attending the party and those working at it, and the inherent artificiality of any such gathering. He calls this "new social form" embarrassingly pathetic with its "Hollywood theatrics" and vocabulary that could only be drawn from a third rate film. Böll's emphasis on the falseness of the cocktail-party social construct is heightened by the fact that precisely this example surfaces again two years later in *Ansichten . . .* when Hans Schnier talks about his mother's *Jour fixe*.¹⁸⁶ (192) Hans fantasizes about going to these soirees in order to

¹⁸⁶ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (380)

fill his pockets with free cigarettes and cigars, quoting almost word for word from “Cocktail-party”. In both cases the scenes emphasize how artificiality negates any real human contact. Böll writes, “the original purpose of such an event - that everyone gets to know everyone – is never accomplished: one never remembers a single name, and the names of the few interesting people have to be found out under the most embarrassing exertions by describing the person in question to the host and asking them for information.”¹⁸⁷ The focus of the essay lies on the uselessness of an event at which no meaningful communication is possible on account of their complete artificiality.

The following year Böll published his essay “What the Left Might Be Today “ [*Was heute links sein könnte*] in which he laments the lame state of the left political opposition. Böll takes advantage of the figure of speech which refers to the different “wings” of political parties, and writes that despite the furious flapping its two wings (left and right) of the oppositional “bird” never manages to take flight.¹⁸⁸ The cause for the flightless-ness of the oppositional bird is the theatrics of dissent within the party stemming from what are in reality meaningless differences: artificial differences. “What could the left still be? I don’t know. I see only templates: the “right-wing” editorials conspire about the intrigues of the enemy on the left. Much foaming at the mouth and denunciation . . .”¹⁸⁹ The vocabulary that Böll uses to describe the conflict between the two wings of the same party emphasizes the militancy with which people adhere to the meaningless differences within their own groups. The potential for any

¹⁸⁷ Heinrich Böll 1917-1985., Aufsätze, Kritiken, Reden. Köln, Berlin, Kiepenheuer & Witsch (1967) 510. (378)

¹⁸⁸ Böll, 510 (124)

¹⁸⁹ Böll, 510 (126)

real opposition is destroyed by the left's inability to communicate meaningfully with itself, and the divisiveness of the artificial groups within the left that prevent it from accomplishing anything at all. The potential of social constructs to eliminate the individual's ability to act to improve society (so central to Böll's *modus operandi* following the failure of the journal *Labyrinth*), so clearly stated in *Was heute links sein könnte*, is central to the feuilleton article published the next year, unambiguously titled "I Belong to No Group" [*Ich gehöre keiner Gruppe an.*]

In this article Böll addresses the antagonisms between the so-called "open" and "closed" Catholics; those belonging to no Catholic organizations and those belonging to and representing the official views of Catholic organizations, both lay and clerical. Böll's main intent with the article is to disavow any personal membership to the "open" Catholics, but his critique of any such dichotomy as open or closed widens to embrace groups of all kinds. The article spreads its focus so wide that it encompasses the effects of such grouping on communication as a whole, for communication is the primary subject of discussion in the article. Böll describes the actions of such groups in communicative terms; "crouching together, whispering to one another, reactions of annoyance . . . etc."¹⁹⁰ The open Catholics use all the weapons in the writer's arsenal, "pencils, paper, typewriters," while the closed Catholics employ in addition to these conventional weapons "whisper-propaganda and all sorts of verbal sensational idiocy," as well as the weapons of mass destruction of the communications world, the threat of boycotts against book-sellers who vend material they do not like. Referring to the latter as "bacterial warfare" it is clear that the only thing Böll finds more

¹⁹⁰ Böll, 510 (457)

despicable than communicating without real intent to communicate is the outright attack on the infrastructure of communication itself.¹⁹¹

Böll continues to criticize the effects of groups on the effectiveness of communication by observing that within the groups themselves the infrastructure of communication has already been so altered that it is no longer useful for anything but communication within the group itself. “There [within closed-Catholic circles] they speak a mish-mash of group-, church- and party-Chinese, that is more foreign to me than real Chinese; it would be easier for me to start some kind of interaction with a Chinese that does speak my language and whose language I don’t speak: there are still gestures, smiles and a language of facial expressions - all of these means of communication are inappropriate for the functionaries [of open Catholic circles] and I’ve long since rejected the dodge that ‘we’re speaking the same language.’” Böll brackets *Ansichten . . .* within this idea, restating it in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* the year after *Ansichten . . .* was published. In a discussion of the nature of “connectedness” in society he observes that the language we speak with one another is vastly different than that which we speak within groups and organizations with their own interests. He writes of the differences between what he calls “public language” and the “language spoken within confidential organizations that requires in every second sentence a ‘How do you mean that?’ and loses itself in a briar-patch of outlandish definitions.”¹⁹² Groups and organizations that replace humane intent with their own interests as the medium for individuals to communicate with one another only alienate the humane character that is the source of moral communication.

¹⁹¹ Böll, 510 (458)

¹⁹² Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (11)

Most importantly for my discussion is that Böll expands his critique to include all groups with platforms of interest like the open or closed Catholics, listing the liberals, atheists, materialists, nihilists and any and all combinations of these as examples of other groups guilty of precisely the same depredations upon honest moral communication. Böll ends the essay with an indictment of all such groups who use not only language, but also aesthetics to limit the form and content of communication to serve only to deliver their own points of view.¹⁹³ This includes the interpretation of others' attempts at communication through their own functions of language so as to willfully avoid understanding across group boundaries. Here Böll explicitly states that such willful avoidance includes the refusal to consider both form and content and their interaction with one another in the case of literature, a sentiment that will be made again with relation to the use of language by groups in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*.¹⁹⁴

Böll accesses the effects of groups upon communication in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* via his discussion of “connectedness” [*Gebundenheit*], which is one of the prerequisites for his aesthetic of the humane. This connectedness is what imbues communication with its moral character: individuals in communication (communion) with one another as moral beings. Böll sets up an opposition to this idyllic scenario of communication by noting that “cliques, groups, teams, and circles” exist as unconnected entities incredulous that a connection between individuals can exist without “expecting or representing interests.”¹⁹⁵ The concept of interests is of particular importance to Böll for it is in the advancement of these that the moral

¹⁹³ Böll, 510 (459)

¹⁹⁴ Böll, 510 (459)

¹⁹⁵ Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (11)

character of communication between individuals is lost. Where before communication was a means to create connectedness between people, with the introduction of interests people becomes a means to ends, and communication serves only to convert people into means. We will see examples of this in the text of *Ansichten . . .* when Hans sees himself or others transformed into mere means for the interests of groups like the Circle of Progressive Catholics or his mother's various social organizations. To begin, however, let us first look at the central role given to social groups in the novel.

The first evidence of the importance of social groups in *Ansichten eines Clowns* is their degree of penetration into all spheres of life. Each character is defined by their affiliations with groups. Hans repeatedly recalls his mother's affiliation with the Nazi party and her current hypocritical devotion to the Central Committee of Societies for the Reconciliation of Racial Differences. His brother Leo is noted as having been deeply involved in a youth worker's circle, the military and finally the Catholic Church. His father represents the economic interests of the elite on television and is an inescapable presence in Hans' life because of his connections to seemingly limitless manufacturing concerns.¹⁹⁶ The employer who bargains Hans out of half of the payment due to him for his last performance is conspicuously a leader of the Christian Educational Works, and Marie's father, Herr Derkum suffers in the political climate of the Bonn Republic because of his "fanaticism" for the communist cause, though his fanaticism is really a fanatical desire *not* to be affiliated with any of the current political parties, especially the SPD. Hans, too, characterizes himself by his lack of affiliation to any groups, stating on the first page that he belongs to no church.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (118)

¹⁹⁷ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (7)

The most conspicuous of all groups in the novel is the Circle of Progressive Catholics, which Hans holds responsible for Marie's decision to leave him. While their sole responsibility in this matter may be disputed, the Circle does play a major role in it, and in Hans' and Marie's relationship at large. The majority of the people on Hans' list of people to call are members of that organization, and these people, with the addition of his family and two school friends appear to make up the total of Hans' social circle. Not only do the groups to which the characters belong determine their social contacts they also determine the interactions of the characters. As we will see, this goes beyond merely playing a major role in their lives and passes into intrusion and manipulation.

Hans returns to Bonn three weeks after Marie has left him, and upon making contact with members of the Circle of Progressive Catholics immediately finds that everyone already knows what has happened between him and Marie.¹⁹⁸ In fact, they know that she had already married another member of their circle, Heribert Züpfner. The reach of the circles is so vast that the private sphere is all but eliminated in Bonn. When Hans and Marie sleep with one another for the first time it is one of Marie's first concerns that Hans go home and tell his brother Leo what has happened so that he does not learn of it first from someone in his work circle, and after his arrival in Bonn Hans is informed by Frau Fredebeul and Dr. Kinkel that they are "disappointed" in him regarding a deeply personal situation that does not affect them.¹⁹⁹ Bonn is, as Hans describes it, "a whisper-city," in which everything is disclosed through the close network of groups that mediates all social interaction.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (86)

¹⁹⁹ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (82)

²⁰⁰ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (208)

The Circle for Progressive Catholics takes a very real and active role in separating Hans from Marie. Hans' telephone conversation with the clerical leader of the group, Sommerwild, confirms his suspicions that the group had a hand in encouraging Marie to leave him, and the members of the group that Hans telephones create a united front against him, withholding from Marie the letters that Hans as written her daily and refusing to reveal Marie's location to Hans. In the most concrete terms the circle cuts off Hans' communication with Marie, triggering his crisis and placing itself in the center of the novel's action.²⁰¹

In the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* Böll expands his criticism of groups, referred to as "circles" and "wreaths", into the aesthetic realm. Writing in reference to the moral function of literature to bind all people, he writes that literature subjected to the approval of critics and admitted into the "circle" of acclaim is closed off from the rest of its readership. Great literature is not only for the "initiated" (*Eingeweihte*) in the circle; that would defeat the whole purpose of literature.²⁰² He writes that "the circle and the wreath have closed-ness in common," and the Circle for Progressive Catholics typifies the closed circle to the utmost.²⁰³ Though always welcome at group meetings, outsiders are clearly only welcome as passive receivers of the programming broadcast by the "initiated" like Sommerwild or Kinkel. Hans' own arguments with Fredebeul and Kinkel over the morality of marriage vs. concubinary and the meaning of poverty are proof enough of the meaning of "discussion" with in their group.²⁰⁴ A further example of the discipline with which the closed-ness of the group's tolerance for

²⁰¹ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (20)

²⁰² Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (79)

²⁰³ Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (20)

²⁰⁴ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (18)

independent thought is the verbal assault aimed at Fredebeul's fiancée who made the grave error of finding some of Gottfried Benn's writings "very beautiful" after which Kinkel "used half of western culture as a plane to carve her to specification."²⁰⁵ Here we see the aesthetic control discussed in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* clearly projected onto the Circle for Progressive Catholics. The same group also clearly illustrates the use of people as means in the novel.

Hans reports that as a pupil in school he always disagreed with the interpretation of the Nibelungenlied that holds Gunther to be Brunhild's rightful husband.²⁰⁶ The fact that Siegfried was sent to her first to take her maidenhead and thereby rob her of her strength to resist Gunther always meant to Hans that Siegfried was her *true* husband. For Hans the parallel between the Nibelungenlied and his own situation with Marie and her eventual marriage to Heribert Züpfner is all too appropriate, and leads him to conclude that he was used by the Circle to prepare Marie for her eventual inclusion within the group. He likewise fears that it is the intention of the circle that he should "play Siegfried" for Monika Silvs as well, preparing her for marriage to some other of the circle's eligible bachelors.²⁰⁷ The members of the Circle also use others as means, as Hans discovers from his telephone conversation with Fredebeul's wife. Hans describes Fredebeul as an "opportunistic gabber who would 'drop' his grandmother if she were a hindrance to him," but his wife had always been very kind to Hans before.²⁰⁸ He notices immediately upon calling that something is different. Her voice betrays that she is uncomfortable talking with him and her

²⁰⁵ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (80)

²⁰⁶ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (45)

²⁰⁷ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (142)

²⁰⁸ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (84)

openly combative mode of speech toward him lays bare that her husband has told her to write him off. Other groups in the novel also exhibit the tendency to use people as means to further their interests, notably the Nazi children's combat corps, the Werewolves, who empty out the orphanage to fill their ranks, since such children have no one to miss them anyway.²⁰⁹ On the whole, social organizations fare very poorly in *Ansichten* . . . specifically when they run afoul of the narrator personally. However, it is the personal quality of Hans' narration that brings out the most interesting commentary on the effect of social organizations on moral communication. In the following pages we will look objectively at Hans' completely subjective story and try to make sense out of the discrepancy between the reality depicted by his words and the way he interacts with it in his behavior, which we will see is often very reminiscent of the groups he so detests.

It has been argued thus far that the depiction of social organizations in *Ansichten eines Clowns* shows how they come between individuals. They disrupt communication and place themselves as the mediating factor between individuals, rather than allowing them to interact with one another directly and humanely. However, *Ansichten* . . . is not so simple a novel to allow itself to be reduced to such a straight-forward reading and be left at that. If it were, Hans Schnier would be a flat character, wronged by those who have taken his partner and his family from him, a moral individual cast out of contact and communication with his fellow man by their wrong-headed adherence to inhumane dogma and hypocritical social mores. Such a protagonist might fit well into the landscape of the works we have dealt with thus far this in thesis. Fred and Käte Bogner are unfortunate individuals dealing with the difficulties the external world has imposed on them. Their harmonious domestic

²⁰⁹ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (27)

sphere is threatened by the effects of their poverty on their personalities, but their redemption is to be found within that threatened sphere, which must eventually overcome the external troubles they face. The Fähmel family, too, is beset by the troubles created by the incongruity of their own recollections of the past with that of society external to their family. Their problems with the past must also be overcome from within their family circle in order to reestablish Böll's utopian family-society. In *Ansichten . . .* the trope of the family fractured by external pressures is discarded and replaced with a secondary family, consisting of Hans Schnier and Marie Derkum. This family cannot fill the role as final safe haven that we have thus far seen the family play in the depiction of humane interaction in Böll's novels, for *Ansichten . . .* interacts with this family at a different point in its development. Until now romantic relationships and family have been shown on the threshold of their re-union and the ultimate fulfillment of their humane potential. Bernd Balzer correctly observes that in *Ansichten . . .* Hans and Marie's relationship is depicted just after the moment of its dissolution; just where the happy end would have come in Böll's other writings.²¹⁰ The narrator's subjective opinion of the reason for the family's failure is that it was torn asunder by opportunistic and parasitic social groups, but the contents of the narration point to internal problems as well, which may have played just as large a role in the ultimate failure of the relationship as the external forces blamed by the narrator. The subjective narration casts Hans' statements about his relationship to Marie, the blame for their breakup, and reality at large into doubt because of the effect outlined by Bernhard earlier in this paper: "the new immediately personal narrative perspective provides Böll with a sharpened and more precise tool to criticize society, for it discards the need to present objective truth about reality because it reflects only the

²¹⁰ Heinrich Böll : e. Einf. in d. Gesamtwerk in Einzelinterpretationen 255 Böll, 253 (49)

subjective perception of reality, but it does so at the cost alienating the reader from the narrator.”²¹¹ Where communication fails, it fails not only because of the machinations of the Circle of Progressive Catholics, but because of Schnier himself.

Let us begin with Hans’ relationship with Marie Derkum. Their relationship begins when Hans begins pursuing Marie while they are in *Gymnasium* together. Hans recounts that Marie is already close friends with Heribert Züpfner, with whom he sees her holding hands, but he makes little of this and begins spending much of his time at the Derkum home, ostensibly to talk about philosophy with Herr Derkum, but his real intention is transparent.²¹² Their relationship only really begins the night that they first sleep with one another. Hans describes the consummation of his love for Marie in terms that leave no doubt as to his devotion to her and only her: his tenderness toward her emotional confusion after they make love, his concern for the least of her discomforts, and his minute and adoring observation at her morning ablutions give testament to the purity of his love for her. There are also moments in his remembrance of their relationship in which mutual affection shines forth, as in the little smile that Marie wears when they talk of how they would dress their children. “Marie always just smiled and dodged the question and said, ‘We’ll just have to wait and see.’”²¹³ However, there are problems in Hans’ and Marie’s relationship from the very beginning: Marie isn’t happy in it. This in turn highlights the first of Hans’ own problems; he is too self-centered to understand her unhappiness. This lack of understanding comes from his inability to *listen* to those around him, and since

²¹¹ Bernd Balzer, Das literarische Werk Heinrich Bölls : Einführung und Kommentare, Originalausg. ed. München : Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997. 416. (293)

²¹² Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (42)

²¹³ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (225)

listening is half of communication this particular failure to communicate has its origin in Hans.

Hans tells us that before he had consummated his love with Marie there had been some sort of involvement between her and Züpfner, consisting of hand holding and attending the same youth groups. Hans makes little of this, saying, “the hand-holding clearly meant nothing,” though the exchange he reports between himself and Marie on the subject indicates the exact opposite. “I talked with Marie about it later, and she turned red but in a very nice way and said, ‘much would have come’ of their friendship: that their fathers were both persecuted by the Nazis, their Catholicism, and ‘how he is, you know. I still like him a lot.’”²¹⁴ The latent romance between Marie and Züpfner continues even as she becomes Hans’ de-facto wife (in Hans’ mind very much his real wife.) Marie continues to attend the Circle for Progressive Catholics, meets up with Züpfner when Hans’ performances put them in the same cities, and even receives flowers from him on one embarrassing occasion that exposes just how little thought Hans devotes to Marie. The obvious disconnect between the situation that is apparent from Hans’ narration and his own appraisal of the situation undermines Hans’ reliability and highlights his mistakes in understanding the world around him. The origin of his false understanding is part of what makes Hans more than just a wronged protagonist, and will complicate the reasons communication in *Ansichten . . .* breaks down.

Hans admits that the situation involving the flowers was embarrassing (*peinlich*) and it occurs to him that he had never sent Marie flowers, save for the flowers he received from his female admirers, the thoughtlessness of which jumps

²¹⁴ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (117)

from the page as Hans continues to describe the scene to follow. He asks Marie who sent her the flowers and she tells him it was Züpfner at which point Hans finally realizes that something may be going on between the two of them that he had not yet registered. He insults the gift and Marie is so hurt that she leaves.²¹⁵ Hans is unreflective about his inability to intuit the meaning of Marie's responses to his behavior, saying that he simply doesn't understand why she does the things she does. He cannot, for example, understand her need to breathe "Catholic air", which is clearly the connectedness that her group membership provides for her. In the eighth chapter Hans recounts how she explained the importance of this connectedness explicitly to him, "she cried and said I didn't understand what it meant to her to live in this condition [living in sin] and without the possibility that our children might be raised Christian." Hans has the revelation, "it turned out that we had been speaking past one another for five years," but he does nothing to act on this revelation, rather remains impassive and stubborn in his claim that he just doesn't understand her, despite the fact that she has just laid bare everything he needs to know to understand her.

For Hans the problem does not lie in giving their children a Christian or Catholic upbringing, but rather in the fact that they need to register with an organization outside of their "marriage" in order to do so. He excuses himself by claiming ignorance of the fact that they would have needed to register with both the church and the government so that their children could be raised Christian, but this misses the whole point of Marie's misery at their situation. She needs the connectedness that the church might provide but Hans can see only an offensive and intrusive rigmarole into their union by an outside group. He hears the words she

²¹⁵ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (141)

speaks, but cannot manage to understand what they mean. Two pages later as Hans continues his description of their argument he complains to her that she doesn't sound like herself, to which she asks who she sounds like? Hans tells her she sounds like the Circle to which she replies "perhaps your ears imagine to have heard what your eyes have seen." With this sentence Marie tells Hans point blank that he is missing the point not only of their conversation, but of a tectonic shift in their relationship because he cannot or will not acknowledge what is taking place in front of him. Hans, however, remains firm in his non-comprehension of the situation, replying, "I don't understand you . . . what do you mean?"²¹⁶ One might make the argument that Hans' conviction in the strength of their union makes him unable to see the problems that make Marie willing to travel great distances back to Bonn while she is on tour with him so that she can attend Circle meetings, or that he is so naïve that such things might never occur to him. There are signs that point to Hans' striking naivety; his preference for films aimed at six-year-olds and his fixation with *Mensch ärger dich nicht* being two examples, but even these hallmarks of his simplicity and innocence present opportunities for Hans to recognize Marie's unhappiness in their relationship.

Hans recounts a change in Marie following her first miscarriage, after which she becomes increasingly upset at his refusal to go to the theater with her, insisting on going to children's' films. At the beginning of chapter twelve Hans describes Marie as they played *Mensch ärger dich nicht* as "making a face like an especially patient nanny" and she then completely loses her interest in *Mensch ärger dich nicht*, which had been shored up only by the introduction of a complex point-gathering system of her own design that elevated the game out of its simple origins by means of what one can only describe as an "abstract principle of order" reminiscent of those she

²¹⁶ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (76)

complains Hans has no understanding of.²¹⁷ That Hans should describe her reaction to the game so specifically and yet still claim not to understand what has changed for her can only be the result of a willful desire not to understand, and that the situation is so clearly described and Hans' reaction to it so inappropriate emphasizes his unreliability as a narrator, evoking the alienation of the reader from the narrator described by Bernhard. Hans' simplicity and innocence might explain his inability or refusal to understand the problems in his relationship with Marie, but even these excuses for him are eventually are debunked in the novel.

Prelate Sommerwild provides commentary on Hans' unreflective-ness at the end of their antagonistic conversation. He condescends to Hans about his inability to understand how Marie could possibly leave him of her own volition, telling him that he is an "innocent, I'd almost like to say pure, person."²¹⁸ This depiction of Hans is nothing if not kind. If Hans were a simple, flat character he might be a pure soul who is so innocent that he cannot conceive of wrong-doing, but as we know from his outburst about Züpfner's flowers he is well able to suspect ill of others. Still later in the conversation with Sommerwild Hans is forced to admit that his fantasies of a conspiracy to steal Marie away from him cannot be solely to blame for her departure. Sommerwild points out that no rules have been broken by the Circle or the Church, and that Hans had never taken the steps necessary to ensure that he and Marie stay together forever. What is more, Sommerwild tells Hans this without a hint of accusation. Hans is brought up short, and briefly sees the situation as it is: "I was silent. He was right, and the recognition was terrible. Marie had gone away and they [the Circle and Church] had taken her in with open arms, but if she had wanted to stay

²¹⁷ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (105)

²¹⁸ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (133)

with me no one could have forced her to go.”²¹⁹ Hans has a similar interaction with someone far friendlier to his cause, Sabine Emonds, who also points out that he may be ignoring the crux of the situation. Sabine is apparently the only person in Bonn who has not yet heard that Marie has left Hans to marry Züpfner and Hans explains that the main problem was the multiple administrative steps to allowing their children to be raised Catholic. Sabine brings him up short saying, “but that isn’t why you broke up” to which Hans is forced to admit, “I know, that was what sparked the whole thing, but there’s a lot more to it that I just don’t understand.”²²⁰ Again Böll allows Hans’ subjective narration to demonstrate his awareness of why Marie has left him while claiming not to understand it. Hans doesn’t want to understand. This is precisely the same reason that he refused to acknowledge Marie’s need for the Church and the reason she eventually left him: he cannot and will not communicate.

The possibility that Hans is really just a pure soul is also discounted by the fact that Hans is able to act cruelly and selfishly, as in the scene where during a fight with Marie he drags her out of their hotel room to prove the meaningless point that he had seen a boy walking in the rain. Marie is ill, having just returned from her first miscarriage when he drags her across the raining plaza in front of their hotel to the train station to prove his point, which in the end he cannot do.²²¹ They return to the hotel soaking wet where he “shoves her into the bar and orders two cognacs”, never giving a thought to what he has just made his ill girlfriend go through, or that she might have no interest in alcohol at the moment.²²² Hans’ blindness to others’ motivations and their needs is to blame for the shattered communication between Hans

²¹⁹ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (129)

²²⁰ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (114)

²²¹ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (120)

²²² Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (123)

and Marie as least as much as the wedge driven between them by the Circle for Progressive Catholics. As pointed out above, the subjective narration in the novel brings this out by presenting a clear picture of a situation through reported dialogue, and then evaluating it, apparently falsely, through Hans' perspective. Hans' treatment of Marie, his mother, father, and other conversation partners offers a counterpoint to Hans' invective aimed at social groups, for at the end of the story, we have seen Hans insult, yell at, beg from, and use people in ways every bit as self-serving as he believes the Circle does.

A brief list of other examples can be appended to this longer discussion of how Hans failed to allow communication within his relationship with Marie. When Hans writes out his list of people to call he places his parents on the list of people he would only ask for money in an extreme case, and yet his mother is the first person he calls. The reason for this is neither explained nor becomes apparent over the course of their conversation, for Hans, it would seem has not called in order to create harmony with his family. His mother makes the mistake of introducing herself in alignment with the Central Committee of Societies for the Reconciliation of Racial Differences, at which Hans bristles and introduces himself using one of her own racist names for Americans and asking to speak her daughter, who died after being sent to a FLAK unit by his mother in the last days of the war. His mother cries out and even Hans himself is horrified at what he has said.²²³ However, the damage is done, and the conversation continues on the most tenuous of terms, eventually ending with a snide comment from Hans and the hardening of resentment and misunderstanding between mother and son. In no part of the conversation is Böll's ideal of moral communication present; there is only accusation, pain and resentment. There is no group interfering with Hans and his

²²³ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (32)

mother, though it is her identification with one that sets Hans off, he is to blame for the missed opportunity for reconciliation.

With the rest of Hans' telephone calls his goals are clear and straight forward: to locate Marie or to get money. He comes to the point quickly with most of his conversation partners, which conspicuously draws attention to their status as means to his ends. His second telephone call is to Frau Fredebeul, and he goes directly from the introductory, "Schnier," to "The letters. The letters that I sent to Marie?" To such a greeting Frau Fredebeul's reaction is predictably icy. With Kinkel Hans follows the same formula, asking immediately about Marie, and gets no further than with Frau Fredebeul. When Hans speaks with his father he makes a better start, but the end result is the same. Hans misses the opportunity to let his father make coffee for the two of them, an important mistake given the close identification of food and drink with love and caring in Böll's writing, and they to the topic of money very quickly.²²⁴

²²⁵ Hans refuses his father's offer to give him an allowance and set him up with a trainer, demanding a simple allowance instead. His father eventually decides this will not do because it violates his own principles of order, which is surprising given his openness and willingness to help his son at the beginning of their visit. Hans manages to sabotage his father's good will over the course of their conversation by tiny insults. Hans yawns when his father makes his proposal to get him a trainer and is well aware that it upsets him, saying, "My father was angry. He always is when one loses control of one's self, and my yawning hurt him not subjectively, but objectively."²²⁶ Hans knows that he's biting the hand that might yet feed him, says so explicitly, but makes

²²⁴ This is the central theme in both *Das Brot der Frühen Jahren* and plays a major role in *Und sagte kein einziges Wort*.

²²⁵ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (147)

²²⁶ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (152)

no genuine attempt at apologizing. Hans repeats the insult again later when he nods off and begins talking in his sleep while his father is deciding just how much his conscience can allow him to give his son per month, and his father snaps at him, taking it as some kind of trick to get the better of him.²²⁷ What follows might be Hans' only serious attempt at the sort of moral communication that has been the topic of this thesis. He tells his father how he and his fellow siblings suffered as the result of their parents' warped attitude toward money, and he breaks his father's heart. However, even his heartbreak cannot bring Herr Schnier to overcome the "objective" remove that he has toward money and life, and Hans cannot bring himself to extend the hand of consolation to his father. The communion promised by moral communication remains unattainable between the Schnier men, and Hans' goal for their meeting, to secure his financial security for the future fails.

The purpose for the comparison between the frustration of communication caused by social groups and that caused by Hans Schnier created by the subjective narration of *Ansichten eines Clowns* comes into focus when one looks at the way Böll backs off from his harsh criticism of groups in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*, and how he allows Hans do to the same in *Ansichten eines Clowns*.

Passages from both works back away from a wholesale condemnation of social groups as responsible for all social ills, making room for Hans to share a part of the blame. In his lectures Böll goes out of his way to make clear that he does not wish to condemn all social groups or the urge to be a part of them. He writes, "It is not my intention to mock the urge toward society, much less to make it infamous; in this urge the desire for connectedness makes itself seen."²²⁸ Hans voices this same desire for

²²⁷ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (165)

²²⁸ Böll, *Ansichten* 110 (15)

connectedness a number of times in the novel, once in a description of attending church with Marie: “the church was empty in the most comforting way: only seven or eight people, and a few times I had the feeling that I belonged to this silent, sad collection of the bereaved of something, which in its unconsciousness, seemed so sublime.”²²⁹ Balzer notes the tension between groups and individuals, saying that in *Ansichten . . .* Böll posits the idea of the individual’s responsibility against the idea of principles of order, and against socialization of the individual (*Vergesellschaftung*) he posits neighborly love (*Mitmenschlichkeit*).²³⁰ However, as we’ve seen through our closer look at Hans’ behavior in *Ansichten . . .* the novel delivers a wicked critique of both. *Ansichten . . .* offers a critique of the hazards on either side of social groups, outlining their potential to hinder moral communication but also the individual’s potential to perpetrate the same violence to communication as groups. The intent here is not to claim that Hans is a monster who cares for nothing but money or his own selfish needs, far from it: Hans is in desperate need of emotional and spiritual support. His needs are so great, in fact, that they leave no room to consider the needs of others. This is the aspect of communication in *Ansichten . . .* that points to its relationship to the aesthetic of the humane. The lack of humane communication and connectedness is the crisis depicted in the novel and finding the origins of that crisis is its central problem. As it turns out there are two origins, in the individual and in groups. The content and the structure (narrative strategy) point to the dual problem of the individual and the group inhibiting moral communication. Though the secondary literature privileges Böll’s new direct social engagement as the , calling out the CDU and the Catholic Church, I believe that the novel expresses in addition to this new-

²²⁹ Böll, *Ansichten* 253 (161)

²³⁰ Heinrich Böll : e. Einf. in d. Gesamtwerk in Einzelinterpretationen 255 (56)

found drive to affect social change a subtext of ambivalence toward the ability of the individual artist to achieve it. The parallels between Hans Schnier's frustration with his own work as an artist and Böll's frustration in the aftermath of the failure of the *Labyrinth* journal were noted in the beginning of this section. In light of this ambivalence, Balzer's impressive reading that *Ansichten . . .* is a working example of the aesthetic of the humane implies that that aesthetic is not a closed system, but rather one which is still in the process of negotiating the validity of its own program.

Conclusion

It has been the goal of this thesis to lend support to those who have championed the aesthetic complexity of Heinrich Böll's writing. In order to do so it has mapped the interplay of form and content as they reinforce one another in his texts using communication as its example. Morality lies at the heart of the aesthetic of the humane, and since for Böll "morality and aesthetics prove themselves to be congruent" we may look to the connection between the morality lessons contained in Böll's novels and the aesthetic delivery of those lessons.²³¹ Since communication is also tightly bound to morality for Böll (recall his repeated assertions of the obligation of writer from the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*) we may seek the moral imperatives in both the actions of his characters, in their interactions (read: communication) with other characters, and the mode of narrative delivery in each text.

The three novels examined here show how Böll uses communication to emphasize the moral tenets of the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*, those tenets being family, memory, and connectedness. These books interact with the historical developments in West-German society contemporary to their writing and reinforce the moral content relating to that context with structures that re-emphasize it and often provide the means for interpretation that makes them moral. In *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* the communication is inlaid in what I have called "structural dialogues" in which the two narrators interact across the gulf of their separation by employing mirroring themes, statements and actions that create a connection and imply the ultimate re-unification of their family, cementing the moral message of the novel, which is the primacy of love and connectedness as described eleven years later in the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*.

²³¹ Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (75)

Böll continues to emphasize the moral tenets of those lectures in *Billard um halbzehn* by focusing on memory. He brings memory to the fore by offering a story that provides a broad historical scope, taking fifty years of history under examination. The three generations of the Fähmel family provide the means to examine how history is processed through memory, demonstrating the causes and effects of memory on the filial relationships that are vital to the moral action that lies at the root of the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*. The fragmentation of the narration reflects the fragmentation of the family as the older generations (Robert, Heinrich, and Johanna Fähmel) realize their obligation to their offspring to communicate the moral content of their memory, opening conversations and relationships long neglected. The memory that is forever in tension with the present and which never allows itself to be completely integrated into the present poses the foremost problem to their moral task, and remains in part unresolved in Schrella's unwillingness to become a present part of their family. The continued fragmentation of the Fähmel family indicates Böll's unwillingness to write a purely didactic morality tale about the German negotiation of memory after World War II. A family that overcomes its difficulties and leads the way into a new era of reconciliation with the past would have been precisely this, but because of his conviction that art must represent not only the real, but reality as well (as laid out in *Bekennnis zur Trümmerliteratur*) the story leaves that thread loose. Böll's willingness to embrace ambivalence finds its strongest expression in *Ansichten eines Clowns*.

Here Böll employs the subjective perspective to narrate the novel, using an unreliable narrator to destabilize the paradigm of his earlier novels in which the protagonists and the antagonists represented clearly defined attitudes toward moral behavior. The possibility of moral communication in *Ansichten . . .* is endangered by

the machinations of discrete groups, but Hans, too, is a palpable threat. Böll's newly-found orientation toward direct engagement in the politics of Germany via literary means seems antithetical to the muddied moral waters created by the subjective narration in *Ansichten . . .*, and the lack of discussion on this point among the novel's critics is surprising. If, as Balzer asserts, the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* and *Ansichten eines Clowns* are reflections of one another then perhaps the focus of the discussion of Böll's aesthetics should be focused on how they negotiate the ambivalence expressed in *Ansichten . . .* toward the ability of the artist not only to affect change in society but to trust herself to maintain enough objectivity to do more good than harm.

Böll closes the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* with a condemnation of the self-deception that everyone is “in agreement” required of the government so that it can do its job. He characterizes the relationship of the individual to the state as one of minimal input and return. “[The people] pay their taxes, pay on the statistical average their rent, their electricity and gas bills, - that is their only contact with the state – and I do not think that there is much else to be gained from this relationship.”²³² This cynical sentiment about the state is not too surprising given the attitudes expressed in his essays from the same period, but what follows is fairly shocking for someone who is considered to be a shining example of the engaged writer. Böll goes on to write “This is similar to the relationship between the writer and society.”²³³ If the public can not be expected to take any more from the labors of writers than the basic amenities of life, there seems to be little hope that an engaged writer will ever have any effect on his society, and perhaps that is just as well considering the ambivalence expressed in *Ansichten*.

²³² Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (109)

²³³ Böll, *Frankfurter* 110 (110)

Obviously this thesis raises more questions than it answers. In the process of arguing to support those who affirm Böll's depth as a writer it has raised the suspicion that for all his talent and sensitivity the product of Böll's engaged and aesthetically complex work was lost on his reading public, at least in his own estimation. To answer the questions raised here about the aesthetic repercussions of his professional frustrations would require another such thesis dealing with the works that followed the *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*. Such questions are for others better suited to the task to undertake. If this thesis has managed offer readings of Böll's novels that offer a new perspective on his use of communication in the content and the structure of his work to comment on the possibility and potency of an aesthetic of the humane, then its author is more than satisfied.

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