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The Role of The Fictitious Narrator in Heinrich Boll's Gruppenbild Mit Dame

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Hannah Elise Boon entitled "The Role of The Fictitious Narrator in Heinrich Boll's Gruppenbild Mit Dame." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in German.

John C. Osborne, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Robert L. Hiller, Henry Katz

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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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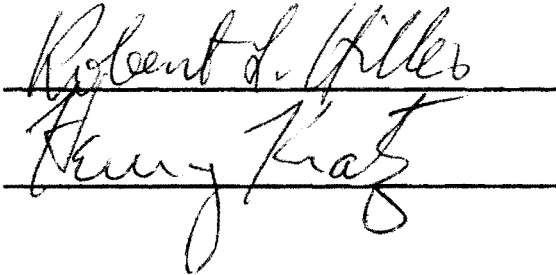
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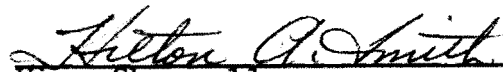


John C. Osborne, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Vice Chancellor
Graduate Studies and Research

THE ROLE OF THE FICTITIOUS NARRATOR IN HEINRICH BÖLL'S
GRUPPENBILD MIT DAME

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee

Hannah Elise Boon
December 1974

ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to analyze the role of the fictitious narrator in the 1972 Nobel prize-winning novelist Heinrich Böll's novel, Gruppenbild Mit Dame. The novel consists of a fictitious report about Leni Pfeiffer composed by the fictitious narrator who is referred to only as "the Author." The report is a collection of information and opinions gathered by the Author from various witnesses to events in Leni's life.

The first topic to be considered is the Author's purpose in writing the report. He maintains that his purpose is purely existential, and the reader must accept this reason. The next topic dealt with is the Author's style. He claims to be writing a factual report, but it is apparent that he uses many devices to influence the reader's opinions. The Author's relationship to the reader for whom he is writing is then examined. The Author develops as a character within the novel, and this development is the fourth topic of the thesis. Finally the Author's relationship to Leni is considered. It is concluded that the Author has composed a portrait of life as it is--the major issues are riddled with mundane triviality.

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INTRODUCTION

The novel, Gruppenbild Mit Dame, written by the 1972 Nobel prize-winning novelist Heinrich Böll is, as indicated by the title, a group portrait. This portrait, in the form of a report, comprises the entire novel. It is word-painted by a fictitious narrator who identifies himself merely as "the Author" [Der Verf.]. He is to be distinguished from Heinrich Böll, the author of the novel itself, and the creator of the Author and other characters. The chief subject of the portrait is a German "Lady," Leni Gruyten Pfeiffer. In the portrait, as in life, she is surrounded by the group which consists of other characters, some living and some dead. The living characters appear as witnesses who divulge to the Author information about Leni and about the deceased members of the group. From the report the reader learns that Leni was born during the years of the Weimar Republic into an upper middle-class German family. Her parents, her brother, her lover, her husband, and her teacher have all died during World War II, and although the Author learns of them only through the living witnesses, they are nevertheless painted in vivid detail. Leni's girlhood, reported by the aged Gruyten housekeeper, Marja van Doorn, was ordinary to the point of dullness. As a beautiful girl she won the heart of her

cousin Erhard. The reader learns about this relationship from Leni's friends: Lotte, a frustrated Communist, and Margret, a whore with a heart of gold. The Author fills in a picture of the years of World War II, which Leni and the group lived through as best they could, manifesting all the baseness, cruelty, love, and selfishness, as well as wisdom, and nobility, of which mankind is capable. Leni was married for a short time to Alois Pfeiffer, a man totally unworthy of her. Since he did not survive the war, however, Leni was soon a young widow. The heroine fell in love with and married Boris, a Russian prisoner of war, while both were employed making funeral wreaths at Walter Pelzer's nursery. They, along with other members of the group, lived in a burial vault, and their son Lev, who is still living as the Author writes his report, but whom he never interviews, was born there. After the War, Boris died in an accident, and Leni was again a widow. She worked in Mrs. Holthöhne's nursery for many years, and at age forty-eight, at the conclusion of the report, Leni is unemployed, carrying her Turkish lover's child, scorned by her neighbors for providing homes for foreign workers, and still loved and cared for by the remaining members of the group. Thus Leni's life appears to have been rather ordinary--she was born, grew up, loved, gave birth, and one day will die. It is the Author whose style is a

mixture of erudite prose, statistical data, and commentaries about conversations with the witnesses, who creates a moving portrait of life and humanity from its basest to its most noble extremes.

Gruppenbild Mit Dame was published in 1971, and therefore there is very little critical material extant pertaining to it, with the exception of magazine book reviews. Most of these reviews are laudatory. Richard Locke in the New York Times Book Review writes the following of the novel:

The charm of Böll's novel lies in the loving accumulation of mundane details, this mixture of the commonplace and bizarre. By tracing Leni Pfeiffer's life through half a century of German history, Böll has written a novel celebrating common humanity--or as he puts it, "natural human innocence," which remains unbroken by the weight of politics, war, depression and boom.¹

Due to the absence of critical work, the only secondary source cited in this thesis is Wayne Booth's book The Rhetoric of Fiction. This has been a source for an understanding of the literary history and characteristics of the fictitious narrator.

It is the role of the fictitious narrator, known as the Author, with which this thesis is concerned. Wayne Booth examines various types of narrators, and he makes a

¹Richard Locke, "Group Portrait with Lady," The New York Times Book Review, 6 May 1973, p. 20.

distinction between two types. These are "mere observers" and "narrator-agents, who produce some measurable effect on the course of events."² The Author in Gruppenbild Mit Dame is clearly a narrator-agent. While he perhaps does not change the course of Leni's life, he certainly controls the course of his report. Mr. Booth says:

Whether or not they are involved in the action as agents . . . narrators . . . differ markedly according to the degree and kind of distance that separates them from the author, the reader, and the other characters of the story. In any reading experience there is an implied dialogue among author, narrator, and the reader. Each of the four can range, in relation to the others, from identification to complete opposition, on any axis of value moral or intellectual, aesthetic, and even physical.³

This thesis, examining only the role of the narrator, will not be concerned with the Author's relationship to Heinrich Böll. The first topic dealt with in the paper is the Author's purpose for writing his report. Although the reader may not be satisfied with the reason which the Author gives, he has no choice but to accept it, since the Author's viewpoint is the only one to which he has access. The second topic dealt with, in Chapters II and III, is the Author's style. In Chapter II the Author's method of factual reporting is examined. In Chapter III it becomes apparent that the Author uses many devices to manipulate the facts in order to bias and distort the reader's

²Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 153-154.

³Booth, p. 155.

opinions of the various characters. The third topic considered is the Author's relationship to the reader. He writes for the reader and is therefore most concerned about this relationship. The relationship is affected by the Author's development as a character within the novel and even in his own report. In the course of his development, relationships with other members of the group result, and of particular importance is the Author's relationship to Leni, which, while always somewhat nebulous, is the motivational factor for his writing the report at all.

CHAPTER I

THE FICTITIOUS NARRATOR'S PURPOSE

In the first two-page section of the first chapter of the novel, the reader is informed of many facts about the "lady" around which the "group portrait" [Gruppenbild] is centered. Her nationality, physical appearance, present and past employment, and clothing preferences are described in detail. The reader is also told, by the way, that Leni Pfeiffer has a son who is currently in jail, that she is dowdy, and that she is pursued by creditors and plagued by disapproving neighbors. Up to this point, information somewhat colored by opinionated statements, such as how Leni might change her appearance for the better, is conveyed by an impersonal narrator. In the second section of Chapter I, however, the reader becomes aware of the first person narrator, who nevertheless consistently refers to himself in third person as simply "the Au." [Der Verf.]. The section begins as follows:

Der Verf. hat keineswegs Einblick in Lenis gesamtes Leibes-, Seelen- und Liebesleben, doch ist alles, aber auch alles getan worden, um über Leni das zu bekommen, was man sachliche Information nennt (die Auskunftspersonen werden an entsprechender Stelle sogar namhaft gemacht werden!), und was hier berichtet wird, kann mit an Sicherheit grenzender Wahrscheinlichkeit als zutreffend bezeichnet werden.⁴

⁴Heinrich Böll, Gruppenbild Mit Dame (Köln: Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1971), p. 9.

Thus, the reader learns that he is reading a report of some sort and that this report deals with the life of Leni Pfeiffer. He also learns that the report will be substantiated by various witnesses. He can expect that the report will be objective and reliable. Several other references to witnesses are made by the Author in the succeeding pages. He draws conclusions from the "statements of the informants" [Aussagen der Auskunftspersonen],⁵ and he names Margret as the "Au.'s star witness" [Hauptzeugin des Verf.].⁶ The Author takes pains to portray himself as a researcher. He mentions his "notebook" [Notizbuch].⁷ He says that he incurred considerable expenses in obtaining information pertaining to Leni's brother Heinrich Gruyten, and he reports that he was unable to avoid making visits to Alois Pfeiffer's home town to learn something about him. In Chapter III the Author mentions his "laborious researches" [mühseligen Recherchen],⁸ which indicates that he had undertaken a somewhat difficult project. Only in Chapter VIII does the narrator tell the reader that he is "totally engrossed in his role as researcher" [ganz und gar in der Rolle des

⁵Ibid., p. 9.

⁶Ibid., p. 11.

⁷Ibid., p. 69.

⁸Ibid., p. 86.

Rechercheurs].⁹ In the same sentence he says: "er [hat] doch nur, nur das einzig und allein, im Sinn . . ., eine schweigsame und verschwiegene, stolze, reuelose Person wie Leni Gruyten-Pfeiffer ins rechte Licht zu rücken. . . ."10

More than once the Author tells the reader that he is working in service of the truth. He maintains that it must be said "not out of ingratitude, merely because of devotion to facts" [Nicht aus Undankbarkeit, lediglich um der Sachlichkeit willen]¹¹ that the tea served him by all three nuns was not very strong. He says that he visited Alfred Bullhorst's village "in the service of truth" [im Dienste der Wahrheit].¹² And in defense of his somewhat dubious manner of procuring certain necessary documents he says:

Zugegeben, es ging nicht immer ganz legal zu, auch nicht immer vollkommen diskret, doch dienen geringfügige Legalitäts- und Diskretionsverletzungen hier einem heiligen Ziel: der Sachlichkeit.¹³

Despite the fact that the reader knows that he is reading a factual report written by a hard-working researcher in search of the truth about Leni Gruyten

⁹Ibid., p. 237.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., p. 30.

¹²Ibid., p. 323.

¹³Ibid., p. 374.

Pfeiffer, still he is left wondering, "Why?--What is the reason for the compilation of all this information?" He must content himself with the same explanation accorded the Hoyser brothers as to why the Author was interested in their relationship with Leni. The Author told them:

. . . es bedurfte einiger unerlässlicher Erklärungen von seiten des Verf., um klarzumachen, weswegen er gekommen war. Um sich zu informieren, sich sachlich zu informieren. Es ginge--so der Verf. in seinem kurzgefassten Exkurs--hier nicht um Sympathien, Tendenzen, Angebote, Gegenangebote. Lediglich die Sachlage sei hier interessant, keinerlei Ideologie, keinerlei Anwaltschaft; er--der Verf.--sei zu nichts bevollmächtigt, bemühe sich auch nicht um Vollmacht; die 'strittige Person' sei ihm bisher nicht ein einziges Mal persönlich gegenübergestellt worden, er habe sie lediglich zwei-, dreimal auf der Strasse gesehen, noch kein Wort mit ihr gesprochen, sein Anliegen sei, wenn auch möglicherweise bruchstückhaft, aber so wenig bruchstückhaft wie möglich, deren Leben zu recherchieren, sein--des Verf.--Auftrag sei weder von irgendeiner irdischen, noch einer überirdischen Instanz gegeben, er sei existentiell, . . .¹⁴

That he is serving no master, no ideology, that he is not taking sides for or against Leni or any of her antagonists is debatable; as to his reason for this interest in her life, this the reader must accept as existential, because the Author never admits to any other.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 337.

CHAPTER II

THE FICTITIOUS NARRATOR'S USE OF "FACTS"

The Author claims to be writing a true, objective report of the life of Leni Pfeiffer. The report consists of fourteen chapters, covering a time span of roughly seventy years. It begins in 1968 when Leni is forty-eight years old and scans the past from Leni's childhood on but also includes information on her parents' own childhoods. Information has been gathered by the Author in countless interviews with some thirty witnesses who have known Leni. These witnesses are often quoted directly and sometimes whole conversations have been transcribed from the Author's notes and tapes. The report includes facts and opinions of the witnesses about Leni, about deceased members of her family, about each other, also, the Author's judgments, opinions, and information about the witnesses. The Author also includes in his report various documents, newspaper clippings, songs, letters, and bits of personal philosophy which he deems necessary to the reader's understanding of Leni.

Most of the report is written in the past tense, except for sections during which the Author appears to have transported himself into the past and uses the tense

appropriate to the scene. He is correct in saying his report is occasionally "piecemeal" [bruchstückhaft];¹⁵ it does sometimes lack continuity and it is disorganized. Sometimes it appears that he is writing the whole report after having completed his research--he alludes to what the reader will find out in the future; at other times he appears to be writing as he proceeds with his investigations. In Chapter I, he makes reference to Chapter X when he says:

Wenige Minuten, nachdem es Leni erlaubt wird, unmittelbar in die Handlung einzutreten (das wird noch eine Weile dauern), wird sie zum ersten Mal das getan haben, was man einen Fehltritt nennen könnte. . . .¹⁶

Thus it would appear that he is writing Chapter I after his research is completed. In Chapter I, the Author also makes several references to Leni's "beloved son [who] is in jail" [geliebter Sohn, (der) im Gefangnis sitzt].¹⁷ Only in Chapter III does the reader receive the first indication that Lev is not a common criminal, and it is not until Chapters IX and XI that anything of his true nature is reported. In Chapter II the Author says: "Hier müssen, bevor einer verstorbenen Nonne ein Denkmal

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 7.

gesetzt wird, die für Lenis Bildung so entscheidend wurde wie der noch ausgiebig zu erwähnende Sowjetmensch. . . ."18 Only later does the reader learn about Rahel, the nun, and Boris, the Russian.

In Chapter I, however, the Author also mentions: "Margret liegt zur Zeit im Krankenhaus. . . ."19 Chapter XII consists of a letter from a male nurse reporting to Leni the details of Margret's death. In Chapter II, the Author says he does not know whether he will be able to afford the time and money to journey to Rome for more information about Rahel, but not until Chapter IX does the reader learn that he does indeed make the trip.

The Author's style includes heavy use of the ridiculous and the absurd. This is epitomized by his use of initials to abbreviate the names of characters already mentioned. Each time a character is re-introduced, he is referred to by his name, and thereafter in that section only by his initials. This first occurs after a quote from Henges: "Henges lebt 'unter nicht unerfreulichen finanziellen Umständen' (H. über H.)."20 Thus Marja van Doorn becomes M. v. D., Lotte Hoyser becomes Lotte H.,

¹⁸Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 12.

²⁰Ibid., p. 16.

and "der Gutachter" who submits the report on Lev becomes merely "G."

Not content to abbreviate just names, the Author goes so far as to abbreviate raw emotions such as tears, weeping, laughter, and beatitude [Tränen, Weinen, Lachen, Glückseligkeit]. He defines these words with an encyclopaedic entry, and then announces to the reader:

Da T. und W., L. und G. ausreichend erklärt sind, ihre Erklärung als Rüstzeug jederzeit nachschlagbar, braucht dieser Bericht sich nicht lange mit der Schilderung von Gemütszuständen zu befassen, nur gelegentlich auf deren Definition im Lexikon hinzuweisen, und es muss ausreichen, wenn man sich der angemessenen Abkürzung bedient.²¹

This is an extreme example of the Author's denying the true nature of emotion. Such feelings cannot be defined; besides there is no need to define them, since all readers must have felt them in one form or another.

The Author uses this device of absurd abbreviation of emotions to destroy any developing feelings in the reader of sympathy or empathy for the situations or characters. The arthritic Russian Bogakov tells of being in a German POW camp, of the struggle for survival during and immediately following the war, of deciding to remain in Germany, of never seeing his wife and children again, and of praying while rolling cigarettes from pages from a

²¹Ibid., p. 95.

prayer book. He then says to the Author:

'Und nun lass mir deine Hand und schweig,' (was der äusserst verwirrte Verf. tat, der auch bei Bogakov T. und W. entdeckte, S. spürte und L.² mit an Sicherheit grenzender Wahrscheinlichkeit vermutete.)²²

The reader may have been quite moved by the sad old man who needs to hold a human hand for a few moments, but he is jolted back to practical reality by the Author. The same device is employed as the Author describes the beauty of Leni's singing. He effectively destroys the mood he has created by referring to the "T.", "W." and "G." he felt.²³

Another method the Author uses to destroy a mood he has created is over-elaboration: he examines an incident in such detail that the significant impact of it is lost. Walter Pelzer describes to the Author an incident which took place during World War II. On Boris' first day at work at Pelzer's greenhouse, Leni shared her coffee with him. Kremp, a Nazi, resented the fact that a Russian, and therefore enemy, had better coffee than himself, and knocked the cup from the Russian's hand. A deathly silence followed during which Leni picked up the cup, washed and dried it, refilled it,

²²Ibid., pp. 290-291.

²³Ibid., p. 357.

and gave it back to Boris--a tense situation with enormous political significance, in which Leni's only interest was humanity towards another person. The Author recognizes the import of the incident, but he becomes absurdly obsessed with the length of time the deathly silence lasted:

Dieser entscheidende Auftritt Lenis Ende 43/ Anfang 44 erschien dem Verf. so wichtig, dass er umfangreiche weitere Informationen darüber sammeln wollte und noch einmal alle Überlebenden dieser Szene aufsuchte. Vor allem schien ihm die Dauer des 'tödlichen Schweigens' von Pelzer als zu lang angegeben.²⁴

He ". . . felt obliged to establish the possible duration of the deathly silence by way of an experiment" [. . . fühlte sich verpflichtet, die mögliche Dauer des tödlichen Schweigens experimentell festzustellen].²⁵ This he proceeds to do three times, arriving at a mean length of forty-eight seconds. Is he so insensitive as to not understand that it is the existence of the silence and not its length which is important?

The Author is even more ridiculously over-analytical when he remarks about the grammatical error in Boris's expression of love for Leni. The Author says:

Leni konnte Boris vor der Toilette rasch zuflüstern: "Ich liebe dich," und er flüsterte rasch zurück:

²⁴Ibid., p. 186.

²⁵Ibid., p. 187.

"Ich auch." Diese grammatikalisch falsche Verkürzung muss man ihm verzeihen. Er hätte natürlich sagen müssen: Ich dich auch, aber möglicherweise hätte ihn das Du sehr an das "Du mich auch" erinnert.²⁶

Just when the reader is engrossed in contemplating the images of Boris' and Leni's developing relationship and their connubial retreat into the burial chapel, the Author interrupts with the following information:

Mit fast wissenschaftlicher Exaktheit lässt sich an Hand der Bombenangriffsstatistik feststellen, dass Leni und Boris zwischen August und Dezember 44 fast vierundzwanzig volle Stunden miteinander verbrachten, am 17. 10. allein drei Stunden hintereinander.²⁷

He has arrived at these figures by calculating the number and duration of the Allied air raids which were the only times Leni and Boris had alone together. The reader might wonder if such exactness is necessary for his appreciation of the poignancy of the situation. The Author further distracts the reader as he examines the burial vault in which Boris and Leni lived together. He reports the following:

Es war schmutzig im Inneren der Kapelle, kühl und feucht, und der Verf. riskierte ein paar Streichhölzer (ob er sie dem Finanzamt als Unkosten anlasten kann, ist noch ungeklärt, da er als starker Raucher ohnehin einen ansehnlichen Verbrauch daran hat, es muss noch--durch

²⁶Ibid., p. 214.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 227-228.

hochbezahlte amtliche und private Fachkräfte--
geprüft werden, ob etwa dreizehn bis sechzehn
Zündhölzer als anteilige Betriebskosten
abgeschrieben werden können). . . .²⁸

Thus, the Author's style is a blend of detailed reality and poetic symbolism. He gives detailed descriptions of such things as the wreath-making industry and Mrs. Holthöhne's apartment. He is also capable, however, of posing such philosophical questions as: "whether the youngest son, Kurt, then still in his mother's womb, cried too" [. . . ob der jüngste Sohn Kurt, der sich noch im Mutterleib befand, mitgeweint hat],²⁹ when his father was killed. And he combines the two styles when, philosophizing about the quality of life, he becomes ridiculously mundane in calculating the exact amount for which some women would sell themselves:

. . . für eine Tasse Kaffee im Wert von achtzehn Pfennigen (mit Trinkgeld zwanzig, genaugenommen neunzehnkommaacht Pfennige--aber welcher Münze fällt es schon ein, Nullkommaeins- oder Nullkommazweipfennigstücke zu prägen, von denen zehn bzw. fünf immerhin einen nackten baren Pfennig ergäben.³⁰

The Author's work does indeed satisfy his purpose to a point. He does appear to have researched every accessible detail in Leni's life. And he has certainly

²⁸Ibid., pp. 305-306.

²⁹Ibid., p. 93.

³⁰Ibid., p. 130.

devoted himself to objectivity, but not exclusively, and therein lies the question of the contradiction between the Author's avowed strict adherence to facts and objectivity and his constant judgments, postulations, prejudicial remarks, and manipulations of characters and scenes.

CHAPTER III

THE FICTITIOUS NARRATOR'S BIAS AND DISTORTION OF "FACTS"

The Author says in at least four instances that his report is accurate with a probability bordering on certainty. He says: ". . . was hier berichtet wird, kann mit an Sicherheit grenzender Wahrscheinlichkeit als zutreffend bezeichnet werden."³¹ He calculates: ". . . Leni [hat] in ihrem bisherigen Leben mit an Sicherheit grenzender Wahrscheinlichkeit im ganzen wahrscheinlich zwei dutzendmal einem Mann beigewohnt. . . ." ³² In an explanation to Lotte's reference to an unspecified church, he says that it can be assumed with "probability bordering on certainty," [mit an Sicherheit grenzender Wahrscheinlichkeit] ³³ that she meant the Roman Catholic church. And he maintains that Boris "weighed (with a probability bordering on certainty) 120 pounds at most" [wog mit an Sicherheit grenzender Wahrscheinlichkeit höchstens 54 Kilogramm]. ³⁴ It may be true that the facts he reports

³¹Ibid., p. 9.

³²Ibid., p. 10.

³³Ibid., p. 103.

³⁴Ibid., p. 166.

are accurate; nevertheless, it is also quite certain that he has definite opinions about each of the characters and situations and that these opinions are clearly reflected by various stylistic maneuvers.

One of the most sly and effective devices for expressing exactly what he thinks about a remark made by a character is the use of punctuation marks, such as the question mark or exclamation point, in parenthesis following a quote. He reports: ". . . während des Krieges verzichtete [Leni] vorübergehend aufs Rauchen, um jemandem, den sie liebte (nicht ihrem Mann!), die Zigaretten zuzustecken."³⁵ Lotte says: ". . . dann aber kriegte Margret [certain information about Pelzer] durch ihren Bonzen (?? Der Verf.) heraus. . . ." ³⁶ A moral judgment is clearly implied by the Author. He quotes Bogakov as saying of Boris:

. . . Das Misstrauen gegenüber dem Mädcl dauerte natürlich nicht lange, einen Tag, oder zwei, und nachdem [Leni] ihm die Hand aufgelegt hatte, und es ihm passiert war (??), nun . . . "³⁷

If the reader had not wondered before what happened, he certainly does when he sees the suggestive question marks.

³⁵Ibid., p. 11.

³⁶Ibid., p. 154.

³⁷Ibid., p. 178.

The Author quotes Margret as saying she had asked Boris:
 "... ob er denn wirklich nicht geahnt hätte, was er
 anrichtete, als er der Leni Ende 44 (!) einen jüdischen
 Schriftsteller empfahl. . . ."38 The Author's surprise
 at Boris' foolishness is evident. The nasty implication
 is clear when the Author quotes a woman as describing
 Leni as follows: "Eine Person von merkwürdiger Schönheit,
 deren Reiz auf Männer sogar ich als Frau beurteilen kann
 (??Der Verf.)."39

The Author frequently indulges himself in plays of
 the imagination. He is inconsistent; sometimes he makes
 a great show of marking various hypotheses as his own,
 and other times he states obvious hypothetical conjectures
 as facts. At one point Mr. Exalted projects rhetorically
 about what the Author might be thinking. The Author pro-
 tests: "(Der Verf. dachte gar nichts, sein einziges
 Begehren stand nach sachlicher Information.)"40 From the
 first page of the report he makes hypotheses and draws
 conclusions. He says: "Würde Leni ihr Haar kürzer
 schneiden, es noch ein wenig grauer färben, sie sähe wie
 eine gut erhaltene Vierzigerin aus. . . ."41

³⁸Ibid., p. 242.

³⁹Ibid., p. 298.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 175.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 7.

By looking at the Gruyten family photos, the Author draws conclusions about their personalities. He examines the photo of Helene Gruyten, Leni's deceased mother, whom the Author has never met. He draws conclusions not only about what kind of woman she was, but also about what kind of woman she might have been under other circumstances, which the Author imagines. He says first only: ". . . [sie] sieht entzückend aus . . .,"⁴² a comment on her physical appearance. Then he comments: ". . . es muss gesagt werden: man sieht, dass möglicherweise eine Intelektuelle [sic] an ihr verlorengegangen ist, vielleicht sogar eine potentielle linke Intelektuelle [sic]. . . ."⁴³ He proceeds to outline how, had her education been different, she might have become a good doctor; he conjectures about what her literary tastes might have been, as opposed to what they were: "Ganz sicher ist--wären solche frivolen Bücher auch nur als potentielle Lektüre in ihre Nähe geraten-, sie wäre eher eine Proust- als eine Joyceleserin geworden. . . ."⁴⁴ He also presents as a certainty, merely from looking at the photograph, that Helene was not a very sensual person: "Eins ist ganz

⁴²Ibid., p. 67.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 67-68.

sicher, wenn man das Hochzeitsreisebild aus dem Jahr 1919 betrachtet . . .: - eine verhinderte Kurtisane war Leni's Mutter ganz gewiss nicht. . . ."45

At one point he digresses in his analysis of the probable relationship between Leni's parents and imagines what kind of children might have resulted in a union between Marja van Doorn and Hubert Gruyten, Leni's father. Before speculating on what Leni's life would have been if Alois, Erhard, Heinrich or any combination of the three men had lived, the Author announces that the possibilities he is presenting are only hypothetical, and that he is taking the liberty of projecting his own opinions. He says:

Hier erlaubt sich der Verf. einen erheblichen Eingriff, indem er sich gestattet, eine Art Schicksalshypothese aufzustellen, sich Gedanken darüber zu machen, was aus Leni hätte werden können, müssen, sollen, wenn. . . .46

Another way in which the Author has definite control over what bias the report will have is that he decides who will be interviewed and what quotes and excerpts and additional documents will be included in the report. The figure of Sister Rahel is an example of the the Author's considered selection of information. The amount of information which investigation of her story

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 68.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 126.

yields pertaining to Leni is hardly in proportion to the amount of time, money, and energy which the Author devotes to dredging up information about the nun's fate. Her story is, however, an effective vehicle for expression of the Author's anti-Nazism and is possibly an indication that he also discerns hypocrisy in the Roman Catholic Church.

The Author includes in the report several documents containing quotations from Rosenberg and Albert Speer pertaining to the use and treatment of slave labor by the Nazi regime during World War II. These reports have no real bearing on the life of Leni Pfeiffer, and the Author could have just as easily not included them, but they certainly have the effect of causing the reader to reflect a moment about the evils of the Nazi government. The Author is also quite skillful at prejudicing the reader's judgments of various witnesses and of characters who are deceased or absent. Five examples are Heinrich Gruyten, Alois Pfeiffer, Pelzer, Kurt Hoyser, and Leni herself.

The Author repeatedly assures the reader through quotes from Leni, Margret, and Marja van Doorn:

""[Heinrich Gruyten war] so lieb, so furchtbar lieb und gut. . . ."⁴⁷ Marja reports that he was educated and

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 54.

genteel without being proud; even the Author himself compares him to Winckelmann, Novalis, and Goethe, a lofty comparison which he banalizes by adding that Heinrich had been home only four times in eleven years. Having decided that the three women were prejudiced by love of the boy, the Author decides to seek out "more objective information" [sachliche information]⁴⁸ from the two Jesuit priests. The Author makes the Jesuits' glowing remarks laughable in two ways: he refers to the priests as "J. (esuit) I und J. II."⁴⁹ Then, although claiming to make the above abbreviations in the interest of simplification of the report, the Author is not content merely with telling the reader that their opinions about Heinrich were almost identical; he proceeds to quote each of their statements verbatim. The first priest says: "'Er war so deutsch, so deutsch und so edel.'" The second says: "'Er war so edel, so edel und so deutsch.'"⁵⁰ The Author continues in this manner through eight further comments. He then includes three letters written by Heinrich. He says of one of the letters: "er ist in klar leserlicher, lateinischer,

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 56.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 57.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 56.

ungemein sympathischer und intelligenter Schrift verfasst, die besserer Gegenstände würdig wäre."⁵¹ That is something of an understatement, since the three letters are hardly letters at all, merely directives to soldiers on proper treatment of the enemy, on deportment, and on hygiene. The reader is left with the impression that Heinrich was a pretty but vapid military doll, despite all the quoted opinions to the contrary.

Chapter IV begins with the words:

Was nun folgt, könnte die Überschrift tragen:
 Leni begeht eine Dummheit, Leni verlässt den
 Pfad der Tugend--oder: Was ist denn nur mit
 Leni los?⁵²

There follows immediately a quote from Old Hoyser in which, describing an unnamed person, he says: ". . . er war nicht gerade übel, der Junge, nur ein Spinner, kein guter Spinner . . ., mit der Neigung zum Gigantismus, die uns nun gar nicht lag."⁵³ Thus the stage is set for the introduction of Alois Pfeiffer, Leni's husband. As if the atmosphere were not already negative enough, the Author proceeds with the words: "Hier müssen unbedingt, obwohl er nur eine Charginrolle spielt, leider ein paar Worte

⁵¹Ibid., p. 58.

⁵²Ibid., p. 106.

⁵³Ibid.

über den von Hoyser so niederschmetternd charakterisierten Alois Pfeiffer und seine Sippe, seinen Hintergrund gesagt werden."⁵⁴ True, what Hoyser says is "withering" [niederschmetternd], but is it the Author who characterizes this period of Leni's life as foolish, and it is the Author who, using the word "unfortunately," [leider] begrudgingly devotes only "a few words" [ein paar Worte] to the man who was the heroine's husband. The reader is already left with the distinct impression that Alois is a not very attractive character. The Author says that he has not included any examples of Alois' poetry: ". . . nicht eins, nicht eine Zeile erreichte auch nur mit Abstand die Aussagekraft der von Erhard Schweigert bekannten."⁵⁵ Obviously the reader can only accept the Author's judgment, since he is not allowed to see examples of either boy's poetry. After creating a somewhat negative impression about Leni's husband, however, the Author makes an ineffective attempt at fairness:

Wendet man schliesslich die immer erstrebenswerte Prise Barmherzigkeit an, auch ein Minimum von dem, was man Gerechtigkeit nennen könnte, und stellt in Rechnung, welch eine extrem schlechte Erziehung A. bekam, so war er letzten Endes gar nicht so übel, und je weiter er von seiner Familie entfernt war, desto besser wurde

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 107.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 112.

er, da ihn in der Fremde keiner mehr als zukünftigen Kardin- oder Admiral sah.⁵⁶

In the case of Pelzer, the Author again employs the technique of maintaining one opinion himself while leading the reader to another. He emphasizes: "Es muss noch einmal eindringlich ins Gedächtnis gerufen werden: Pelzer wirkt in keiner Weise obskur, schmierig, verdächtig."⁵⁷ However, by making such an issue about what a fine fellow Pelzer is, the Author in effect raises the reader's doubts about the plausibility of this judgment, as does Pelzer himself by constantly repeating that he is "not a monster" [kein Unmensch].⁵⁸ The Author also casts aspersions on Pelzer's sincerity when he speculates about the genuineness of Pelzer's tears when speaking of Boris.⁵⁹ The Author does concede, however: [ich habe] "ziemliche Sympathie für Pelzer entwickelt. . . ." ⁶⁰

The Author continually maintains that he is interested in fairness and objectivity. In reference to the Hoysers he explains why he took considerable pains and time to investigate them:

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 117.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 210.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 208.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 275.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 367.

. . . um der Objektivität, der Gerechtigkeit, der Wahrheit willen, auch, um eine rein emotionelle Stellungnahme tunlichst zu vermeiden, auch um der Informationspflicht willen, in das Hauptquartier der Gegenseite vorzudringen.⁶¹

The idea that the Hoyzers were on the "opposition" [Gegenseite] implies partisanship, and it is clear that the Author sees himself on the side opposing the Hoyzers, that is, on Leni's side. The reports by Kurt and Werner Hoyser about their relationship with Lotte, Leni, and Lev are given in a "condensation, verifiable from the Au.'s notes" [Zusammenfassung, durch die Notizen des Verf. verifizierbar].⁶² The report is condensed and contains relevant direct quotes; the Author injects few personal comments and then only after making it clear that his views are subjective. At one point he says in a parenthetical remark:

(Die Anführungszeichen stammen vom Verf., der aus Werner Hoyzers Worten nicht ganz genau heraushören konnte, ob er hier zitierte, rezitierte oder bloss ein Zitat in seine eigene Sprache übernommen hatte; es muss als ungeklärt gelten, ob die Anführungszeichen hier berechtigt sind. Sie sind lediglich als Vorschlag zu betrachten.)⁶³

The Author does not need to condemn Kurt and Werner. Their own words show them to be bigoted hypocrites. Perversely, the Author says of Kurt:

⁶¹Ibid., p. 334.

⁶²Ibid., p. 343.

⁶³Ibid., p. 349.

Was ihn betraf, hatte der Verf. sehr viele Vorurteile korrigieren müssen, hatte er ihm doch nach allen mitgeteilten Details wie eine Mischung von Hyäne und Wolf vorgeschwebt, als rücksichtsloser Ökonomieritter; doch hatte Kurt H. bei näherem Zusehen geradezu sanfte Augen. . . . Kein Zweifel: Kurt Hoyser war ein sensibler Mensch. . . .⁶⁴

In Chapter I the Author deliberately creates the impression in the first paragraph that Leni is a dowdy, not especially attractive woman. In the first paragraph of Chapter II he describes her as having been "striking" [bemerkenswert]⁶⁵ by the age of seventeen. In Chapter VI, when he summarizes what he knows about Leni, the words are negative, as were those of the first description, but the overall impression remains good, and by the end of the novel, it is clear that the Author adores Leni. Thus, the Author's descriptions of Heinrich, Pelzer, and Kurt are positive while producing a negative impression, but in Leni's case, even negative descriptions produce a positive impression. In the case of Alois, the Author gives a negative description and creates a negative impression; here his attempt at fairness fails completely, and it is evident that he has no use whatever for this deceased man whom he has never met.

The Author has written a report which the reader

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 351.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 26.

may assume is as exhaustive as possible, concerning the life of Leni Pfeiffer. In that sense, the Author has succeeded at what he attempted. At maintaining objectivity and a neutral stance, the Author is certainly less successful. After reading the report, the reader must certainly have, as does the Author, certain positive and negative reactions to the characters.

CHAPTER IV

THE FICTITIOUS NARRATOR'S RELATIONSHIP TO AND CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE READER

Although no reason other than the existential can be established for the Author's report on Leni, it is apparent that he has written the report with someone in mind--namely the reader. From the beginning of the report, the Author establishes and maintains a certain distance and formality between himself and the reader. He does this quite effectively by consistently referring to himself as simply "Der Verf."⁶⁶ Although he is not consistent and often makes opinionated statements which he does not identify as necessarily his own, he often quotes himself directly, as in the following example:

Heinrich und Erhard sehen beide 'irgendwie deutsch aus' (Der Verf.), 'irgendwie' (Der Verf.) gleichen sie beide sämtlichen auftreibbaren Bildern deutscher Bildungsjünglinge. . . . Sachlich festzustellen ist, dass E. blond, H. braunhaarig ist; dass beide ebenfalls lächeln, E. 'innig und gänzlich unreflektiert vor sich hin' (Der Verf.), lieb auch und ausgesprochen nett.⁶⁷

Although it is obviously only the Author's opinion that the boys look like cultured German youth and that Erhard

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 23.

looks nice, the Author quotes only those comments of his own choosing.

The Author shows a clear consciousness of the presence of the reader in several ways. He worries about the reader's impatience with various aspects of the report and about how the reader must be reacting to various individuals and situations. The Author says: "Was ist das für ein Mensch, fragt sich der immer ungeduldiger werdende Leser gewiss, was ist das für ein Mensch . . .?"⁶⁸ He is speculating about what the reader's impression of Hubert Gruyten might be. He mentions the reader's impatience again when he asks: "Bemerkt der ungeduldige Leser, dass hier massenhaft Happy-Ends stattfinden?"⁶⁹ The Author carries this speculation about the reader's impressions to an extreme when he projects what two different readers might think of Leni:

Nun ist deutlich zu spüren, dass der bis hierhin mehr oder weniger geduldige Leser ungeduldig wird und sich die Frage stellt: verflucht, ist diese Leni etwa vollkommen? Antwort: fast. Andere Leser--je nach ideologischer Ausgangsbasis--werden die Frage anders stellen: verflucht, was ist diese Leni denn eigentlich für ein Ferkel? Antwort: sie ist keins.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 73.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 372.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 53.

The Author is addressing another segment of his reading public when he says:

. . . so werden auch bildungsanspruchsvolle Leser vielleicht geneigt sein zuzugeben, dass [Boris] nicht allzuweit unter Leni stand, jedenfalls als Liebhaber ihrer würdig und--wie sich herausstellen wird--ihrer wert.⁷¹

Moreover, it is clear to the reader that the Author wants him to agree that Boris is worthy of Leni.

Another way in which the Author indicates his awareness of the reader is by answering in parentheses rhetorical questions and remarks addressed to him by various witnesses. In an interview with Bogakov, the following appears: "' . . . ich hab den Jungen gern gehabt, wenn Sie wissen wollen' (der Verf. wollte es wissen, der Verf.). . . ." ⁷² The Author is quoting Bogakov's remarks and then, for the reader's sake, answering his remark of convention. He not only answers the question, he attributes the answer in parentheses to himself, the effect of which is to show a ludicrous concern for proper documentation. The Author intrudes himself again in this verbatim transcription of Mrs. Holthöhne's words:

Ich liebe dieses Land und die Leute, die es bewohnen: sie sind nur in die falsche Geschichte geraten, und nun mögen Sie mir mit

⁷¹Ibid., p. 167.

⁷²Ibid., p. 179.

so viel Hegel kommen, wie Sie wollen (der Verf. hatte nicht vor, mit Hegel zu kommen! Der Verf.). . . .⁷³

He is indignant that she should think he intended to counter her argument with Hegelian philosophy, and he wants the reader to know this. The exclamation point emphasizes his indignation. Again he attributes to himself a remark that is quite obviously his.

The Author defends himself repeatedly in a long monologue by a man he will identify only as "Mr. Exalted" [der hochgestellte Herr]. The following examples are excerpted from the transcript of Mr. Exalted's remarks:

Glauben Sie etwa, ich wäre blind und taub und gefühllos gewesen? (Lauter Dinge, die der Verf. nie behauptet hatte.) . . . Ich fand ihn, aber ich sage Ihnen (drohende Handbewegung gegen den vollkommen, aber auch vollkommen unschuldigen Verf.). . . .--ich fand ihn. . . . und denken Sie vielleicht, Erich von Kahm hätte das allein entscheiden können? (Der Verf. dachte gar nichts, sein einziges Begehren stand nach sachlicher Information.).⁷⁴

It is not to Mr. Exalted that the Author addresses these remarks, but to the reader.

Another way in which the Author exhibits his concern for the reader is by including information in the report which does not pertain to Leni but which will help the

⁷³Ibid., p. 156.

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 174-175.

reader understand various situations. The Author says: "Spätergeborene mögen sich fragen, wieso im Jahr 1942/43 Kränze kriegswichtig waren. Die Antwort lautet: um Beerdigungen auch weiterhin so würdig wie möglich zu gestalten."⁷⁵ The "Spätergeborene" are the younger readers, and the Author fears that they might not understand the significance of wreath-making since they were born after World War II. Then he says: "Sollte 'irgendwo' das Vorurteil bestehen, die Kunst, Kränze zu binden, sei unwesentlich, so muss hier--schon um Lenis willen--energisch widersprochen werden."⁷⁶ 'Irgendwo' refers obliquely to the reading public.

The Author warns the reader against accepting as fact all statements made by the witnesses. He notes for example: "Bei Marja van Doorn muss im Falle des alten G. zu einer gewissen Vorsicht gemahnt werden. . . ."⁷⁷ Thus he reminds the reader that since Marja was infatuated with Gruyten, she is possibly not a reliable witness concerning him. Of Leni's best friend he writes:

Da Margret selbst die einzige Zeugin für diese Vorgänge ist, mag hier eine gewisse Vorsicht am Platze sein; der Verf. selbst hat allerdings den

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 145.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 65.

Eindruck von Margrets absoluter Glaubwürdigkeit.⁷⁸

In this case, he warns the reader of Margret's possible fallibility as a witness and then assures him that he himself has no doubts at all about her reliability.

Occasionally the Author asks the reader's permission to comment:

. . . diese Melancholie [Pelzer's], so schien dem Verf., steigert sich von Besuch zu Besuch, und zwar--wenn man dem Verf. diesen psychologischen Schluss erlauben möchte--liegt bei Pelzer ein überraschender Grund für diese Melancholie vor: Liebeskummer.⁷⁹

This is only one instance in which he asks the reader's permission, and the Author certainly does not always accord him this courtesy.

The Author sometimes asks for the reader's participation in some of his own experiences. He commands the reader: "Man stelle sich vor: man weiss dort [in the Roman convent] von Leni!"⁸⁰ Then he asks the reader to imagine the scene in the convent which he describes:

Man muss sich das vorstellen: Rom! Pinien-schatten. Zikaden, Ventilatoren, Tee, Makronengebäck, Zigaretten, etwa sechs Uhr am

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 48.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 270.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 324.

Abend, eine leiblich wie geistig gleichermassen
verführerische Person. . . .⁸¹

He wants the reader to experience the same strong feelings
which he himself felt.

It is apparent that the Author is quite aware of
the reader's presence. It is important to him that the
reader understand what he is saying, and he is concerned
about the reader's perception of himself as a person,
not just as an impersonal reporter. It would even seem
that he wants the reader to like him or at the very
least, to accord him the respect which he feels he
deserves.

⁸¹Ibid.

CHAPTER V

THE FICTITIOUS NARRATOR'S DEVELOPMENT AS A CHARACTER

The "group portrait," of course, is meant to focus on Leni, the heroine of the novel, and she is surrounded by the many characters whose lives have been touched by hers at some point. The portrait is composed and painted by the Author. The composition of all works of art is greatly affected by the character of the producer. The producer can manipulate the degree to which and the manner in which he injects his own personality into his work, but even in the most anonymous and impersonal creation, the past experiences, prejudices, thoughts, and characteristics of the producer must play an integral part.

The persona of the Author as the creator of the group portrait is at least as important as Leni in the novel Gruppenbild Mit Dame. During the course of the novel, the Author develops from an almost invisible reporter to a definite personality. From the beginning of the report he strives to retain his anonymity by referring to himself as "der Verfasser," which he further impersonalizes by abbreviating it to "der Verf." The reader

never knows his name, his age, or anything about his physical appearance, but by the end of the report the reader has been exposed to enough subtly conveyed information about the Author to perceive him as a definite personality and perhaps to feel even a fondness for, if not an understanding of him.

In the first two-thirds of the report, the Author is fairly successful in his efforts to maintain his anonymity, although not his professed impartiality. The reader learns very few details of his personal life until Chapter IX of the report. Up until that point the reader can surmise that the Author has definite anti-Nazi sentiments, that he is well-educated, that he is kind, although with what motives one is not sure. After that point the Author emerges as a very human character about whose personal habits, background, and love relationships the reader learns.

The first evidence of human nature that the reader sees in the Author is his appreciation of female beauty. The Author says:

Zur Haut von Schwester Cecilia noch eine Bemerkung: es waren noch milchige Stellen zu erkennen, weichweiss, nicht ganz so trocken; der Verf. gesteht freimütig, dass er in sich den möglicherweise frivolen Wunsch verspürte, mehr von der Haut dieser äusserst liebenswürdigen

zölibaren Greisin zu sehen, mag ihm auch dieser Wunsch den Verdacht der Gerontophilie einbringen.⁸²

Later he says that his research is tedious and that he finds pleasurable the sight of the blushing Lotte.⁸³

Evidences of his personal habits appear with increasing frequency during the course of the report. He says that Mrs. Holthöhne showed an "obvious dislike of chain smokers" [offensichtliche Abneigung gegen Kettenraucher]⁸⁴ among whom the reader may assume the Author to be numbered. He says that ". . . for health reasons he usually preferred to walk there [to Margret's]" [er schon aus gesundheitlichen Gründen meistens zu Fuss dorthin ging. . . .]⁸⁵ And the reader learns that he is a boxing fan when he says: "Der Verf. (ohnehin durch den Boxkampf Clay-Frazier mit seinen Recherchen in Verzug geraten) geriet in einige Gewissensnot. . . ."⁸⁶ The reader learns even that the Author does not possess a business card.⁸⁷

⁸²Ibid., p. 32.

⁸³Ibid., p. 86.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 193.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 320.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 319.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 340.

Throughout the whole report it is apparent that the Author has only scorn for anything or anyone connected with Nazism. Early in the report he mocks those Germans who tend to minimize the horrors of the Nazi atrocities. He says the following of Marja van Doorn:

Sie ist entsetzt über das, was Leni widerfährt und ihr angedroht wird, ist sogar bereit, gewisse historische Greuel, die sie bisher nicht gerade für unmöglich gehalten, in ihrer Quantität aber angezweifelt hat, zu glauben.⁸⁸

This tone of light irony is used often to show his anti-Nazi feelings. He reports that Leni was not demoted to a special school because she had twice been chosen by a commission of racial experts as "the most German girl in the school" [das deutscheste Mädels der Schule].⁸⁹ The Author then poses to the reader the question: "Konnte man etwa das 'deutscheste Mädels der Schule' auf die Hilfsschule schicken. . . ?"⁹⁰ He refers to the eagle and swastika on the uniforms of Heinrich Gruyten and Erhard Schweigert in their photographs as "defects" [Mängel].⁹¹ The Author mentions that Leni joined the "Nazi girls' organization" [Naziorganisation für Mädchen].⁹²

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 14.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 27.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 23.

⁹²Ibid., p. 26.

His anti-Nazi prejudice is emphasized by the parenthetical lament to the deity and by the adverbs "even" [sogar] and "still" [noch] when he says: "in deren Uniform sie sogar (Gott seis geklagt!) noch nett aussieht."⁹³ He calls Hitler's racial theories "extremely vulgar" [äusserst vulgär].⁹⁴ In Chapter VIII the Author directly attacks Nazism. He is concerned with Leni's personal situation at the end of the war. In order to give the reader an idea of the general situation, he includes entire reports concerning the mistreatment of condemned Soviet prisoners at the hands of the German army. The Author's disgust with the situation shows in the heavy ironic tone in which he addresses to the reader the following:

Nun, wichtig ist zu erkennen, dass die Eroberung von Weltteilen oder Welten keineswegs so einfach ist und dass auch diese Leute ihre Probleme hatten und dass sie sie mit deutscher Gründlichkeit zu regeln versuchten und mit deutscher Akribie aktenkundig machten. Nur nichts improvisieren! Notdurft bleibt Notdurft, und es geht nun einmal nicht, dass man Menschen, die man hinrichten soll, schon als Tote angeliefert bekommt!⁹⁵

Although the Author never reveals any facts pertaining to his own educational background, it is apparent

⁹³Ibid., p. 50.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 109.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 241.

from his frequent literary, artistic, and historical allusions that he is educated in the Humanities. He proposes that Leni would surely have read Beckett if only her literary advisor had known of the playwright.⁹⁶

He says that Hubert Gruyten looks "as if he had stepped out of a painting by Hieronymus Bosch" [als wäre er einem Gemälde von Hieronymus Bosch entsprungen].⁹⁷

Referring to a conference of Leni's friends concerning her desperate plight he notes: "In Schirtensteins Wohnung ging es zu, wie es in einigen Nebenräumen des Smolny in St. Petersburg im Oktober 1917 zugegangen sein mag."⁹⁸ The Author feels knowledgeable enough in German literature to describe Heinrich Gruyten as follows:

". . . zwölf Jahre seines Lebens lang . . . [existierte er] wie ein Geist, fast wie ein Gott, eine Mischung von jungem Goethe und jungem Winckelmann mit einer Beimischung von Novalis fern von der Familie. . . ." ⁹⁹

That the Author is a man capable of human kindness and sympathies becomes slowly apparent through the course of the report. He is not ashamed to admit that he used

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 20.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 67.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 355.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 54.

cigarettes and liquor to obtain information from the dying Margret, but it does not appear that he begrudges her these gifts. The Author "(der sich hier ausnahmsweise in den Vordergrund drängen muss)"¹⁰⁰ decides to rig up a cigarette holder so that the arthritic Bogakov will be able to smoke by himself. The Author defends himself from possible suspicion of ulterior motives when he says:

Dass der Verf. auf Grund der Konstruktion des "bekömmlichen Rauchgalgens" bei B. gewisse Sympathien erworben hatte und damit dessen Gesprächigkeit förderte, lässt sich nicht leugnen, so wenig wie die Tatsache, dass er dessen bescheidenes Taschengeld von 25 Mark monatlich durch Zigarettengeschenke verbesserte, nicht nur--wie er an Eides Statt versichert--aus egoistischen Gründen.¹⁰¹

The Author shows his humanitarianism in wartime when in answer to a rhetorical question directed to him by Mr. Exalted, he writes in parentheses:

(Vorwurf in der Stimme unberechtigt, da der Verf. zwar nie versucht hat, auch nie die Möglichkeit hatte, irgend jemand irgendwo herauszuholen, aber einige Gelegenheiten, Gefangene gar nicht erst zu machen oder laufen zu lassen, was er auch getan hat.)¹⁰²

The Author appears to be a rather emotional but at the same time inhibited sort of fellow. He says that he

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 168.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 168-169.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 174-175.

cannot listen to a tape of Leni's singing "without tears streaming down his cheeks (Au.)" [. . . ohne dass ihm die Tränen nur so über die Wangen strömen (Der Verf.)].¹⁰³ In reference to Pelzer's account of the birth of Leni's baby, the Author writes:

Der Verf. gesteht freimütig, dass auch ihn das alles ziemlich aufgewühlt hatte und dass er mühsam zwei, drei Tränen, die ihm in die Augen stiegen, als er sich ans Steuer seines Autos setzte, unterdrücken musste.¹⁰⁴

He avoided, however, "giving away to excessive sentimentality" [. . . allzusehr in Rührseligkeit zu verfallen].¹⁰⁵ In Chapter X of the report, however, he tells of the emotions he feels when he hears Leni singing across the way while he is taking a bath. He says ". . . Der Verf. [konnte] die T. nur mühsam zurückhalten. . . , und [liess] sie schliesslich, weil er sich fragte, warum immer zurückhalten, unaufgehalten strömen. . . ." ¹⁰⁶ Thus he not only becomes freer with personal revelations, he also gives reign to previously controlled emotions.

One's fantasies are often indicative of certain aspects of one's character, and this is certainly true of the Author. He intrudes his character most notably,

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 282.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 357.

showing a remarkable capacity for fantasy, in his hypothesis about what Leni's life might have been had the men important to her lived:

Da es irgendwo im Weltall gewiss einen noch nicht entdeckten unbekannten Flugkörper gibt, in dem ein Riesenc Computer, wahrscheinlich von der Grösse Bayerns, installiert ist, der hypothetische Lebensläufe nur so ausspuckt, müssen wir wohl warten, bis dieses Ding endlich entdeckt ist.¹⁰⁷

His imagination continues on the theme of giant computers when he states further that there exist other ones which study what human secretions cause various physical characteristics and which calculate emotions in terms of weight. He admits no doubt that these computers do indeed exist; it is only a matter of waiting until they are discovered: "Es muss hier endgültig festgestellt werden, dass noch viele UFOs mit vielen Computern noch nicht entdeckt sind."¹⁰⁸ He begins to philosophize about the quality of life. In an emotional outburst he exclaims:

Verflucht, sollen Verf. denn alle diese Probleme lösen? Wozu haben wir die Wissenschaft, wenn sie die teuren Dinger losschicken, um Mondstaub zu kassieren oder ödes Gestein heimzubringen, während keiner in der Lage ist, jenes UFO auch nur zu orten, das über die Relativität von Lebensgütern Auskunft geben könnte.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 127.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 130.

He is greatly disturbed by the fact that the quality of life is relative and what is all to one person is a mere nothing to another. He laments: "Was sind das für Zustände? Wo bleibt da die Gerechtigkeit."¹¹⁰ Then, as if embarrassed by this display of feeling, he attempts to deny it and regain control of himself: "Nun, es soll hier lediglich angedeutet werden, dass viele Fragen offenbleiben."¹¹¹

Conclusions that the Author is a chain smoker, that he is educated, and that he hates Nazis must be drawn by the reader. However, as the report progresses, the Author actually tells the reader more and more facts about himself. He no longer leaves it to the reader merely to draw conclusions. He states at one point that he has a "compulsion to the negative" [Negationsbedürfnis] when he automatically answers "Against" [Dagegen] in response to a question by a Communist about whether he stood for or against the year 1968.¹¹² He further confirms something which is already quite obvious to the reader: ". . . der Verf. [ist] völlig ungeeignet . . . zu lügen oder irgend etwas zu erfinden (er ist auf eine schon peinliche Art faktenabhängig, wie jedermann

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 317.

inzwischen begriffen haben wird). . . ."113 In Chapter IX of the novel, the Author reveals something of his background when he describes the feelings aroused by his visit to the wealthy Hoyzers:

Nicht ohne Herzklopfen fuhr der Verf. dorthin: sein kleinbürgerliches Gemüt nimmt immer nur mit Bangen wahrhaft Repräsentatives wahr; er fühlt sich auf Grund seiner extrem kleinbürgerlichen Herkunft dort zwar wohl, und doch fremd.114

The Hoyser's is also the scene of the jacket incident, during which the Author reveals himself to be quite human and perhaps for the first time stirs the reader's empathy with himself. During the conference Old Hoyser becomes rather aggressive and rips a button from the Author's dearly beloved old jacket. The Hoyser sons offer to replace the jacket and cannot understand the Author's insistence that the old one be repaired, that he does not want a new jacket. The Author reports:

. . . er [der Verf.] verkniff sich einen Hinweis auf das Alter seiner Jacke, die Reisen, die er mit ihr gemacht, die vielen Zettel, die er in ihre Taschen hineingesteckt und wieder herausgenommen hatte, das Kleingeld im Futter, die Brotkrümel, die Flusen, und sollte er tatsächlich darauf hinweisen, dass Klementinas Wange noch vor knapp achtundvierzig Stunden, wenn auch kurz, auf seinem rechten Revers gelegen hatte?115

113 Ibid., p. 322.

114 Ibid., p. 335.

115 Ibid., p. 341.

He describes jackets such as his as follows:

. . . zwölf Jahre alte geliebte Jacken, die einem lieber sind als die eigene Haut und weniger ersetzlich, denn die Haut ist transplantabel, eine Jacke eben nicht; an der man hängt ohne Sentimentalität, lediglich, weil man letzten Endes eben doch Abendländer ist und die lacrimae rerum einem eingebleut worden sind.¹¹⁶

First the Author lists some of the many things that have made this jacket particularly cherished, but, true to form, he did not let the Hoysers know that these were the reasons for his attachment. In fact, he denies to the reader, and probably even to himself, that sentiment had anything to do with his refusal to replace the old garment. He tries to attribute a perfectly natural emotion to a society-imposed value system.

In Chapter IX also, the Author, still repressing such universal emotions as love, informs the reader, often only incidentally, of his love relationship with Klementina, the nun. He reveals that he was caught under her spell when he tells of the turmoil in his soul caused by the simple question directed to him by the beautiful nun: "Werden Sie mir glauben?"¹¹⁷ He then describes her seductive appearance and its effect on him:

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 342.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 326.

Der Verf. war schwach genug, zustimmend zu nicken, zusätzlich, „da er durch eindringliche Blicke zu verbaler Ausserung aufgefordert wurde, ein Ja zu hauchen, wie es ansonsten nur vor Traualtären gehaucht wird. Was blieb ihm-- dem Verf.--anderes übrig?“¹¹⁸

As he leaves the convent a rather unusual event occurs. In his typical understated style, the Author tells the reader: ". . . er [der Verf.] zog Klementina zwischen zwei junge Zypressen und küsste sie ungeniert auf die Stirn, die rechte Wange, dann auf den Mund."¹¹⁹ In the next paragraph he refers to Klementina as "the woman who is now his beloved" [nunmehr Geliebten].¹²⁰ The reader hears very little more about Klementina and perhaps has doubts as to the seriousness of this relationship until thirty pages later when at the end of a newspaper report, with no transition except paragraph change, the Author mentions that he flew to Frankfurt to meet Klementina, who had shed her nun's coif and left the convent. This startling new development is reported with characteristic lack of passion or involvement on the part of the Author. He proceeds to tell the reader more about Klementina but never makes clear the extent of their relationship. Klementina, however, takes an

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 330.

¹²⁰Ibid.

increasingly active part in the Author's work, even, in Chapter XIII, editing the police officer's report, and it is obvious that she has become an important part of the Author's life.

The Author seems to sense that the scanty information about his life and his dispassionate report about Klementina leave the reader feeling no real empathy with him. He says: "Es sollte hier vielleicht doch eine grossartige Banalität ausgesprochen werden: dass der Verf. . . . nur ein Mensch ist. . . ."121 Perhaps in the case of the Author, such a remark is not so banal.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 363.

CHAPTER VI

THE FICTITIOUS NARRATOR'S PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP TO HIS HEROINE AND HIS BELOVED

During the course of his report the Author is eventually established as a personality, albeit a somewhat nebulous one, of significance almost equal to Leni's, although the reader knows much about her and little about him. The extent of the relationship between these two main characters of the novel is, like the Author's purpose and details of his personality, only slowly disclosed in the course of the report.

If it occurs to the reader, as he begins reading the report, to wonder whether or not the Author is acquainted with Leni, he may assume, from the few direct quotes which are not said to come through someone else, that the Author has at least talked to her. The reader should not jump to this conclusion. The Author writes: "Sie hat kein Gebetbuch, geht nicht zur Kirche, glaubt daran, dass es im Weltraum 'beseelte Wesen' (Leni) gibt."¹²² Did the Author talk to her or did this information come via one of the witnesses? At this point in the novel, the reader cannot be sure. Much later in

¹²²Ibid., p. 19.

the report there appears a section about which the Author says: "Die wenigen direkten Zitate von Leni sollen hier einmal zusammengefasst dargeboten werden: . . ."123

There follow forty-six quotations from Leni, and it can be seen from the text that all but five of them were reported to the Author by someone else. Again, the reader does not know how the Author learned of the remaining five quotations.

In Chapter II the Author states very casually that he loves Leni. He says he might have been tempted to try to pair her off with the librarian whom he knows to be infatuated with her, "if he himself weren't in love with Leni" [. . . wäre er nicht selbst in Leni verliebt].124

The reader might assume that if he loves Leni, he knows her. In answer to a question asked her by the Author, Margret tells him to ask Leni herself. He retorts: "Fragen Sie Leni! Das ist leicht gesagt. Sie lässt sich nicht fragen, und wenn man sie fragt, antwortet sie nicht."125 The implication is that he does at least have the opportunity to ask her. In Chapter IV the Author says that Alois, Leni's husband, was prone to speak in platitudes. He comments: ". . . es fällt nicht schwer, sich

123 Ibid., p. 308.

124 Ibid., p. 38.

125 Ibid., p. 89.

vorzustellen, wie die irdisch-materialistische, menschlich-himmlische Leni bei solchem Gerede die Stirn runzelte."¹²⁶ This uncharacteristically eloquent description of Leni implies that he knows her well enough to judge her reaction to Alois' words and that he somewhat reveres her. Another time, in a relative clause, the Author tells of his feelings for her: "Leni, an der der Verf. mit Zärtlichkeit hängt, kann ohne diesen Begriff [Unschuld] nicht verstanden werden."¹²⁷ He seems to feel that with the idea of innocence, he, as well as others, can comprehend her and mentions only incidentally that he has tender feelings for her. In Chapter VI the Author indicates even more surely that he has at least spoken with Leni. He gives the following as the reason why he cannot identify Mr. Exalted:

Der Verf. kann sich nicht die geringste Indiskretion erlauben, sie würde ihn einfach zu teuer zu stehen kommen, und da er sie--die Diskretion--ausserdem noch Leni fest zugesagt hat, mündlich natürlich, möchte er Gentleman bleiben und seine Zusage halten.¹²⁸

The Author also admits in Chapter VI that he by no means understands everything about Leni. He feels called upon to explain that the fact that Leni's lover was not a

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 122.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 135.

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 165.

German, but rather a lucky Russian is not the Author's fault but Leni's. He adds: "Diese Tatsache muss--wie so vieles von Leni--einfach hingenommen werden."¹²⁹

The Author's attitude towards Leni is not, however, one of unreserved adulation. He says in Chapter IX:

Der Verf. hätte nur zu gerne eine Episode in Lenis Leben übergangen, über die von einigen Auskunftspersonen schon andeutungsweise berichtet wurde: Lenis kurze politische Tätigkeit nach
45.130

He makes it plain that he disapproves of this period of her life, but since he knew of it only through witnesses' testimonies, it is clear that during that period he was not a part of Leni's life, nor she of his.

Beginning in Chapter IX, several incidents occur which indicate that the Author is capable of taking a more active interest in Leni's welfare. His research leads him to a particularly vicious, scathing newspaper report of Leni's Communist activities. He remarks:

Der Verf. hofft inständig, dass Leni damals eine so sporadische Zeitungsleserin war, wie sie heute ist. Er--der Verf.--sähe sie nur ungern in diesem christlichen Stile (absichtliche Verwendung des Dativ-Es! Der Verf.) gekränkt.¹³¹

Then he has an opportunity to actively aid Leni. He

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 166.

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 312.

¹³¹Ibid., p. 318.

resists going to Rome, where he would have seen Klementina, who was still in the convent, in favor of going to a meeting of the "Leni in Need--Help Leni Committee" [Leni in Not--Helft Leni- Komitee].¹³² However, before he goes to this meeting, he takes the opportunity to go see the Hoysers, and it is during this conversation that the reader learns the following: "[Leni] . . . sei ihm bisher nicht ein einziges Mal persönlich gegenübergestellt worden, er habe sie lediglich zwei-, dreimal auf der Strasse gesehen, noch kein Wort mit ihr gesprochen. . . ." ¹³³ However, the Author takes it as a matter of course that he should be invited to the committee meeting which included such intimates as Lotte, Marja van Doorn, and Pelzer. He explains: "Der Verf. brach hier zum erstenmal, bevor er die festlich gestimmte Gesellschaft verliess, seine Neutralität, indem auch er sein Scherflein in den Leni-Fonds einzahlte."¹³⁴

It is finally in Chapter X, after he has met Klementina in Frankfurt and journeyed around the country introducing her to the various witnesses whose professional relationships with him have evolved into

¹³²Ibid., p. 334.

¹³³Ibid., p. 337.

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 362.

friendships, that the Author's first meeting with Leni takes place: "Nicht ohne Beben und Bangen liess der Verf. durch Hans Helzen nun die längst fällige direkte Begegnung mit Leni arrangieren."¹³⁵ The Author says of this meeting:

Leni, nun, es blieb viel Bangigkeit, bevor hir der Blick zu, dann jener voll auf sie gerichtet wurde: immerhin hatte der Verf. sie im Laufe seiner unermüdlichen Recherchierarbeit nur zweimal ganz flüchtig auf der Strasse gesehen, von der Seite, nie en face, ihren stolzen Gang bemerkt, nun aber gab es kein Ausweichen mehr, es musste der Wirklichkeit ins Auge geblickt werden, und es sei hier ein schlichtes, auf understatement beruhendes: es lohnte sich! erlaubt.¹³⁶

Thus, when his research is almost complete, the Author speaks to Leni for the first time and then only at a rather formal afternoon party with Lotte, Mehmet, Bogakov, and Klementina in attendance. Leni says very little, but the Author is entranced with her and with the general aura of love filling the room. At one point the Author compares his relationship with Klementina to that with Leni:

. . . [er sagt] dass er ja über Leni alles, über sie--K.--fast gar nichts wisse; dass er sogar, auf Grund intensiver langwieriger Recherchen mit Lenis intimsten Intimsphären vertraut sei, sich wie ein Verräter oder Mitwisser vorkomme, während

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 369.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 370.

sie--K.--ihm nahe sei, sei Leni ihm, wenn auch
sympathisch, so doch fremd.¹³⁷

Of the meeting between his two loves, the Author says:

"Sie [Leni] betrachtete--was den Verf. mit Stolz und
Freude erfüllt--K. wohlgefällig und wohlwollend. . . ." ¹³⁸

His two loves have met, and he is much gratified that his rather more earthy love meets with the approval of his adored idol, Leni. Klementina is his mortal sweetheart-lover-companion, while Leni remains his "divine" [himmlische] ideal. In the course of his research, even when he implies occasional criticism of Leni, it is clear, as has been shown, that she remains no less than perfect in his eyes, but Klementina supplants her as an object of desire. After the report of their meeting, no more is said of the relationship between the Author and Leni. However, Klementina develops an intimate relationship with Leni. The former nun is allowed the very special privilege of watching Leni paint. It may be assumed that through this synthesis of his two loves, the Author's relationship to Leni continues, although the exact nature of this relationship cannot be ascertained.

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 370.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 371.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The role of the narrator in Gruppenbild Mit Dame appears to be twofold. As a researcher, sociologist, detective, and writer, he has assembled and presented to the reader a report containing much information pertinent to the lives of Leni Gruyten Pfeiffer and the group of family, friends, acquaintances who surround her. It has been shown that the report is not as objective as the Author claimed it would be, but it does convey a great deal of factual information about the characters, tempered though it is by the Author's personal influences.

The second aspect of the role of the narrator is manifested in the slow materialization of the Author as a character in the novel. During the course of his report, the Author evolves from an allegedly impartial observer to a character who is completely involved in the action which occurs in his report. The reader never learns the narrator's name, but by the end of the report, he can identify the Author as a personality complete with opinions, war experiences, and a love relationship. The Author becomes acquainted with the various witnesses as he does his research. Some of these acquaintances become friends, and

one, Klementina, becomes his wife. It is through Klementina that the Author probably sustains his relationship with Leni. The Author has in essence become a member, and by no means the least important member, of the group portrait.

The report which the Author compiles contains facts about the lives of Leni and the group. The Author portrays rather moving incidents such as Boris' and Leni's trysts, Lev's birth, Bogakov's survival struggle, and his own love affair with the nun. Interjected into these matters of life and death, however, is an abundance of often irrelevant statistical data and opinionated digressions.

Thus in the two-faceted role of narrator, the Author, prejudiced, disorganized, often ironic, presents a vivid detailed portrait of life as it was, during and following World War II, life where major issues--birth, death, sex, love, and war--are always riddled with mundane triviality.

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VITA

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