

Female Characters in the Works of Heinrich Böll and Bao Ninh: A Comparative Study on Writing Techniques

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Abstract

This paper presents a comparative analysis of the narrative techniques employed by Heinrich Böll and Bao Ninh in constructing female characters within war and post-war contexts. Using textual analysis and comparative literature methodology, the study highlights two key techniques: the blurring of character identity and the use of fragmented narrative structures. While both authors obscure personal details to reflect trauma and alienation, Bao Ninh uses stream of consciousness, and Böll employs parallel perspectives. These techniques not only underscore the psychological scars of conflict but also invite reflection on the representation of female subjectivity in wartime. The paper contributes to comparative literature by bridging European and Southeast Asian post-war narratives.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term "comparative literature" originated in France and then spread to other European countries. In the 1920s in the West, literary scholars began to pay more attention to the international relations of different national literatures, which led to the emergence of a comparative approach in literary studies. Journals specializing in comparative literary studies were established, such as the *Revue de littérature comparée*, first published in France in 1921; *Comparative Literature*, first published in 1949; *Comparative Literature Studies*, first published in 1963 in the US; and *Arcadia* in Canada, first published in 1966. Today, prestigious journals in comparative literature such as *Comparative Literature* from Duke University Press, *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* from Purdue University Press, and *Comparative Literature Studies* from Penn State University Press in the US continue to attract scholars who publish research findings, demonstrating the appeal of this field of study. Comparative literature is currently still one of the popular research directions among scholars worldwide.

Heinrich Böll, whose full name is Heinrich Theodor Böll (1917-1985), was a German writer and translator. He is considered one of Germany's greatest post-war writers. With his unique writing style and profound humanistic ideals, Heinrich Böll was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1972. With his sharp pen and strong imagination, Böll reconstructed the post-war face of Germany, filled with wounds and instability, yet also harboring serene hopes.

His works are always rich in empathy, providing comfort and healing amidst the haunting and wounded backdrop of post-war Germany. The writings of Heinrich Böll have been translated into Vietnamese since the 1960s of the 20th century. Since then, H. Böll had a significant influence on Vietnamese literature, particularly on modern Vietnamese authors after 1986.

Bao Ninh is a prominent novelist in post-war Vietnamese literature, known for his innovative narrative techniques. His novel, *The Sorrow of War*, has been translated into multiple languages and has garnered attention from both domestic and international literary critics and scholars. Bao Ninh belongs to a generation of writers who matured and established themselves in the post-war era, during the *Doi Moi* (Renovation) period. His reputation and contributions to contemporary Vietnamese literature are undeniable.

H. Böll, a representative of German literature and Bao Ninh, a Vietnamese famous author, are both writers focusing on the theme of war and the human tragedy of the post-war era with humanistic perspectives. Besides the similarities in ideology and narrative techniques, each author reveals their unique choice of viewpoint with distinctive features in their writing style. Therefore, this study discovers the similar and different characteristics of the writing techniques of H. Böll and Bao Ninh on female characters based on the comparative literature approach.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In scholarly research, the oeuvre of H. Böll not only serves as a primary subject of study but also as a point of departure for examining his impact on successive generations of writers across diverse national contexts. Comparative literary analyses are conducted to delineate Böll's eminent stature, critical position, and the breadth of his influence within the global literary canon.

N.N.Sarmi and the research team analyze H.Böll's *The Laugher*, juxtaposing the protagonist's professional need to produce seemingly original laughter with his somber personal life, through the lens of Jean-Paul Sartre's concepts of authenticity and freedom. Using a qualitative cultural studies approach, the researchers explore the tension between the ideal of authenticity and the protagonist's reality, as his compulsory laughter, which is intended to sound authentic, ironically becomes a symbol of bad faith and personal discontent. This laughter, meant to incite more laughter, underscores the protagonist's unhappiness, revealing the constraints of societal expectations on personal freedom. The analysis concludes that Böll's narrative not only questions the authenticity of forced laughter but also reflects on how prescribed roles can lead to a restricted and joyless existence (Sarmi et al, 2023).

The research on the reception of H. Böll's writings has been conducted by Gisela Holfter with the book titled *Heinrich Böll and Ireland*. In the book, Gisela Holfter meticulously documents Heinrich Böll's deep personal and literary engagements with Ireland and its literature, tracing his journey from an early childhood fascination with Irish fairy tales to making Achill Island his second home. The narrative further explores his and his wife Annemarie's extensive translations of works by prominent Irish writers such as Brendan Behan, J. M. Synge, G. B. Shaw, Flann O'Brien, and Tomás O'Crohan. Additionally, the book delves into the reception of Böll's works in Ireland, particularly focusing on the controversy sparked by the 1960s broadcast of his film "Irland und seine Kinder" (Holfter, 2011).

The comparative method has been employed in conducting research on H. Böll. In the dissertation, Oliver T. Jones explores the literary works of Soviet-Jewish writer Vasilii Grossman and West German Nobel Prize winner Heinrich Böll, focusing on their portrayal of the Stalinist and National Socialist regimes within memory studies. This analysis particularly addresses the post-1945 representations of these regimes, challenging traditional post-atrocity literary studies that often center on victimhood and psychoanalytic trauma theories. Instead, this project emphasizes the importance of addressing morally complex experiences of historical violence that elude simple classification into 'victim' or 'perpetrator'. The thesis utilizes two theoretical frameworks to dissect Grossman's and Böll's narratives (Jones, 2021). In another research, O.T.Jones mentions presents a thoughtful and academically rigorous approach to the study of post-atrocity fiction through the lens of 'moral injury', a concept that enriches the analysis of literature emerging from post-National Socialist Germany and post-Stalinist Russia. The essay adeptly shifts away from traditional psychoanalytic trauma frameworks to explore the complex moral landscapes navigated by characters within such literatures, using Michael Rothberg's concept of the 'implicated subject' as a pivotal reference point. The analysis specifically of Heinrich Böll's *Billard um halb zehn* and Vasilii Grossman's *Vse techet* is particularly compelling, as it showcases how these texts delve into the personal accountability of their characters in historical violence, emphasizing the necessity of personal integrity in their reckonings. This approach not only broadens the scope of literary analysis but also prompts a reevaluation of the narratives surrounding victimhood and perpetration (Jones, 2022).

Although there have been many studies on the works of H.Böll, the exploration of H.Böll in comparison with Vietnamese literary authors remains a gap in research in Vietnam and globally. Our study will contribute to filling this critical gap in H.Böll's works from a comparative viewpoint.

3. RESULTS

3.1. The Blurring in the Art of Creating Female Characters

In the works of Bao Ninh and Heinrich Böll, the personal outlines of female characters are blurred. Most characters are referred to by simple names such as Phuong, Kien, Ho Bia, May, Loan, Tam, Dieu Nuong, Nga, Thuy, Thao... or by anonymous personal pronouns such as "the old woman", "I", "the girl" in the novel titled *The Sorrow of War* (*Nỗi buồn chiến tranh*) and in the short stories by Bao Ninh.

In Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War*, Phuong is the central female character, however, her background is described very vaguely and the details about Phuong's origins are indistinct. Her father, a pianist, had passed away before the liberation of the capital. The reasons for her parents' deaths and why they left her alone in the world are omitted. The author does not explain why Phuong lives alone in an apartment next to Kien and his father, nor why she is so isolated. Phuong suffers abuse and experiences several transient relationships. Her romantic encounters are briefly mentioned from Kien's perspectives and Phuong's fate and conclusion remain a question mark for the reader. She leaves, seemingly escaping the city and Kien, but no one knows where she goes.

In other short stories by Bao Ninh, the veiling of characters is also thoroughly explored. Dieu Nuong, a beautiful woman in *Wild Winds* (*Gió đại*) is described against a backdrop of vague, mythical spaces filled with various rumors and half-truths. Despite the gossip and

embellishments by others, the life of Dieu Nuong remains completely mysterious. This technique emphasizes the theme of uncertainty and the elusive nature of truth in the aftermath of war, reflecting the fragmented and disjointed experiences of the characters. Dieu Nuong seems to have forgotten who she is, with no awareness of her identity anymore. No one knows why she became a singer performing for the puppet soldiers or ended up in this village. The details of Dieu Nuong's life and her wanderings are heavily omitted. This omission highlights the tragic and fragile human condition in the harsh circumstances of war. It reflects a narrative style where the gaps and silences speak as powerfully as the stories told, underscoring the disruptions and dislocations caused by conflict.

The character Thao in the short story *Betrayal (Bội phản)* of Bao Ninh is portrayed with indistinct characteristics. Her full name remains unknown. Although the household's sustenance relies entirely on her, her occupation is unspecified.

Bao Ninh constructs characters without names or clear ages in the short story titled *Marking on the Side of the Boat (Khắc dấu mạn thuyền)*. The female character in this work lacks both a name and age. The author describes her as possessing unparalleled beauty, loveliness, and gentleness, resembling an unreal illusion. This young woman prepares porridge and tenderly cares for the protagonist, aiding him in surviving a sudden, severe malaria attack. At the end of the story, the two characters part ways and lose contact, unable to reunite, leaving the protagonist with feelings of regret.

Bao Ninh's short story *Camp of the Seven Dwarfs (Trại Bảy chú lùn)* features the tragic love story of Nga and is constructed with an open-ended structure. Nga is a young, healthy, and beautiful liaison officer. The quiet, budding affection between Nga and Hinh ends abruptly when Hinh suddenly dies in a forest fire. Nga's fate seems to open a new chapter with a secret love affair with the commander of a reconnaissance team. However, the scout never returns to find Nga, rumored to have been killed just a few days after leaving the supply station where Nga lived and worked. The story concludes with lingering silence and open questions about Nga's life. Nga leaves her child with Mộc, a close friend and comrade, and leaves the *Camp of the Seven Dwarfs* to search for the reconnaissance team commander because she doesn't believe he is dead. Where Nga went and why she didn't return to the *Camp of the Seven Dwarfs* remains an open question for readers. The story ends with Moc's lonely, hopeless wait at the *Camp of the Seven Dwarfs* who loved Nga silently and quietly raised Nương, Nga's daughter with the reconnaissance team commander, to adulthood.

Heinrich Böll also employs the technique of ambiguity when constructing the world of female characters in the novel *And Never Said a Word* and the short story collection *The Pale Anna*. The central characters in *And Never Said a Word* are Fred and Kate. The author frequently refers to Kate with the pronoun "she." The character's name rarely appears in the stories or dialogues. Kate is described as a girl who worked as a librarian before the war broke out and she loves reading books. When the war occurred, Kate had to take on various jobs to support her children while waiting for Fred to return. The writer meticulously details the impoverished and miserable living conditions of Kate, Fred, and their two small children but does not describe Kate's occupation. The personal backgrounds of the characters are also blurred. The relatives of Kate and Fred are not mentioned throughout the novel of *And Never*

Said a Word. The entire work focuses on Kate's pain and psychological trauma, her patient endurance, and the tragedy of her life, highlighted by the deaths of her two children from lice bites, their shabby rented room, and Fred's violence due to war trauma.

In the short story *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum*, Heinrich Böll thoroughly exploits the technique of obscuring characters. The character is referred to by an initial: Maria X. Other characters are called by pronouns such as "she" or "the woman." In the short story *A Note of Cheer*, the female character is identified as a blonde, lovely and beautiful girl or "the girl." In other short stories, Heinrich Böll refers to female characters with phrases like "my little beloved," "she," and "the nun."

In Heinrich Böll's works, the majority of characters remain unnamed, identified solely by pronouns or descriptive phrases about their appearance or occupation. These characters are presented without detailed personal backgrounds or professional information. As a result, the female characters in his narratives function as symbols or emblematic portraits, representing numerous women enduring complex and unfortunate lives in post-war society.

Both Böll and Bao Ninh utilize the technique of challenging traditional modes of identity construction in realist literature in their portrayal of female characters. This shared approach lends a postmodern quality to their works. In postmodern literature, characters are symbolic, representing individuals who are alienated, dehumanized, lonely, and powerless.

Additionally, the authors blur details related to the characters' lives and fates. In traditional literature, the novel genre typically portrays comprehensive, full depictions of the lives and fates of central characters, unlike short stories, which offer mere slices of life. However, in Bao Ninh's novel *The Sorrow of War*, the fate and life of Phuong-the central female figure, are blurred in many details, including the reason Phuong became an orphan at seventeen, how she returned to Hanoi after being abandoned by Kien, whom she loved afterward, and how she experienced those relationships, and her life after leaving and severing ties with her hopeless love for Kien, allowing Kien to forget her. All details related to Phuong's life are fragmented and obscured from Kien's perspective, making the picture of her life hazy. Only Phuong's pain and loneliness are vividly portrayed as the dominant theme throughout her life. The story focuses on tragic and painful moments, such as when Phuong meets Kien after being assaulted. Another tragic moment occurs when Phuong decides to leave Hanoi and go far away from Kien. However, no one knows how Phuong's life unfolds after her departure. These textual gaps render *The Sorrow of War* filled with latent sorrow and melancholy.

Heinrich Böll's novel *And Never Said a Word* is written with two parallel perspectives, including Fred's and Kate's. Many details are omitted in this work, such as Kate's tragic life during the war after her first two children were bitten to death by lice, fleas, and bugs, and her difficult life post-war, burdened by poverty and debt, even after Fred's return. These hardships are only briefly mentioned but are profoundly haunting: "I counted the money Fred sent... The children watched me handle and arrange the money, representing my husband's monthly salary as a telephone operator in the church district offices: three hundred and twenty-five marks and eighty pfennigs. I set aside one bill for rent, another for electricity and gas, a third for the health fund, and I calculated the remaining amount for the bakery." (Böll, translated by Vennewitz, 1994). The novel ends with many unresolved details: it is unclear whether Fred will return to

Kate and their three children, whether Kate is truly pregnant with Fred's fourth child or if it is just a vague fear, and when Kate's children will finally be reunited with the father they love and miss so dearly.

3.2. The Fragmented Structure in Character Construction

The non-linear narration in character construction, particularly for female characters, is a notable technique employed in literary works to create depth and complexity. This approach involves presenting the character in pieces rather than as a whole, allowing the reader to slowly piece together the character's life, personality, and experiences. This technique often mirrors the fragmented and multifaceted nature of human identity and experience. Although the works of Bao Ninh and Heinrich Böll are characterized by fragmented structures, the two authors employ distinct artistic techniques to achieve this effect. Bao Ninh uses the stream of consciousness as the main technique in his novel *The Sorrow of War*, while Heinrich Böll employs parallel perspectives to create a fragmented nature in the construction of female characters.

Bao Ninh employs the stream-of-consciousness technique throughout his novel *The Sorrow of War*. The portrait and life of the character Phuong in this famous novel are depicted as a collage of fragmented memories within Kien's stream of consciousness. The novel begins with Kien's memories of the battlefield, during the dry season of 1967—one of the most intense years of the resistance against the Americans. In this harsh environment, Kien continuously fights and constantly remembers Phuong. From his nostalgic perspective, Phuong is the seventeen-year-old goddess in Kien's heart, helping him overcome life's temptations and indulgences. Kien's stream of consciousness about Phuong drifts back to a more recent past, to everyday life in peacetime. In this moment, Phuong appears as a strong and determined woman, resolute in ending a hopeless love when she realizes Kien cannot forget the haunting guilt, even though the guilt was caused by vile assailants. “Cold winds swept through the streets, and drizzles started again... Phuong had left at the beginning of winter. No news, no letters, as if she had decided never to return. Her room's door was tightly locked, seemingly never to open again. This was the first time since they reunited after the war that Phuong had left him in such a sudden, painful, and cruel manner” (Bao Ninh, 2022).

At the end of the novel, Kien's recollections return to moments when Phuong was a radiant, beautiful, and youthful seventeen-year-old girl, the dark shadow when Phuong was assaulted on a military supply train, and Phuong's sorrow when Kien left while her pain was still fresh. The fragments of the stream of consciousness have depicted Phuong with a beautiful and sensual appearance and a soul full of sorrow. The collage of past and present, reality and illusion, contributes to portraying a soul that is shattered, painful yet strong, determined, and full of love. Through the stream-of-consciousness technique, Bao Ninh reflects the brutal reality of war with its traumatic and painful fractures. Beautiful and pitiable women like Phuong cannot find happiness in such a broken environment. This technique emphasizes the fragmented nature of Phuong's fate and psychological world, showing empathy for the pain endured by people, especially women, in war—pains that are not easily healed.

A montage of perspectives can be displayed through the art of multiple perspectives. However, in Bao Ninh's work, fragmentation is built based on the stream of consciousness with

a single perspective: Kien's. This single perspective is structured into multiple sub-perspectives: Kien's objective perspective in the third-person narrative, Kien's internal perspective in the first-person narrative, and the intertwining perspectives of the present and the past. With this fragmentation, Phuong is portrayed with a multifaceted and multidimensional view: sometimes as a thirteen-year-old girl full of life, love, and naive passion; sometimes as a seventeen-year-old girl with intense love and a sense of foreboding about the future; and sometimes as a woman full of painful experiences, challenging her life with fleeting romances. Yet, from any perspective, Phuong remains a symbol of Beauty that redeems Kien, helping him survive the many hardships of life and the unhealed wounds of war.

If Bao Ninh's works are characterized by the stream of consciousness technique, Heinrich Böll's *And Never Said a Word* is distinguished by its parallel perspectives. The novel is structured with two independent, parallel perspectives: Fred's, the husband's, and Kate's, the wife's. Through Fred's perspective, Kate appears as a lovable and pitiable woman. Through Kate's perspective, she sees herself, reflecting on her aging, withering figure and the tragic pain of her life.

Heinrich Böll's *And Never Said a Word* comprises 13 chapters, with six narrated from Kate's perspective and seven from Fred's. In Chapter 1, Kate is briefly seen through Fred's eyes as a loving mother: "Kate, my wife, also watched our children leave early in the morning, their backpacks on their shoulders" (Böll, 1994). In Chapter 2, Kate narrates her own story, describing how Fred left their family's rented room two months ago to sleep at friends' houses or in various institutions because he couldn't bear the cramped quarters and the unpleasant presence of their landlady, Mrs. Franke. Kate gradually becomes apprehensive about church ceremonies, dreading mass and seeing the priest at the altar. She emerges as a suffering, fearful, and weak woman in poverty, yet deeply loving and protective of her children. Kate feels weak when she sees her children's excessive timidity and obedience at the Franke family's Christmas party. Poverty has turned Kate's children into fearful lambs. Kate understands their innocent joys when they are allowed to play at the door while the Franks attend the Catholic Women's League convention. She also perceives her vague fears before Mrs. Franke—a woman symbolizing power and wealth: "Sixty years old but still very much a woman, her strange gaze haunts everyone and frightens me... All those details make her an unbeatable character" (Böll, 1994).

In Chapter 3, Kate is not prominently featured in Fred's musings, only appearing as a "pale face" that Fred imagines seeing when he dies. Her portrait starts to take shape but is interrupted as Fred's thoughts focus on a young girl named Bernard, describing her in detail: "a girl with a gentle voice," "I looked up at her, starting from her ivory nape to her hastily mended stockings. I observed her soft curves as she leaned forward to tend the fire," "the girl collecting money, giving change, smiling, greeting... She completed all these tasks beautifully without effort" (Böll, 1994).

In Chapter 4, from the parallel perspective, Kate appears as an aging, withering woman, "a face of a woman acutely aware of life's bitterness." Her hair is graying at the temples from the worries caused by her two young children, her cheekbones are prominent due to weight loss, and her pale skin has turned yellowish. Her daily chores are depicted: fetching water and

starting a grueling day of cleaning their dusty, dilapidated room. Through the mirror-like water surface, Kate sees her unending pain: her firstborn children, Resgine and Robert, who slowly died from the harsh wartime conditions. Lice, fleas, and bugs caused their bodies to swell. Kate struggled with her children's agonizing pain and fever, hearing their desperate cries while being unable to cure them, forced to buy ineffective medicines from the Minister of Public Health's nephew. Kate also perceives the changed appearance of Fred, her beloved husband, after the war: "Fred's face had aged terribly. A face drained of life by a miserable existence... the face of a man indifferent and cold to all that is deemed proper and serious" (Böll, 1994).

Chapter 5 does not continue Kate's portrayal from Fred's perspective. In Chapter 6, Kate talks to Fred over the phone, feeling guilty for leaving her children to meet Fred. She contemplates her own and her children's suffering from the lewd moans of neighboring tenants and thinks about millions of impoverished families like hers and Fred's, lacking a place to enjoy love. In Chapter 7, Fred recalls Kate's last meeting, capturing her beautiful exterior, "Kate's fair face and her striking blue eyes. Her arms were also fair and bare." Fred also remembers Kate's sorrowful tears. For two months, despite living in the same city, the couple has been meeting in hotel rooms, occasionally in secluded parks or on abandoned lots.

In Chapter 8, Kate arranges for her children to be watched by Bellermann, a boy hired to babysit, so she can meet Fred. Kate realizes that Bellermann and his pretty girlfriend see her as an unworthy mother who must be meeting a lover. Kate's inner world is further revealed: her resentment towards Fred for leaving her with the children and her guilt for abandoning them each time she meets him. She does not know where her husband is staying. At this moment, Kate reminisces about her youthful beauty through Bernard: "She had a beautiful face, smooth skin like an onion's surface, and under her scarf, I guessed her hair was brown... I saw her as if returning from a distant place, another version of myself. We looked at each other and smiled" (Böll, 1994).

In Chapter 9, Fred recalls meeting Kate, who worked as a librarian and loved books. In Chapter 10, Kate recounts a meeting with Fred in a shabby hotel. Kate feels pity for her husband, "a small, pale, tired face, his lips holding a white cigarette," and realizes she still loves him. She confides in him about her sorrow, crying every night because she wants him by her side but cannot stand him hitting the children due to the pressure of their impoverished life. Kate pities her children for being well-behaved, studious, diligent, quiet, modest, but hopeless and lacking childhood joy. She remembers their rented house two years before the war, when the family lived cleanly, paid rent on time, and had money for everything.

In Chapter 11, Fred sees Kate's pale face and recalls their memories of a pregnant woman, irritable, delighting in being filthy. Kate resolutely refuses to continue their encounters as they have for the past two months, meeting in some garden of a ruined house or a field. She is overwhelmed by sorrow and despair, "her face streaming with tears." In Chapter 12, Kate reassures the children about Fred's return and calmly faces the landlady's harsh questions. In Chapter 13, Fred envisions Kate, no longer young but beautiful, and realizes he must return to her and the children.

Thus, through the parallel perspectives, Kate's exterior, fate, and pain are reflected in a multifaceted way. This structure makes the novel resemble a collage of different fragments. Each chapter is like a piece that contributes to the overall portrait of Kate's exterior and inner self: young, beautiful, full of love and happiness in the past; sad, old, withered, and desperate but still full of love in the present; ugly and pitiful in the eyes of the landlady and the babysitter; deserving of a better life from Fred's perspective; loving, understanding, and compassionate towards her husband's flaws and pains.

4. CONCLUSION

Bao Ninh and Heinrich Böll exhibit notable similarities in their approaches to constructing female characters while also displaying distinctive individual styles. Both authors employ techniques that obscure character details, deliberately omitting specifics regarding personal backgrounds, lives, and fates. This creates interpretive gaps within their narratives, inviting readers to engage more deeply with the text to uncover the nuances of the characters' experiences and emotions.

Additionally, both authors utilize disrupted chronologies in their works to convey thematic messages about war and human suffering. This fragmentation reflects the chaotic and disjointed nature of wartime experiences, mirroring the internal and external conflicts faced by their characters. Through these techniques, both Bao Ninh and Heinrich Böll explore the profound impact of war on individuals, particularly focusing on the psychological and emotional scars that linger long after the physical battles have ended.

Despite these commonalities, the works of Bao Ninh and Heinrich Böll possess distinctive characteristics that set them apart. Heinrich Böll employs the ambiguity technique with greater intensity, often leaving significant aspects of his characters' lives and identities ambiguous. This approach not only emphasizes the universality of human suffering but also underscores the dehumanizing effects of war, reducing individuals to mere symbols of broader social and historical forces.

In contrast, Bao Ninh is distinguished by his use of the stream-of-consciousness technique. This method allows him to delve deeply into the inner worlds of his characters, particularly their thoughts, memories, and emotions. Through this technique, Bao Ninh provides a more intimate and immersive portrayal of his characters' psychological landscapes, capturing the fragmented and nonlinear nature of memory and trauma.

Heinrich Böll, on the other hand, adopts a structural approach that incorporates parallel perspectives. By presenting the story through multiple viewpoints, Böll offers a more multifaceted and layered depiction of his characters and their experiences. This approach not only enriches the narrative but also highlights the subjective nature of perception and memory, illustrating how different individuals can interpret and remember the same events in varied ways.

In summary, while Bao Ninh and Heinrich Böll share a commitment to exploring the complexities of human suffering through fragmented narrative structures and the ambiguity of character details, they each bring their unique strengths to their storytelling. Bao Ninh's stream-of-consciousness technique provides an intimate, in-depth exploration of his characters' inner

lives, while Heinrich Böll's use of parallel perspectives offers a broader, more multifaceted view of his characters and their experiences. Together, their works contribute significantly to the literary examination of war and its enduring impact on the human psyche.

The works of Bao Ninh and Heinrich Böll are distinguished by their sophisticated and unique use of the techniques of narrative opacity and montage of perspectives, particularly in the construction of female characters. This choice not only reflects their keen and profound observations of women's portrayals in wartime but also opens new avenues for literary approaches and understanding.

Ambiguity, as an artistic technique, is used by both authors to create mystery and ambiguity, making female characters more complex and multidimensional. This not only prompts readers to reflect and explore but also allows the authors to free their characters from stereotypes, imbuing them with high symbolic value. Blurring helps them convey deep psychological and social aspects of their characters, thus reflecting the realities and repercussions of war on individuals, especially women, in society.

Fragmented structure, another technique employed by both Bao Ninh and Heinrich Böll, contributes to the uniqueness of their works. Through fragmentation, the pieces of the characters' lives, emotions, and fates are arranged not in a linear order but as a complex web with multiple layers of meaning and connections. This not only enhances the allure of their works but also authentically and hauntingly reflects the realities of war and its aftermath.

Each author, through their flexible use of these artistic techniques, has created unique and memorable works. The difference in their approaches—Bao Ninh with the stream of consciousness technique and Heinrich Böll with parallel perspectives—highlights the distinctiveness of each author while demonstrating the richness in character construction and storytelling. Their works are not only portrayals of war but also poignant odes to the strength, pain, and hope of individuals before and after the tragedies of history.

The findings of this study resonate profoundly within the broader landscape of contemporary global literature about armed conflict. The techniques of narrative opacity and fragmented structures, so expertly utilized by Bao Ninh and Böll, offer powerful models for contemporary authors seeking to depict the ineffable and often indescribable experiences of conflict. By deliberately omitting specifics and disrupting linear progression, these authors create a universal space for understanding trauma, moving beyond mere factual recounting to evoke the emotional and psychological realities of war. Modern writers can draw inspiration from this approach to craft narratives that transcend cultural boundaries and speak to a shared human experience of suffering and resilience.

This study also offers significant insights into the universality or cultural specificity of trauma representation. While the authors' respective cultural backgrounds undeniably shape their narratives—Bao Ninh drawing from the war in Vietnam and Böll from World War II—their shared reliance on ambiguity and fragmentation suggests a universal human response to extreme psychological distress. The deliberate blurring of details, for instance, allows for a projection of collective trauma, enabling readers from diverse backgrounds to connect with the characters' experiences regardless of specific historical or geographical context. This

universality is further underscored by the focus on the inner world of characters, where the psychological impact of war, such as fragmented memories and emotional scars, transcends cultural particularities. However, the distinct ways in which each author employs these techniques—Ninh's emphasis on stream-of-consciousness for intimate psychological exploration versus Böll's broader, more symbolic ambiguity—also highlight subtle cultural inflections in how trauma is processed and communicated. Ultimately, their works demonstrate that while the specific manifestations of trauma may vary culturally, the underlying human experience of profound suffering and the artistic impulse to represent its complexities through innovative narrative forms remain remarkably consistent across different literary traditions.

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