HEROIC FIGURES IN HEINRICH BÖLL
A STUDY OF
HERCIC FIGURS IN
SELECTED DRAMATIC WRITINGS OF
HEINRICH BÖLL

By
Gwendolyn Maureen Cahagan, B. A.

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AUTHOR: Gwendolyn Maureen Gahagan, B.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor J. B. Lawson

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: In this thesis nine dramatic works (eight radio plays and one drama) of Heinrich Büll are discussed in detail. An attempt has been made to show, with Menschlichkeit as a criterion, that many of the characters are heroic figures. In addition Büll is presented as one of his own heroes.
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Introduction

For this thesis nine dramatic works have been chosen for discussion. Among these are eight radio plays, *Mönch und Räuber* (1953), *Zum Tee bei Dr. Borsig* (1955), *Eine Stunde Aufenthalt* (1957), *Bilanz* (1957), *Die Spurenlosen* (1957), *Klopfzeichen* (1960), *Sprechanlage* (1962), and *Konzert für vier Stimmen* (1963), and the stage drama, *Ein Schluck Ende* (1962). The reason drama has been chosen is that the heroes in these works are representative and lend themselves favourably to a discussion of some of the major themes inherent in Böll's works. Since drama, and especially radio drama, must make an immediate impact, these themes are presented clearly and concisely. *Ein Schluck Ende* has the added attraction, in the first place, of being Böll's only stage drama, and secondly, of having the appearance of representing the exception to the rule in Böll's selection of setting in his portrayal of man: the environment lacks the immediacy of the present, and the language creates an aloofness through its contrast to contemporary speech.

In the consideration of Böll's heroes in these dramas they are to be treated throughout the main part of this thesis as individuals within their society. A discussion will ensue of the heroes in their relationship to this society. First of all, rebellion against society and hypocritical institutions of society, in particular the church, will be dealt with.

In the following chapter there will be an endeavour to show the
consequences of this rebellion. Special attention will be given to the problem of isolation which results from the heroes' rebellion, and each play will be brought under consideration independently, since the problems in the portrayed circumstances represent the whole essence of the heroes' relationship with society and of Böll's own personal commitment.

Next, the significance of this isolation, the possibility of consolation in spite of isolation, and possible attitudes toward an alien society will be the basis of examination. An occasional allusion to Böll's stand as an author will also be made.

The final chapter will show reflections on Böll's use of the heroic figure as a tool for illustrating the ideas of his own engagement. In addition there will be an attempt to depict Böll himself as a heroic figure comparable to those he portrays in his dramas.

Before beginning, however, it is necessary to undertake a brief discussion of what has been understood by the term "heroic" as it is applied to Böll's writings throughout this thesis.
Heroism Defined

Heinrich Böll never portrays his characters in black and white; they are always a shade of grey. His figures are much too real to be perfect, just as they are much too real to be entirely repulsive. The purest saints are not without taint, and the greatest sinners always maintain some saving grace. The main protagonist, therefore, need not be the only character displaying heroic qualities.

Nor does Böll confine himself to a particular type of hero in his writings; for his characters range from the children of "Lohengrins Tod" or Haus ohne Hutier through the adolescents of In Tal der donnernden Hufe to the young adults of Das Brot der frühen Jahre and to an older generation found in most of his dramatic works as well as in Billard um halb zehn. Social class, too, is irrelevant. Böll deals equally with the very poor such as those found in Irisches Tagebuch or in Und sagte kein einziges Wort, with the middle class like those in Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit, and even with the very upper class in Ansichten eines Clowns.

Yet, in spite of the diversity in arbitrary and outward classifications, all of Böll's heroes have a definite common denominator. They all seem to stand, in one way or another, on the outer fringe of our so-called "affluent society", and they are all in their own way heroic. Nowhere is this more evident than in Böll's radio plays, and even his stage drama, Ein Schluck Erde, has comparable features.
Heroism in Böll's works has very special and distinctive connotations. That kind of heroism which is attributable to outward gallantry plays a role of relatively little or no importance. The war stories, for example, usually deal with inexperienced, young men who are swept up helplessly in the tide of events and who exist in a state of quiet panic like the protagonist in Der Zug war pünktlich; and such characters as the wounded schoolboy-soldier in "Wanderer kommst du nach Spa..." are simply not interested in making a pretense at a brave front. Many heroes of the post-war works are out-and-out escapists. They lack the courage and energy to face the grim reality of the modern world, and so they often run away from a situation or turn to alcohol as Fred Bogner does in Und sagte kein einziges Wort. In the dramatic writings, too, if Böll's heroes are not outcasts of society, they are at least unconventional members of it. Militär in Mönch und Räuber, the priest, Brühl, in Die Spurlosen, the prisoners in Kopfzeichen, Clara, Martin, and Lorenz in Bilanz, and the Kreisen in Ein Schluck Erde are all punishable criminals according to the laws of society, while Robert in Zum Tee bei Dr. Borsig, Chrantoxy in Eine Stunde Aufenthalt, Robert in Sprechanlage, and Erwin Bass in Konzert für vier Stimmen all consciously set themselves apart from the conventional values of society.

The fact that these characters reject what they consider superficial, corrupt, or hypocritical standards in the world around them makes them all the more heroic. Indeed, the very juxtaposition to false and shallow values emphasizes their underlying, admirable qualities. These superior inner qualities include a desire to preserve both individ-
uality and communion with other individuals, a need for firm self-assurance and inner satisfaction in one's convictions as opposed to a half-hearted or blind conforming to the general trends of society, and most of all, an interest in what they believe to be the permanent rather than the transient aspects of life. In the midst of a dehumanizing world those possessing such qualities appear to be the last stronghold of the humane, and it is this attribute, humanity or Menschlichkeit, which is the hallmark of heroic character in Böll's works.

Such heroes do not fit into the social scheme which Böll portrays in his dramas as well as in his other writings. As the French critic, Henri Plard, points out, a sense of humanity suggests an esoteric affinity to some superior power beyond the realm of day-to-day existence:

Schon das Menschliche ist für Böll eine Gnade,
ein Beweis für den übermenschlichen Ursprung
des Menschen.¹

Perhaps it is this awareness of an ideal, or at least of something better than their society offers, which causes Böll's heroes to rebel against their environment.

Rebellion against Society

Rebellion or a rebellious attitude in Böll's works finds expression in a great variety of circumstances. Occasionally it is destructive, but the kind of rebellion the true heroes demonstrate rarely brings a threat of any serious chaos, since such rebellion occurs on a personal level. No matter how drastic a form it may take, rebellion always has the positive aspect of being firmly linked with the concept of humanity. In the dramatic works rebellion against the obvious flaws or shortcomings in society is a prevalent theme.

Bruhl in Die Spurlosen rebels in a positive way. At the end he is caught between criminal law and the law of humanity, between society and conscience. By choosing 'humanity' he does no harm to anyone: he grants the thieves a chance to develop their better society, and he does not even really hinder to any great extent the process of law as the police believe. Above all, in spite of his imprisonment and public shame, he maintains his peace of mind: "Ich kame mir wie ein Verräter vor, wenn ich nicht schwiegen."

The bank-robbers in the same play, however, are also protesters against a false society, but their rebellion is a negative one. They represent a generation still conscious of the atrocity of war and very much aware of the basis of modern society:

Kröner: ... Ich habe die Männer gehaßt, die mir zu zerstören befahlen - aber ich hasse sie noch mehr, seitdem ich weiß, daß sie jetzt wieder Lateinunterricht geben, Herringe kaufen, oder sich darüber erregen, wenn ihr Kind ein Spielzeug oder einen Suppenteller zerbricht.3

In an attempt to establish a better community they have run away to an unknown and isolated island in the hope of cutting themselves off from the rest of the world. But as Böll points out through the abducted priest, Brühl, such a utopian existence is also not so ideal as Kröner, the leader of the thieves, would like to believe. In order to maintain their existence it is necessary to break the law by stealing, while at the same time they write for their children in the sand the "Thou shalt not steal" of The Ten Commandments. Despite the ironic overtones of such actions a dual standard does prevail here, for the thieves are very much concerned about the reconstruction of the church in their society. In view of this duality Brühl is forced to realize the hopelessness of the battle against the foundations of society: "Alle Paradiese berufen auf Raub, Diebstahl, Einbruch."4

The Krester in Ein Schluck Erde practise a different kind of rebellion. They are not so much concerned with the reform and improvement of society as they are with their own self-preservation. Nonetheless, they are not without some longing for a better world:

3Ibid., pp. 312-313.
4Ibid., pp. 324-325.
Weit, weit weg - da gibt es Erde, viel Erde-
Erde für Kind und Tier - und Erde für diese
Lust - weit weg von hier.5

As a matter of status (lowest of the low) they are expected to act in
what are considered unconventional ways by their society:

Man erkennt einen Kresten an 1. seiner Gier,
2. seinem Schmutz, 3. am Mitleid, 4. am Wieder-
Spruchsgeist, 5. seiner Sinnlichkeit - und ...
6. seinem Opferwahn. . . . an den großen Gesten
erkennen ich den Kresten.6

They ignore the official tabus such as the eating or mentioning of fish,
love, coimnal laughter, empathy, and thought. But in this particular
instance there is a real threat of chaos, since there is no room in the
narrow confines of this particular society for rebellion; survival de-
pends to a large extent on adherence to laws. A great danger lies in
the contamination of the rest of society by the Kresten through their
easy-going attitudes combined with their unconcern for community laws
and in particular the law of controlled population:

Der Plan wird durch den Nahrungsfahtor bestimmt,
und dieser gebietet: kein Leben, wenn nicht
vorher Tod war.7

To counteract such a danger, however, the only solution the
higher authorities can find is a death punishment, also a tabu and con-

5Heinrich Böll, Ein Schluck Erde, [Köln]: Kiepenheuer & Witsch,
[1962], p. 61.
6Ibid., pp. 22, 33.
7Ibid., p. 68.
trary to the law they are defending. Only in the nick of time do the Kresten escape their watery doom. While the Kresten, too, have con-
sidered murder as a solution to their confinement, in the end they can-
not really accept it; love is stronger than hate even for an enemy:

Das Wort ist nicht die Tat, und die Möge ist
mehr als beide. Gebt ihm die Möge. . . ?

Rebellion occurs with its humorous aspects as well. Erwin Bass
in Konzert für vier Stimmen is suffering from pangs of conscience be-
cause of the success he has had in designing absolutely useless hats.
At first he exhibits a mild protest by changing his designs to the
ridiculous and the absurd, but still his hats are an overwhelming suc-
cess to his chagrin but to the joy of his family and employer. No one
seems to understand his bothered conscience or his disgust with a stu-
pid society. Finally, in an attempt to express his alienation he sim-
ply refuses to wash or to change his clothes for weeks on end. Al-
though this action does not solve anything, it does at least make
others aware of his protest, even if they cannot understand it, and it
does arouse some concern for Erwin's well-being.

Perhaps the saddest and most hopeless kind of rebellion comes
from the man in Klopzeichen. He had found himself imprisoned, not be-

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8 In his imaginative portrayal of the future Böll has anticipated
the evolution of language. Throughout this drama there are many strange
forms of words, as in this case where Möge is used in place of the
word Liebe.

9 Ein Schluck Erde, p. 82.
cause he intentionally defied the law, but because his humanitarian in-

stinct precluded any thought of law when he saw a starving enemy lad 
and gave him bread; yet, for such punishment he feels no bitterness. 

His real objection comes mainly to a contradictory shift in 
standards. He has seen a fellow prisoner shot for stealing half a 
spoonful of flour so that he could celebrate mass in secret. Shortly 
thereafter, however, mass was instituted as a regular part of the pro-
gramme in prison life, and in post-war times even the flour-dust which 
is wasted on the baker’s hat would equal that amount for which a fellow 
man had to die. Against such circumstances no constructive protest is 
possible, and the realization of the futility in trying to understand 
the inhumane actions of society drives the man, as his wife remarks, 
almost to distraction:

Du klopfst gegen Wände, die nicht zu unserer 
Welt gehören, gibst Signale an Menschen weiter, 
die ich nicht kenne, und ich fürchte, daß du nie 
ganz in unsere Welt zurückkehrst.  

Böll’s heroes object to more than a vague and general concept of 
a society which is based on superficial and arbitrary values. Through 
their criticism, their protests, and even through the various situations 
in which they find themselves, they point out the failures and short-
comings of particular institutions. In the dramatic works, no institu-
tion more than the church is an object for censure, perhaps because it

10"Klopfzeichen" in Erzählungen, Hörspiele, Aufsätze, p. 334.
is the church which is expected to uphold that which is truly just and humanitarian, for as a fellow priest reminds Brühl in Die Spinlosen:

...die Strafe wird hart sein, weil man von Ihnen mehr Verantwortungsgefühl erwartet.\textsuperscript{11}

It is, however, necessary in discussing such criticism to distinguish between the Church as the incorporation of essential concepts of the Christian faith and the church as a concrete institution meant to uphold those concepts. Never do Böll's heroes reject the ideals inherent in the Church. Only when the selfish desires or the bigoted ideas of the appointed upholders of the faith distort what Böll feels to be the spirit of Christianity does he attack through his heroic figures. Böll's heroes are not interested in destroying the institutional church, but rather intensely dedicated to insuring that it preserves the lofty ideals of the faith, for as one critic rightly concludes,

Bölls Kritik an der Kirche ist Eifer, ist über-große, zweilen verletzte Liebe.\textsuperscript{12}

The only aspect of the institutional church which Böll takes a dim view of is the misguided minority of influential officials who inadvertently betray their responsibility both to the Church and to their fellow man.

Especially in the play Mönch und Räuber the difference between

\textsuperscript{11}Erzählungen, Hörspiele, Aufsätze, p. 325.

the ideals of Christianity and empty, outward forms of it is accentuated. In searching to find the man on earth who resembles him most, Eugen, the priest, continually discovers a clash in viewpoint between himself and the various clergy. Eugen seems, in Böll's portrayal, to represent a humble idealist and the epitome of what priesthood should be, for he is selfless, humane, and ambitious in his reforms. Yet, underway to his goal in Beguna he is confronted with two attitudes in other clergymen which are alien to his ideal.

The first is the Bishop of Murdien who, informed of Eugen's pilgrimage, meets him at the border. Already a contrast becomes evident. Eugen who comes from a wealthier area travels humbly by foot, while the bishop rides luxuriously through his poverty-stricken land in a coach, and the impression of an excessive show of opulence is further emphasized by Eugen's comment on the bishop's ultra-modern facilities, particularly his library. Another and still more significant contrast in the two men is shown in their evaluation of goodness. Eugen is aware of his inability to be a true judge of a person's inner merit and is thus prepared to accept a person from any station in life as the man who is closest to him in character, but the bishop indicates definite criteria for worthy qualities in a man, just as if he cannot believe in any standards but those he considers to be obvious. Fame, above all, is important to him, and then, social status plays the next most important role. According to the bishop as well, to be of any worth both persons and places must be well-known for their reputation and outward show of piety. Neither Beguna nor its inhabitants fulfill the
bishops ideals:

Ich habe den Namen nie gehört — und Beguna ist nicht so weit entfernt ... Beguna steht nicht im Rufe großer Freiheit. Es ist ein hübsches, schmutziges Dorf, in dem Sittenlosigkeit und Trunksucht herrschen. 13

Eugen, nonetheless, is not impressed with the bishop's opinions nor with the three "Heiligen" whom the bishop ascertains to be the only really great and saintly figures in his province. At the risk of scorn and mockery from the 'greater' members of the clerical hierarchy Eugen remains true to his ideal and proceeds with the task before him.

A second contrast to Eugen is the pastor with whom he seeks shelter. Unlike Eugen, the pastor cuts himself off from the way of life around him and shuns all of the local inhabitants as scum. This pastor, too, has superficial bases for his judgments. To him the shallow routine of such practices as attending church regularly is enough to warrant the label of "fromme Seele". Indeed, his narrow outlook makes him conceited enough to believe that he really has a thorough knowledge of the people in his area:

Eugen: Seid Ihr so sicher, daß Ihr Beguna kennt?  
Pfarrer: Wirklich, ich kenne es, nicht jeden Menschen dort, nein, aber jede fromme Seele. Ich kenne jede fromme Seele im Umkreis von zwanzig Meilen ... 14

13 Erzählungen, Hörspiele, Aufsätze, p. 197.

14 Ibid., p. 201.
But the pastor's ideas are not all so harmless, as is seen when one of the native men of the area points out his recognition of the pastor's hypocritical double standard. The man finds it quite offensive that a member of the church should vehemently condemn in the local people behavior which is just as prevalent, and not at all frowned upon, among the officials of the church:

Wir mögen ihn nicht, er mag uns nicht. . . . wenn unsereiner kommt, tippt er nicht einmal an der Rand, sondern blickt uns streng an und schreit: Wieder besoffen gewesen, was? Hat schon einmal ein Pfarrer einem Direktor auf der Straße zugerufen: Wieder besoffen gewesen, was? Auch die saufen nämlich, und der Pfarrer weiß es. 15

Such incongruency only serves to arouse antipathy toward the church and what it seems to stand for.

How such clergy as this pastor and bishop differ from Eugen who mingle with the masses and tries out of genuine love to reform the wayward! It is not difficult either, to imagine with what vehemence such clergy would protest and deny the truth if, as Eugen, they were confronted with a tavern singer and one-time thief and were given to believe that this was a person as good as or better than they. Eugen's humility, however, removes in him at least any blindness or unwillingness to penetrate the surface of truth, and he, in fact, realizes that he can learn still more humility from his encounter with Milutin whom everyone

15 Ibid., p. 204.
loves and who is a truly "heroic" figure. Such a close juxtaposition of conflicting values and practices among the so-called upholders of the institutional church confirms another critic's assertion about Böll's personal stand on the church:

Die Religiosität Heinrich Bölls macht ihn empfindlich gegen die konventionell entleerten, veräußerlichten Formen der Frömmigkeit. 16

Konzert für vier Stimmen deals, albeit in a humorous way, with the problem of hypocrisy among members of the church. Erwin Bass's refusal to wash or change has indeed aroused some concern from those close to him including his parish priest. As an early form of rebellion Erwin stopped attending church services. In the end it appears that the priest is genuinely interested in Erwin's troubled soul and truly pleased with his decision to return to church. But it soon becomes obvious that the priest's conventionality and his desire not to upset his congregation takes precedence over his interest in a single lost soul:

Sopran: [Erwins Tochter]: Was, sagte ich, ich muß verhindern, daß Vater in die Kirche kommt? Ja, sagte er [der Priester], verhindern, daß er in diesem Zustand kommt. Es ist sündhaft, so schmutzig zu sein, es ist sündhaft gegen die Mitmenschen.
... Besser gar nicht als so, wie er ist. 17

16Wolfdietrich Rasch, "Lobrede und Deutung" in Heinrich Böll, p. 11.
Poor Erwin cannot find acceptance or understanding or help even in a part of society supposedly dedicated to that purpose.

The virtue of humanity is just as much a part of the essence of a good clergyman as it is of a true hero. In *Die Spurlosen* these two roles merge in the figure of Bühl, the abducted priest. Unwillingly he is forced to face the ironical dichotomy of justness. While he pedantically disapproves of the thieves' actions, he cannot entirely condemn their motives. Much as Bühl tries to detach himself, he finds himself being drawn constantly closer to the thieves. Circumstances compel him to become involved, but just which form involvement should take remains a personal decision.

Somewhat reluctantly, Bühl decides in favour of the denounced malefactors of society after being convinced that upon these very malefactors another society with twenty-five children is totally dependent; he has a full realization that no man, no society can be perfect even when it is founded on ideals. By keeping his promise and refusing to give the police any information about the bank-robbers, Bühl himself is identified by the society in which he lives as a criminal. He must suffer public shame and must risk the responsibility of causing a public smear on the reputation of the church. He had the chance to avoid personal subjection to this by going with the criminals, but his intuitive conviction in the justness of his silence gives him the strength and peace of mind to maintain his stand in spite of all opposition.

In the meantime the thieves have also been portrayed in a sympa-
thetic and humane way: they have never harmed anyone; their respect for religious traditions are strong enough for them to risk capture by abducting Brühl just after they have committed a crime, and they are attempting to create an improved form of society as a legacy to their children. Consequently, in the eyes of the audience, Brühl's action, or rather his lack of it, is the only satisfactory solution to the problem, at least from the humane point of view. Human sympathy appears as a much more important value than cold, impersonal laws.
Alienation and Isolation

A person with true heroic qualities in Böll's works usually appears as one of two types. He may be a naive idealist like Eugen in *Mönch und Räuber* in his juxtaposition to a sophisticated, cold, selfish, and self-centred world, or he may be a disillusioned cynic like Chranto in *Eine Stunde Aufenthalt* with an inability to realize any of his ideals. Only rarely does such a character as Brühl in *Die Spurlosen* emerge into cold reality from his sheltered realm of simple ideals without a sense of despair. Yet, no type of Böll-hero ever completely loses his naiveté, because none ever completely loses sight of his ideals; humanity is, after all, an ideal.

No matter which path he takes, each of Böll's heroes is to some extent alienated from society. If the heroes have not been rejected from the general trend of life and thought, then they have withdrawn themselves from it. Because of their affinity for ideals, whether they are able to achieve them or not, all Böll's heroes tend to become something fearful to the other members of society. As one character remarks of the hero, Hans Schnier, in *Ansichten eines Clowns*, it is not the rebellious acts of a hero which are so frightening as it is the pure simplicity of a hero's outlook:

Sie mögen schimpfen und mir drohen, soviel Sie wollen, ich sage Ihnen, das Schreckliche an Ihnen ist, daß Sie ein unschuldiger, fast möchte
ich sagen, reiner Mensch sind. 18

Boll had used this theme long before Ansichten eines Clowns, however. Already in the radio play, Bilanz, Clara expresses the same idea about her husband with whom she is having some trouble communicating:

Clara: Du weißt nicht, wie schrecklich du bist.
Martin: Schrecklich? Ich?
Clara: Ja, weil du - weil du gut bist. 19

In each case perhaps the cause for alarm lies in the confrontation of that-which-is in juxtaposition to that-which-could or should-be, as one critic seems to suggest:

Seine [Bölls] naive, reiner Helden schließlich
deuten auf ein Idealbild des Menschen . . . sie
offenbaren dem Menschen sein wahres Antlitz. 20

So the clash between hero and society is a two-way procedure. The heroes cannot condone the short-comings of society, and society shuns the ideals of the heroes. Where there is no understanding, alienation and isolation are only inevitable consequences.

Ein Schluck Ende is the most symbolic example of isolation and alienation in all the dramatic works. The heroes' separation from the

19 Erzählungen, Hörspiele, Aufsätze, p. 281.
rest of society becomes obvious on various levels. Because different members of society must always be in such close proximity, the ruling authorities have imposed an arbitrary class distinction through the allotment of colours ranging from colourless through blue, green, red, and white right to gold. Ironically, the heroes of the drama, the Kresten, comprise the colourless community in this inverted Utopia.

By possessing humane attributes (their name, after all, is only a varied form of the German word for Christians: Christen), they threaten to disrupt their whole society. Even the cage, in which they are housed and guarded to remind the other classes of what outcasts such beings are, cannot subdue or hide their inner, humane tendencies.

Various methods are, therefore, employed in an attempt to "reform" these offenders to the order. Starvation is instituted as a means to control their tendency toward generosity:

Das Minimum ist so errechnet, daß es eher zu Anfällen von Gier als zu solchen von Opferwahn führt. 21

But this, too, fails. When thrown a piece of bread as a reward or a present, they immediately share it or make a further present of it. Besides this, they are not so totally reliable upon society as the authorities like to think. In fact, little as it is admitted, society depends to a great extent on the Kresten for salvaging food from the flooded earth. With an inner disposition to share and to feel sympathy.

21 Ein Schluck Erde, p. 22.
it is only natural that some of the booty the Kresten recover in their dives to the bottom of the sea will be given up to their fellow creatures. So attempted starvation is not the answer for forcing these outcasts to conform.

No matter what measures are taken the Kresten always seem to remain immune to the outside influences of society. Yet, members of the outside society cannot remain immune to the Kresten. Inhuman laws and rules, even when strictly enforced, cannot withstand the test of their love, joy, and sense of community. The various classes of society are trained to view the Kresten as scapegoats for all that is wrong in the regime, but again and again individuals are "contaminated" by the disposition of the Kresten. The green Berlet is the first to be won over, followed later by red Simone and, finally, by the white Trenner. In fact, the attraction of the Kresten seems to threaten to disrupt the whole structure of society, since, at least among the creatures seen by the audience, demotions outweigh by far any promotions. It is impossible to isolate those values inherent in the Kresten by merely locking them up in a cage.

The authorities try to maintain a pat system of standards where everything is either black or white. There is no room for human error or human emotion, and for this reason, too, they attempt to set the Kresten apart from participation in the rest of activities of society. Not even in a matter of justice do the rulers choose to call upon the Kresten:

Niemals einen Kresten zum Zeugen aufrufen,
break the law and to drown the Kresten. As much as the Kresten are separated on an arbitrary basis from society, they still remain an in conquerable attraction to the outside world, and somehow it seems just that Trenner, the former white arch-enemy, should through an act of love be responsible for saving the Kresten and their inherent ideals from elimination.

One aspect of the various forms of alienation which have been incorporated in the Kresten is portrayed in the play, Bilanz, by each of the three main characters, Clara, Martin, and Lorenz. Lorenz represents the arbitrary and outward separation from society. But his isolation is self-willed. He cannot accept the obligations and interdependence demanded by society, and his thefts are not at all committed with malevolence, but rather to provide a means for escape from a world estranged to him. The fact that he does not resent the society which locks him in prison for his misdemeanours only emphasizes his lack of malice and his indifference to being kept apart from an environment in which he cannot feel at home. Lorenz does, indeed, fit into another critic's conception of Böll's heroes:

Es sind zumeist Menschen, die in Not und Angst, unter beengendem Druck und dumpfen Gewalten sich in ein Dasein gefesselt sehen, das sie nicht begreifen, nicht bewältigen, in dem sie nicht heimisch werden.24

24Wolfdieterich Rasch in Der Schriftsteller Heinrich Böll, p. 9.
Martin, Lorenz's father, has also alienated himself from society in so far as inner values are concerned. As a criminal lawyer he had played a significant role in the workings of society; yet, it had become merely a farcical act, for he had lost faith in the justice of men especially after the execution of a seventeen-year-old boy whom he had tried to defend. For this reason, he cannot condemn Lorenz's actions and even suggests that he might be the one who is really responsible for Lorenz's crimes:

Ein Dieb und ein Betrüger. Mein Sohn. Vielleicht hat er gespürt, wie sehr ich das Gesetz verachte. Ich sprach es nie aus, aber sicher ahnte er es und handelte danach.25

Thus, both Martin and Lorenz have in a sense divorced themselves from the values of the world around them. Lorenz, however, stands defiantly on the outside looking in, while Martin only appears to sit approvingly on the inside looking out. Lorenz has never allowed himself since his experience with war to become involved in the workings of society, whereas Martin is deeply entangled in spite of his inner disillusionment.

Martin's wife, Clara, on the other hand, is neither detached nor a mere silent rejecter of society's structure. She is, however, fully aware of a society out of joint and is just as much alien to it as her husband and son, but she is active and positive in expressing her disapproval. She makes a valiant attempt to balance at least one little

situation in a foul system.

In earlier years Clara has had an affair with Martin's best friend, Kramer, for which she has carried not only a sense of guilt but also an intense hatred for the hypocritical attitude Kramer has assumed toward Martin. Kramer's ambition has caused him to use Martin as a stepping-stone to a position of esteem and importance, while at the same time he plays the role of a true friend. Somehow the injustice to the inherently good Martin, disillusioned with what life has to offer opposed to Kramer's apparent success and satisfaction with what he has achieved, is too much for Clara. She cannot tolerate the secret awareness of Kramer's wrong against her own husband, and above all, she cannot tolerate her husband's naive respect and admiration for Kramer. Right up until her death-bed this has been the basis for a deep-rooted estrangement from her husband, which she feels is her duty to resolve. Her cunning plan to have Kramer denoted on account of Lorenz's escape achieves the balance she seeks. Kramer must pay with his high position in society for the freedom of Martin's favourite son. Clara is indeed successful in conquering the inner barrier between herself and the man she loves and in balancing the hatred she carries for Kramer, but her success can only be enjoyed for a few moments before her death.

A case of an ironical alienation is that of Milutin in Mönch und Räuber. From birth he was brought up as a social outcast because he belonged to a notorious community of robbers. Years later he still retains at least a feeling of isolation from the rest of the world when Eugen finds him in the little village of Beguna.
Until Eugen actually meets him there are many indications to suggest that Milutin probably does not fit into accepted society. Before entering the province of Murdien, Eugen is made aware of the poverty and backwardness which reigns in the area, and the closer he comes to Beguna the more derogatory the reports become. The bishop indicates that no pious man has been known to exist in Beguna, and certainly no one with the name of Milutin is known in the "better" circles. Even the pastor remarks about the wild, unsavoury kind of life which exists in Beguna, and he makes Milutin's alienation all the more evident by mentioning that his name is foreign to the area and that such people usually have a very poor reputation. In addition, facts which come a little later (the discovery that Milutin is a tavern singer and the knowledge that he spent ten years in jail) throw an unpleasant perspective on the man from the point of view of the standard which is portrayed throughout Eugen's entire journey as being the approved one.

Yet, the moment Milutin meets Eugen the audience's whole perspective begins to shift. Milutin's reaction to what one would suppose to be his direct counterpart, namely the priest, Eugen, is entirely different to that of the bishop and pastor in similar circumstances. Instead of forcing a greater barrier between himself and Eugen, Milutin immediately begins to dissolve it:

Eugen: Warum sagst du kleiner Eugen zu mir, wie dein Vater damals?
Milutin: So sage ich zu allen, die nicht so schlecht
In a way Milutin is isolating himself, but only in his own mind, when he compares his own status to that of Eugen, but there is never any tension between the two men.

Finally, Eugen's landlady puts into the proper light the whole picture previously painted by the bishop and the pastor. She points out that the difficulty in finding Milutin was not because he was unknown, but because Eugen had asked precisely those few, detached bigots who really have nothing to do with 'real society', since they are the ones who are truly isolated, not Milutin. Hearing further examples from the landlady concerning Milutin's love for children, his generosity, and his general goodness, Eugen becomes aware of the positive kind of isolation in which Milutin lives, for Milutin is isolated only from a cold, unfeeling, and superficial kind of society. In his own community he is the central figure, and the esteem in which he is held is based on his true worth. Somewhat melancholically, Eugen becomes aware of the irony in his own situation:

... mein Herz wurde traurig, denn viele Menschen in Beguna liebten Mulz, obwohl sein Name über die zehn Gassen, in denen die Armen von Beguna wohnten, kaum hinausgedrungen war. Mich aber, den fast alle kannten, schien niemand zu lieben.27

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26 Ibid., p. 206.
27 Ibid., p. 209.
Eugen, however, makes a mistake in trying to separate Milutin from his adopted people; he cannot quite grasp that putting Milutin in a cloister would be a negative isolation for a man whose whole life is built on assisting and associating with his fellow man.

Milutin's simplicity and humility overwhelm Eugen so much that they serve to accentuate Eugen's own isolation. Eugen does return a better and wiser man from his pilgrimage, but his fellow monks feel only scorn for an endeavour which they feel resulted in a fiasco. Such a rude awakening to life forces Eugen to withdraw from it into the hills of his youth. Eugen's alienation is by far greater and severer than Milutin's, for many of his learned ideals are shattered to be replaced with more sophisticated ones, and in the end he is left with absolutely no one to console him.

A similar situation of a priest and thieves in relationship to each other and to society is found in the radio play, Die Spurlosen, but the circumstances are somewhat reversed. It is the thieves who withdraw on their own initiative from a society whose whole foundation they despise.

The thieves are, like all of Böll's heroes, not malicious in relationship to their fellow men, but they are definitely hostile to a system which is, as they see it, inhumane. With their pure child-like ideals they cannot tolerate a hypocrisy to which not only appears to consent, but upon which it even seems to rely in order for survival. What society builds with one hand, it destroys with the other in an endless and senseless cycle. So, the thieves are acting in the hope of
finding some liaison between the two forces: "Ich suche das Verhältnis zwischen Zerstörung und Arbeit".\textsuperscript{28}

Rather than attempt to reform the society at hand they have pulled up all roots and cut off all connections with it (except for the one ironical fact that they are dependent on it for their survival) in order to start afresh. Because of their dependence on a social structure for which they ascertain they have nothing but disgust, their isolation from it can never be complete. They cannot assume only the good aspects of a society and live off the product of what they consider evil in another without being hypocrites themselves. They are not at all as alien as they have chosen to believe, for their isolation is only an outward, superficial one.

The priest, Brühl, on the other hand, is ostracized for remaining true to his humane ideals and responsibilities. His isolation is imposed by society itself. Brühl is aware of the imperfect structure and foundation of society, and he also recognizes that even the men with the greatest ideals cannot avoid being degraded by society: "Auch Christus war ein Verbrecher".\textsuperscript{29} In any arbitrary system built on various conceptions of ideals there are bound to be contradictions. Brühl merely chooses to uphold his own humane ideal when it conflicts with the pedantic ideals set down in written law. As a result, he, just as much as the thieves, is scorned as a criminal, and he is temporarily

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., p. 312.

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., p. 324.
cut off from participation in the kind of society in which he has chosen to live.

The detective, Kleffer, is not capable of understanding the importance of any ideal other than the one he has been ordered to uphold: stiff and rigidly interpreted law. No compromise is possible for him:

- Ihr Schweigen, Ihr Stolz, Ihre Brüderlichkeit werden verschwendet sein - weggeworfene Zeit,
- Mißtrauen, das Sie sich hätten ersparen können - Verwirrung gesät - und die Unzufriedenheit der Oberen.
- Weswegen, Brühl, weswegen?

Again nothing can be solved. Both societies still exist on dual standards and probably always will. Both the thieves and Brühl live in only arbitrary isolation.

Isolation and alienation assume more subtle and psychological significance in Zum Tee bei Dr. Borsig. That cold, unsensitive attitude already seen in Kleffer reappears in unscrupulous businessmen like Söntgen and Dr. Borsig whose only interest is to make a profit at the public's expense, while deep concern for integrity and preservation of individuality is seen in the other three characters in the play, Frau Borsig, Robert, and Franziska.

Yet, neither of these attitudes is directly responsible for isolation. Both can exist comfortably side by side. It is only when a person with one predisposition is compelled to exist among those of

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30 Ibid., p. 326.
the other that real alienation occurs.

Söntgen is the extreme example of the cold, insensitive attitude. He has absolutely no concern for honesty as is shown in the alteration of a composition which Robert has written as a tribute to Werner Becher at the request of Söntgen’s company Oramag. Nor has Söntgen any qualms about the usefulness of his products or any interest in the well-being of his clients; his striving for profit and prestige indicate this: "... soll ich mehr Gewissen haben als die Konkurrenz?"31

His colleague, Dr. Borsiag, although he now belongs in the same classification as Söntgen, is a relative new-comer to it. As the story unfolds, his wife makes it quite clear that he has been so corrupted by the false charm of materialism that he has lost sight of his ideals and with them his inherent dignity. But even early in the play Borsiag does himself give some indication of an affinity for the other kind of attitude:

Dr. Borsiag: Es gibt Dinge, die keinen Preis haben.

Dr. Borsiag: Verzeihen Sie -- nicht in jedem Fall.32

It is too late for him, however, to escape from his entanglement with Söntgen.

31Ibid., p. 232.
32Ibid., p. 213.
Robert, the young, naive poet, is at the other extreme. He is so bound up in his lofty ideals that he is completely unaware of the danger threatening him and misinterprets Franziska's apprehensive warnings as outbursts of resentment at an interrupted tryst. Only after his encounter with Frau Borsig does he begin to comprehend the fact that there is another attitude to life, but this seems merely to arouse his curiosity. He, nonetheless, withstands his test and recognizes how narrow Söntzen's and Borsig's outlook really is:

Dr. Borsig sagte: Sie sehen zu weit, Sie sehen zu tief - aber man kann nicht weit, kann nicht tief genug sehen. 33

Actually, it is the two women who play an integral part in the presentation of the concept of isolation. Franziska who has an outlook completely foreign to the business world is not so far removed from it that she cannot see its conniving and its corrupting influence. Most of all she fears the loss of personal freedom and the right to individuality in Robert if he allows himself to be deceived just once in the conference over afternoon tea:

... es wird der bitterste Tee deines Lebens sein, und er wird teuer sein: jeden Schluck, den du trinkst, wirst du bezahlen müssen. 34

Robert does not belong to the impersonal part of life, and Franziska is only too much aware of the regret he would have to experience too late.

33Ibid., p. 239.
34Ibid., p. 220.
if once caught in it; yet, she is aware, too, that he must see for himself what lies on the other side, if she is not to alienate herself from him:

... du würdest die ganze Zeit über an die größte Chance deines Lebens denken, die dir entgangen ist.35

The person, however, who is suffering real alienation and isolation is Frau Borsig. She is the picture of what Franziska could be in the future if Robert sells his soul for the "Etwas-vom-Leben-haben" blindfold. In the past she has seen her father and husband fall into the same pit and has been helpless to do anything. While she cannot accept the values of her environment, she cannot escape from them either. Even her own daughters are alien to her. No one has any understanding for her point of view, and one gets the impression that her physical illness is just an outward sign of the inner tension.

In spite of her attempt to hold fast to the ideals incorporated in Franziska and Robert, Frau Borsig has not been able to avoid the degenerative influence of her surroundings. The sensitivity which causes Franziska to cry at such simple pleasures as the smell and taste of dry bread is foreign to her. She is caught between two worlds and incapable of living in either:

Ich kann es nicht mehr hören, kann sie nicht mehr sehen: ich werde bald weit wegfahren...36

36Ibid., p. 235.
But it is doubtful if she can ever escape from the vise in which she is caught, and no one sees it more clearly than Franziska:


A less tragic consideration of isolation under similar circumstances occurs in Konzert für vier Stimmen. Erwin Bess is a sensitive man caught up in the cold world of business. He cannot exclude his thoughts of decency from his work, even though the two forces seem to be incompatible:

Naturally bekam ich Gewissensbisse; das ist ganz unwahrscheinlich, wenn man an höhere Werte glaubt, und ich glaube an solche. . . Tue etwas, wovon du nicht ganz überzeugt bist – was ist die Folge: Gewissensbisse.

Yet, he does not throw blame directly on the business world for his bad conscience. Admittedly his firm does produce useless and often ridiculous articles, but as Erwin points out, if members of society, and in particular the "intellectuals", were not so stupid in their demands for the product, he would not have to be worrying about receiving money for something of no use.

Still, Erwin feels some responsibility for putting such a pro-

37Ibid., p. 238.
38Zum Tee bei Dr. Borsig, Hörspiele, p. 178.
duct in front of obviously irresponsible eyes, and by seeking reassurance from first his wife and then his priest he only discovers through the lack of sympathy and understanding just how alone he is with his problem.

The priest postpones any attempt to interfere in Erwin's 'crisis'; Erwin's wife, Alt, is only concerned about his outward appearance; his son, Tenor, takes a pseudo-intellectual and non-sympathetic stand. Only his daughter, Sopran, makes any real attempt at communication with her father, but all her efforts are frustrated by the lack of any real interest on the part of all those who could help. Erwin's alienation problem like those in all the other dramas is, in fact, left unresolved.

In the three radio dramas, *Eine Stunde Aufenthalt*, *Sprechakt*, and *Klopfzeichen*, alienation and isolation take on more serious perspectives. These problems, too, are left unresolved, and all three plays maintain a tone of tragedy throughout.

In *Eine Stunde Aufenthalt* Chrontax is a man again of two contradictory worlds. To be sure, his isolation from one world is a self-willed act, but it becomes increasingly clear to him that his innate affinity to this world from which he is trying to escape is detrimental to any real identification with another way of life. The isolation he experiences is so extreme and so involved that he is powerless to break out of it. This is especially evident after his last attempt with a telephone call to his former sweetheart seems to confirm his inability to re-establish the old relationship of the past.
Chrantoxy's alienation is illustrated in various and increasing depths. The first signs of distinction from the world around him are presented on a very superficial level. Through the porter, Bruno, foreignness in both appearance and name are emphasized. Yet, already a discrepancy is evident when Bruno notices a slight tendency toward the local dialect in Chrantoxy's speech.

Another indication of aloofness is through the time element. Chrantoxy, admitting that he has been born and raised in this city, informs Bruno of a self-imposed exile in South America which has lasted almost thirty years. During this time, he assures Bruno, he has put his former life completely out of his mind and has shut out the past. Again, however, there is a hint of contradiction as Chrantoxy reveals a state of near panic when he discovers he must spend an hour in his former home town:

Ich habe nicht damit gerechnet, daß der Zug hierhält, sonst hätte ich eine andere Route gewählt.\(^{39}\)

Being forced to face that which he has chosen to forget shows that Chrantoxy has not been able to isolate himself entirely from some emotional involvement.

As Chrantoxy relates the story of his youth to Bruno, the basis of his trend toward isolation is made clear. An overpowering disgust for the immorality of the affluent environment in which he lived was the cause of an early isolation from his parents. But since his girl-

\(^{39}\)Erzählungen, Hörspiele, Aufsätze, p. 242.
friend, Anne, and his brother, Krumen, experienced the same repugnance, Chrantoxy was not entirely isolated. All three found companionship and solace in one another while at the same time they rejected the standards of their decadent society:

Wir hatten Angst, nach Hause zu gehen, nicht Angst
vor der Straße, Angst vor den, was unsere Eltern
ihre Freiheit nannten.\(^{40}\)

These were the only two people, however, with whom Chrantoxy was able to have any communication at all. His sister, Fritzi, who was very strange in her ways and probably exercising her own form of isolation from an incompatible society, could tolerate only Krumen near her. His other brother, Werner, did not share his attitude to life:

Mein Bruder Werner war mir immer fremd. Es war,
als spräche er eine andere Sprache; kein Wort
hatten wir gemeinsam. \(^{41}\)

But even the relationship with Anne and Krumen became intolerable for Chrantoxy. Because he believed that he was the only hindrance to a romantic relationship between his girlfriend and his brother, he disappeared, leaving no traces. Only out of love for Anne and especially for Krumen did Chrantoxy completely geographically isolate himself from them. His decision, nonetheless, did not come easily, for he admits he turned around twice under way to fetch his brother. He was not convinced he was right in his determination to be absolutely alone, but

\(^{40}\)Ibid., p. 257.
\(^{41}\)Ibid., p. 252.
he sacrificed his own happiness because he thought he could insure
that of the people dearest to him. Only after twenty-six years does he
discover from Anne how wrong he was:

Es war nicht besser für uns. Es war schlecht.
Es war die Hölle, weil du nicht da warst. Du
hättest bleiben oder uns mitnehmen sollen.42

His withdrawal did not solve or improve anything; his effort was, in
fact, from all points of view tragic.

Abroad, too, Chrantoxx was faced with the futile situation of
being isolated from a new way of life because he could not become com-
pletely isolated from his past. In spite of changing such outward as-
pects as his name, he was constantly trapped between two worlds, hope-
lessly striving to enter into a bright, new future while being continu-
ously haunted by the curse of his heritage. He was not even able to
live in poverty for any length of time, since according to his fatal-
istic outlook and inherent talent he was doomed to belong to that
wealthy minority of society:

Wissen Sie, was es heißt, reich zu sein, reich
seit einhundertfünfzig Jahren, reich von Ewig-
heit zu Ewigkeit. Das ist wie eine Hautfarbe,
die Sie nicht mehr loswerden.43

Attempt at a marriage into fresh blood was equally a failure, just as
it had been for Anne. An outsider could not stand the lack of "freedom"

42 Ibid., p. 260.
43 Ibid., p. 251.
imposed by such a marriage. Again the plague of the past serves to
isolate not only Chrontox, but apparently his whole clan:

Schmilling geborene Frulham, Frulham geborene
Schmilling, Donath geborene Schmilling, Schmil-
ling geborene Donath. Von dem Hügel geborene Von
dem Hügel. Vier Namen nun, die sich zweihundert
Jahre mischen. Man heiratet sich, mischt sich. 44

Real isolation for Chrontox is not from anything, but rather it
is not being able to belong to anything. He is doomed to retain his
class distinction wherever he goes; yet, he is in his mind always ali-
enated from the standards and values which appear to belong to such a
class.

His one last vague and hesitant hope of finding a deep alliance
with someone after discovering the death of Krumen seems to be crushed
with Anne’s refusal to become involved with Chrontox again:

Mich – mich wirst du nicht sehen. Es gibt mich
nicht mehr, wie es dich nicht mehr gibt. 45

Still, there is a slight indication that all may not be lost. Chrontox
is promised the son of Anne and Krumen. But just how hopeful such a
relationship could be leaves much to speculation. At least it has pos-
sibilities: both come from the same class, and it is highly probable
the boy will have compatible attitudes since he is the off-spring of
the only two people who meant anything to Chrontox. It appears, nonethe-
less, that Chrontox is trying to recapture a bright moment from the past,

44Ibid., p. 253.
the past which no longer exists.

Nothing, however, is certain except that for Anne there is no escape now from her isolation once her son is gone. Chantox ignores Bruno’s pleas on Anne’s behalf; he does not feel he can insist on staying to dry her tears after what she has told him. Again he is deserting her and misunderstanding her.

Just as Chantox maintains his detachment on the telephone through the illusion of distance, Robert Köhler in Sprechunlage, as the title suggests, uses the intercom in a parallel situation. Like Chantox he, too, has chosen to forget the past as much as possible; yet, circumstances force him to renew some contact with it.

Seventeen years before the conversation takes place both Köhler and Rehbach seem to have had equal social status. But time has taken its toll, and the two find themselves in entirely different standings. Rehbach has become important in his community, and his surroundings suggest security and opulence. In his family and in his society there is every indication that he is a well-adjusted, established individual. In spite of the lapse of time he has not forgotten his debt to Köhler, nor does he hesitate in his offer for assistance.

Köhler, however, is almost Rehbach’s complete antithesis. Since the war he has sunk into utter poverty and decadence which accompanies indolence or disgust, and he has become to all intents a social outcast. He, nonetheless, expresses no bitterness about his position or that of his one-time friend, Rehbach:

Köhler: . . . Findest du mein Lachen bitter, Franz?
Rehbach: Nein -- merkwürdigerweise: nein... 46

By refusing to see Rehbach, Köhler demonstrates his first sign of isolation. Secondly, his constant laughter acts as a barrier which completely bewilders Rehbach. Köhler certainly has not the same relationship with Rehbach which he had in earlier years; nor, does he want it. In fact, he does everything to destroy anything that might be left of that relationship. He makes light of his former courage and dismisses Rehbach’s debt of gratitude for saving his life as a gross misinterpretation:

Nein, du stehst nicht in meiner Schuld, Franz.
Ich ging ganz gern mal nachts aus unserem Versteck
raus schon um mal eine andere Frau als Helene
zu sehen. 47

Deliberately, he tries every possible way he can to antagonize Rehbach. Especially in financial matters he dwells on figures of speech. When told that all Rehbach’s wealth is his, he insists on a detailed inventory and questions the discrepancy in the estimate in cash and the amount he receives. Along with this he takes advantage of the pun on squandering one’s money in his demand to have Rehbach throw him money out of the window, an insinuation which is sure to irk the prudent businessman. Even on a personal level Köhler manages to throw out an insult in connection with Rehbach’s picture in the newspaper:

Es war wirklich nicht erheiternd, dein Gesicht

46 Zum Tee bei Dr. Borsig, Hörspiele, p. 166.
47 Ibid., pp. 171-172.
in der Zeitung zu sehen; nimms mir nicht übel:
du wirst ja hin und wieder in den Spiegel sehen
-- so lange ich dich nicht mit meinen eigenen
Augen sehe, kann ich mir einreden, es habe am
falschen Raster, an der Technik des Fotos, des
Drucks gelegen. 48

He pushes the test of friendship to the extreme so that although Reh-
bach endures it with patience, he does indicate that Köhler is making
the impression he meant to convey:

Wenn ich deine Stimme nicht kannte, würde ich be-
zweifeln, ob du wirklich der Robert bist, den ich
kannte. 49

Robert has indeed changed! Moreover, there are intimations that
Köhler's mysterious change in both outlook and status might be a result
of some action on the part of Rehbach. The fact that all these years
Rehbach has made such an issue to his family about his debt to Köhler
and the fact that Rehbach's admission that all he has belongs to Köhler
seem to indicate that he may have a guilt complex and perhaps is respon-
sible, at least in part, for Köhler's present condition. This idea is
reinforced when Köhler is inadvertently, yet consistently, reassured
that he has a right to demand everything from Rehbach.

Köhler, thus aware of his superior psychological position, is
able to hold Rehbach at bay and to accentuate the barrier between him-
self and Rehbach which has consequently arisen through the years. There

48Ibid., p. 166.
49Ibid., p. 166.
are also many other indications of alienation. He scorns Rehbach's suggestion that he is needed in society, laughs at Helene's rebuke at wasted talent, and prefers to avoid an encounter with Georg. Mysterious insinuations arise as well throughout the play of Köhler's unpre-

sentable appearance. His great pains to avoid being seen, his mockery of the idea of the cheque, and Marianne's agitation and refusal to de-
scribe him all seem to indicate that he is in some way unacceptable to society.

Marianne, Rehbach's wife, does, however, assist in some explana-
tion of Köhler's isolation. She is an outsider to the situation and has, in fact, never seen Köhler before; yet, she recognizes him at once. Although she is shocked by the encounter, she shows an immediate under-
standing for Köhler's position when she, too, ridicules the idea of a cheque. She seems to recognize that a cheque is a form of agreement or treaty used only among established members of society. To be able to use this kind of communication society demands all appearances of se-
curity and respectability which Köhler apparently does not possess. His identification would mean absolutely nothing in a society based on permanence and dependability. No one would believe in the integrity of a social outcast.

So, Köhler both rejects and is rejected by established society. Still, ironically, he must rely on support from those responsible mem-
bers of the society he rejects. By belittling himself, by harping on trifling details, by continual sarcasm, and by occasional references to his past, Köhler gives the impression that his detachment is not based
solely on the alien standards of society.

The man in *Klopfzeichen* is an example of a person driven to distraction through his inability to adjust to society. In this case it appears to be society rather than the individual which is at fault, for the manner in which society interprets and executes its rules appears to follow an inconsistent pattern. Because of the very unpredictability of this pattern the unsuspecting individual is liable to fall prey to the system.

By reacting only to his own, personal, humane instincts the man in this play has found himself an enemy of the law without even intending any opposition. Like Brühl in *Die Spurlosen* he accepts his punishment as a natural consequence, and toward the neighbour who was responsible for his arrest he, like Köhler in *Sprechlage*, expresses no antipathy. But whereas Köhler employs a tone of sarcasm at seeing himself a victim of others, the man here conveys instead a suggestion of irony:

Der Nachbar war ein gesetzesstreuer Mann -- er ist es noch heute.

... der Nachbar ist immer noch gesetzesstreuer, der Richter immer noch gerecht.  

It is, after all, not only easier to equate one's conscience with the rigid machinery of law than to accept full responsibility for one's actions on a purely personal level, but also the only possible attitude if one is to be accepted into a society based on stiff, impersonal

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rules and regulations.

The conflict, however, between adherence to inner values and duty to written law underlines the whole question of what is really just. If the man obeys only written law, then he must alienate himself from the essence of his whole nature; if he gives in only to natural reactions, then he must both alienate and isolate himself from society. For such a "hero" as the man in Klopfzeichen there is no possible way of reconciling these two obligations, and to remain a hero, alienation from society is inevitable under the circumstances portrayed in the play.

Yet, even when the man accepts the sacrifice of his freedom as payment for his alienation from the order of society, this man-made order reveals a startling instability. For giving bread and cigarettes to a young, starving Polish boy during the war he was committing a crime punishable by imprisonment; now, however, such an act would be perfectly acceptable and even laudable. At first in prison, mass had to be conducted in utmost secrecy, but a few months later public celebration in the prison chapel became a regulation. Julius, a fellow prisoner, was executed for stealing half a teaspoon of flour; every day now the man sees that amount wasted on the cap of the baker, on the sleeve of the baker's son, and on the truck which transports the flour from the mill to the bakery, and his wife's only punishment for dropping a whole pot of flour on the floor is a slight reprimand. Where a man is at one time a social outcast, he is later perfectly within the realm of law for precisely the same behaviour. The only real bitter-
ness the man displays toward this duality is in his reaction to Jull-
us's death, since Julius stole to provide flour for celebrations of
mass of which Julius himself never had the chance to partake:

Er war des landesverraths angeklagt. Hoffentlich
hat er ihn wirklich begangen; es könnte ihn, als er
starb, getröstet haben - wenn es ihn nicht getröstet
hat, wegen eines halben Löffels Mehl zu sterben.51

The man is so much confused that he cannot comprehend what is
wrong and what is right, what is real and what is illusion, what is
past and what is present. The very kneading of dough reminds him so
much so of the signals which he used to convey between the priest and
Julius that in his mind he can no longer distinguish the knockings:

Man kann in die Zeit fallen, wie in ein Loch, da
ist alles gegenwärtig, vergangen und zukünftig -
und du weißt nicht, ob das Vergangene Gegenwart
oder das Gegenwärtige Zukunft ist. Es ist eins.52

When time becomes meaningless for him, so does any sense of reality.
He must continually touch the objects around him and move constantly
from room to room to see the members of his family and such signs of
their existence as the toothbrushes in the bathroom in order to assure
himself that it is all not just a dream. The past, nonetheless, is
always more vivid than the present. The prisoner whom he has never
seen seems much more real to him than his own children; the masses
which were celebrated in secret have much more significance for him

51 Ibid., p. 335.
52 Ibid., p. 331.
than the masses he now attends in church. He admits that although he will live on in the present, his mind will always be on those events of the past. In earlier years, at least, there still seemed to be some meaning to life, and he still had some conception of right and wrong, of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. He is no longer isolated or outwardly alienated from society, but he is alienated from the present. His heroic qualities, however, have remained the one constant through time, change, and even emotional disturbances.

This is true of all Böll's heroes. They never lose that hint of humane concern which seems to justify their existence. Although their actions may not always be commendable and their reasoning not always entirely logical, they are in every way realistically drawn individuals, and, as at least one critic recognizes, they cannot be denied compassion. The fact that they are outsiders to the life around them augments rather than detracts from an approbation of them. There is a sensitivity about them and an affinity for some absolute values which make it impossible always to conform to the standard routine of society. A physical isolation may not always be imposed by society, but there is always at least a psychological alienation from which there can be no escape.

53 see E. S. Pisko in *Christian Science Monitor*, June 28, 1956, p. 11.
Significance and Consolation

It is no coincidence that while much attention in the selected dramatic works (as well as in the majority of Böll's other writings) is given to the foreground of the heroes, the main emphasis is on the environmental background, and this background is society, past, present, and future. The rebellion and resulting isolation of the heroes has meaning only when seen in their relationship to society, and although the focus appears to be upon the struggle of the individual, the real concern lies in the destructive threats of society upon individualism.

There can be no doubt that Heinrich Böll is an 'engaged' writer, and as such he has a definite purpose in the continuous portrayal of his heroes in contrast to the way of life around them. Rather than merely denouncing what he considers to be faulty in society, Böll uses a more subtle approach. By championing the individuals who are cut off from society, he is in a sense criticizing that way of life which is incompatible to the heroes. These heroes are by no means ideal persons, but the basis of their split with society is inevitably society's transgression of some humane ideal.

Such transgressions are rarely exposed by a direct protest against an out-and-out wrong. The man in Klopzeichen, for example, expresses a hint, ironic as it is, almost of admiration for his neighbour's close adherence to the law, and never does he criticize other than by implication the neighbour's cold-heartedness towards himself.
on the Polish boy. In Mönch und Räuber Milutin looks upon himself as an evil outcast in comparison to the so-called virtuous citizens, and there is even the extreme example in Ein Schluck Edle of the Kresten whose very Christian ideals classify them as criminals. Throughout, a note of irony prevails as the reader alone is able to recognize the inverted standards which are being exposed. Such irony could in some circumstances be almost humorous, but when one considers the true-to-life delineation of such situations as Böll portrays, the implications become in fact horrifying.

The trend in life does indeed in Böll seem to be yielding to the cold, technical workings of a mechanical organization, and, worst of all, man in his writings either does not recognize it or is indifferent to it. As society becomes more mechanized, so does man, and as man becomes more mechanized, he loses sight of his humane ideals and even begins to condemn them.

The heroes who resist this, however, are in an even worse position. Their sensitivity makes them susceptible to the emotional turmoil which, as the critic, Henri Piaud, ascertains, is entirely lacking in their counterparts:

Die Gleichgültigen, die unwissentlich Grausamen sind Automaten, nicht Menschen. 54

For such heroes as Böll's the struggle for identity can never achieve much success when confronted with the automatons. No prospect of a rosy

54 Der Schriftsteller Heinrich Böll, p. 71.
future can lie in store for a person who bases his life upon personal emotions and abstract ideals. Never is there any satisfactory solution for Böll's heroes; they remain homeless wanderers with no chance of recognition in society.55

But heroism is only measurable when compared to a certain set of values. If an individual's ideals clash with those of society, then he automatically becomes unheroic in the eyes of that society. Böll is obviously measuring his heroes against the ideals of Christianity; so where his heroes clash with society, society is usually clashing with the essence of Christianity.

Böll's heroes are in many ways a representation of man in general, for while their particular situations appear on an individual level, there are also many universal connotations. Therefore, the assumption about the appeal of Böll's heroes by yet another critic is probably correct:

... seine Menschen sind interessant nicht wegen ihres Innenlebens, sondern wegen der zeittypischen Erscheinungen, Probleme und Auseinandersetzungen, die durch sie zum Ausdruck kommen.56

Their problems are those of sensitive individuals confronted with the overwhelming, impersonal outlook of a progressive society.


56 Schwarz, p. 110.
Not only in these dramatic works, but also in his essays Böll expresses alarm at the increasing devaluation of anything which has no material advantage, so much so that he even regards contemporary existence as a "foundationless society".\textsuperscript{57} Where life should be based on Christian ideals, it focuses instead on capital gain to such an extent that humane ideals are being smothered.\textsuperscript{58} Nowhere is this illustrated more clearly than in \textit{Ein Schluck Erdbe} where the setting is in the far future and the last remnants of humane or Christian ideals are preserved with the lowly Kresten in a cage.

But to imagine that Böll foresees a totally dark future would be a false assumption. Even though the Kresten are the unknowing preservers of Christian ideals, they do prove that these ideals can neither lose their appeal nor be destroyed nor do they depend upon a conscious effort by man for their survival, for they continually disrupt the rest of society by constantly making it aware of the questionable relevance of many rules and superstitions and by also making it conscious of greater pleasures through human relationships.

Equally false would be an assumption that Böll advocates the total rejection of a corrupted society, as the thieves do in \textit{Die Spurenloser}, for while he may be an idealist, he is, nonetheless, a realist. Not always does he paint society in such a negative light that all its values are to be shunned. Köhler in \textit{Sprechansage}, for example, seems

\textsuperscript{57}Frankfurter Vorlesungen, p. 83.
\textsuperscript{58}Ibid., pp. 82-83.
to be very conscious of how he might appear to society and may even be trying to reestablish himself in it with the money he requests. Through the priest, Briühl, in Die Spurlosen, too, Böll seems to recognize the inevitability of faults in an arbitrary organization which can be accepted without ever yielding or losing sight of basic humane ideals. When the two forces clash, however, it must be noted that when Briühl must choose one or the other, he, as a true hero, chooses his own personal ideals but still does not condemn the workings of society.

When Böll's heroes choose their own ideals above those of society, they usually become victims of persecution in one form or another. So, often, if society is not doomed, the heroes seem to be. They become passive and introverted and seem to be swept along by a tide of events beyond their control. But Böll does not appear to be entirely convinced of the inevitability of such a fate. Now and again there is an exception like Robert in Zum Tee bei Dr. Borsig who does not allow a disillusioning awareness resulting from a confrontation with the cold, materialistic aspect of life to force him into inertia. Rather, he becomes stronger in his convictions and more determined to uphold them against threatening corruption at least for the present. The fact that such heroes constitute a young, naive generation, however, raises the question of whether or not their vitality and optimism will not also gradually be suppressed with time.

Böll is even less convinced of the doom of his heroes' ideals. In spite of the suppressing influence of the rest of society, there is constant evidence to indicate that humane values are not as fragile and
disposable as they sometimes appear. Again in Zum Tee bei Dr. Borsig, Robert proves in the end that he can survive without having anything to do with Söntgen's grim business world, but on the other hand, Söntgen makes quite clear in the beginning his dependence on the "fantasy" of the artistic, heroic types in order to evoke some appeal in the general public. The failure of society either to subdue or to destroy the standards of the Kreten even in the far future of Ein Schluck Ende also suggests a spark of hope. Finally, Brühl in Die Spurlosen forces his doubting colleague, Pölzig, to reveal a secret admiration of Brühl's stand against the cold machinery of law in spite of Pölzig's former show of scepticism toward Brühl's behaviour.

Where enthusiasm like that of Robert in Zum Tee bei Dr. Borsig is nearly always lacking in Böll's other heroes, a numb dullness rests in its place as passivity and inertia become a way of life. Many of Böll's heroes give up trying to fight back against the overpowering, inhumane forces of society. In order to preserve their ideals, they feel they must withdraw themselves from their environment like Eugen in Mörch und Räuber or Lorenz in Bilanz or Chantox in Eine Stunde Aufenthalt. Escapism is a common answer to disillusionment in Böll's heroes, although it is by no means portrayed as a positive solution.

Probably the most positive kind of hero pictured by Böll is one who continues to fight back in his own way. In view of such a criterion, Brühl in Die Spurlosen might be considered to be one of the most admirable of all the heroes in these dramas. He accepts his opportunity to do an active part in preserving the vestiges of Menschlichkeit without
blotting out society. In Bilanz Clara from her death-bed manages, as well, to do what she can to balance a minute incident in society's blind, ruthless, and hypocritical strivings.

Yet, all the heroes are remarkably realistically drawn persons right down to their human faults. While some of them may be more praiseworthy than others, none are condemned for their human weaknesses. For those who are not strong enough to withstand the demands of society, escape from such a society is the only possible answer - whether it be in running away, in being confined, or in mental distraction. Many of them just seem to be marking time, waiting for the monotony of life to pass. They do not seem to be able to find any communication with other members of society, for as the character, Fred Bogner, in Und sagte kein einziges Wort indicates, society's values can be nothing short of boring:

... -du glaubst nicht, wie langweilig die meisten Menschen sind, die Toten sind großartig.59

It must be noted, however, that in all the examples of escapism which Böll portrays, none of his heroes ever commits or attempts suicide. As much as there may be a longing for death, there is never serious contemplation of self-destruction. Aside from the purely religious point of view on this question, Böll offers another reason for contin-

ued existence in an unsympathetic environment: in a sense, these are mostly 'engaged' heroes which he portrays. Probably the narrator in the novella, Entfernung von der Truppe, draws the clearest parallel between the rejection of suicide and the responsibility of a hero to his fellow man:

Ich muß mich zurückhalten . . . mich nicht hineinzuzwischen in die dunklen Fluten des Rheins. Nur die Hand meiner Enkelin hält mich zurück. . .

Again and again this theme of responsibility recurs on various levels. Robert in Zum Tee bei Dr. Bonsig is the epitome of conscious idealism in his sense of responsibility in fairness to the general public. Among many such heroes as Martin in Bilanz, Erwin Bass in Konzert für vier Stimmen, and the man in Klopfschläger there is at least a subconscious awareness of an obligation to one's family.

Brühl in Die Spurenlosen, however, is most mindful of the responsibility of his position and of the example he is expected to set. His concern at being held captive by the thieves is the suspicious appearance of his continued absence:

Außerdem ist es so, daß auch ich für andere eine Enttäuschung werden könnte. Ich möchte das vermeiden.

And it is a concern which his colleague, Druven, proves to be well-grounded. Later, Brühl becomes less concerned with appearances and

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61 Erzählungen, Hörspiele, Aufsätze, p. 313.
and much more concerned with his responsibility of upholding the ideals of Menschlichkeit. He no longer cares about overt disapproval by society or by his superiors when he is convinced in his own mind that he is upholding his true responsibility even if it means, as Henrik Ibsen once described, enduring loneliness:

You are fighting for the truth, and that's why
you're alone. . . . and the strong must learn
to be lonely.62

Loneliness is unavoidable for all those who cannot conform to
the rules of society, and as a result, these non-conformers find themselves inescapably trapped on the outer fringe of society. If there is no escape for the individual caught in the twilight zone between absolute values and the grim reality of life, there are, nonetheless, some consolations which Böll offers to combat the oppression of cold society.

Most important of all the consolations which Böll portrays seems to be the ability to nurture human relationships, for only in personal exchange between individuals can there be any justification, in Böll's belief, for human existence. This exchange is, after all, the very basis of humanity. Whether these relationships take the form of love, friendship, or any kind of real communication, they are indeed of utmost significance to Böll's heroes, for whom, as the critic, Henri Plard, points out, material gain has little importance by comparison:

Für Böll hat menschlicher Austausch, selbst wenn er kurz und wortlos ist, mehr Bedeutung als materieller Wiederaufbau mit seinen Verlockungen zu Stolz und Gewalttätigkeit.63

Probably the best example of wordless communication is illustrated in Klopzeichen. In the present, the man is out of touch with the world; even his wife becomes increasingly aware of his lack of contact with his whole environment. The knockings which the man hears in his imagination have much more significance than any conversation he has with his wife. Receiving the host in a routine distribution during mass in church now lacks the deeper meaningfulness the man experienced when he received his wifer from the hands of a disbelieving murderer in prison. The only acquaintance from prison he still meets occasionally on the street is a thief, Kurt, and his communication with him is one of silent understanding and remembrance for which no words are necessary:

Wenn wir uns treffen, bleiben wir beteinernd stehen, lachen, sprechen kein Wort miteinander.64

Eine Stunde Aufenthalt shows a similar case of quiet understanding. Fritz’s silent companionship with Krumen and Bruno’s sympathetic comforting of his tearful wife stand out (even though they are minor details) as events of deep importance. Just as important and probably more so because of its irrevocable loss in oblivion is the har-

63Der Schriftsteller Heinrich Böll, p. 76.
64Erzählungen, Hörspiele, Aufsätze, p. 332.
mony (Chranox, Anne, and Kumen had amidst a chaotic background. In juxtaposition to the present it is invaluable.

Clara in Bilanz also stresses the pricelessness of personal communion between people through the consciousness of her lack of it. She has made every attempt to gain some insight by her thorough study of each member of her family; she can even predict their every move right to the very minute of their telephoning; yet, she is only too much aware of her failure to achieve an inner communication with any of them including her own husband:

Ich sagte nur, ich hätte so gerne auf dieser Erde einen Menschen wirklich gekannt. 65

Much as she regrets this failure, she seems to realize the impossibility of such a communion. Most tragic of all, however, is the loss of the love she was once able to experience.

Far less concerned about an inner communication between people is Erwin Bass. His only hope is to evoke some kind of understanding or sympathy for his stand in the business world. But the tragedy of the situation is the fact that even such a humble desire is too much to expect from persons as close to him as his employer, priest, and family. No one, except perhaps Sopran, is capable of exerting any genuine interest in the feelings of others.

Although a deep, inner attunement between two people may not always be possible, as in Clara’s case, no matter how much effort is put

65 Ibid., p. 268.
forth, a manifestation of love is always possible. There is no legiti-
mate excuse in the light of _Menschlichkeit_ for the treatment of Er-
win Blass.

Eugen in _Mönch und Räuber_ learns through his experience with
the outcast, Milutin, the meaning of real love. From his work at the
cloister Eugen has gained fame, and along with this fame he has mis-
takenly assumed himself to be the receiver of love. His enlightenment
on this misconception serves to present the moral of the play:

... auf den Gesichtern meiner Brüder in Suntor
sah ich Spott, als ich heimkehrte ... und ich
verbringe den Rest meines Lebens in Gebet und in
Betrachtung über den Satz: Viele wohnen im Haß,
welche glauben, in der Liebe zu wohnen, viele
glauben, im Haß zu wohnen, welche in der Liebe
wohnen.66

Only when he can compare his kind of love to Milutin's does he grasp
its true significance. Even the companionship which Eugen und Milutin
shared in the cottage on the barren hills is portrayed as a much more
sincere relationship than the one Eugen has with his fellow monks.

The Kresten in _Ein Schluck Erde_ instinctively value personal
relationships above all else. When they are starving, they still share
any food they have with their fellow creatures, and even if it means
outraging the authorities by open defiance, they pass on their rewards
as tokens of friendship. Any law which countermands one's humanity is
automatically ignored by the Kresten, and any enjoyment they discover,

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they share readily with any member of any class who shows an interest.

Another means of combat against the dehumanizing factors of society is the rebellion against the loss of personal identity. This theme recurs remarkably often throughout Böll's works; he has even devoted such entire short stories as "Die ungezählte Geliebte" to the illustration of it. In the plays, too, there are several references to society's unfeeling attitude toward the majority of individuals.

In Die Spurlosen it is the priest, Druven, who takes up the protest against the cold methods of law in trying to establish a man's guilt. The detective, Kleffer, is only concerned with outward appearances and tangible facts upon which he seems to base his own convictions about the situation. Only Druven seems to believe that more than bare superficial evidence is necessary in order to be able to make a valid judgment:

Sie haben ihn nicht gekannt, nie gesehen - Sie
sehen ein Foto, eine Wohnung, Kontoauszüge,
Briefe, den Menschen kennen Sie nicht.67

Druven is insinuating that contrary to the common belief a grain of subjectivity is necessary not only from the humanitarian point of view, but also for the cause of true justice.

The Kreten in Ein Schluck Ende stand out vividly in juxtaposition to their automated background. They are a continual source of dismay and horror to the upholders of the mechanism of society, because their actions can never be pre-determined. By their individualistic

67ibid., p. 308.
behaviour they defy all attempts to give them a pat classification, and they refuse to act according to the role designed by society.

Both of the women in Zum Tec bei Dr. Borsig exert all the influence they can over Robert to protect him from being enticed into a role where he would gradually be reduced to a mere automat to be used at will by the material interests in society. They both recognize that the essence of his happiness lies in his individuality; while Frau Borsig sees it predominately in his art and creativity, Franziska is aware of it on a more personal basis. A loss of individuality for Robert would mean the subsequent loss of everything of significance to him in life.

Without the preservation of inherent individuality all the dignity of a man risks doom, for there is no dignity in being a mere automat. Once individuality has disappeared, a deep, inner contact between people becomes impossible. No real communication can take place where there is no understanding, and only communication, maintains Böll, distinguishes a man from an automat:

Ich gehe von der Voraussetzung aus, daß Sprache, Liebe, Gebundenheit den Menschen zum Menschen machen, daß sie den Menschen zu sich selbst, zu anderen, zu Gott in Beziehung setzen.68

Yet, even the solace of human relations is not enough to make life really bright. A failure to achieve or a loss of any real communication is not an uncommon problem as Chrantox, Frau Borsig, and Ro-

bert Köhler illustrate, and even if communication is possible it is often frustrated as a final answer to life by the overwhelming influence of society on both a physical and psychological level. While the life of Böll's heroes is not catastrophic, neither is it enviable; their existence is one of monotony:

Das Schicksal dieser Menschen ist ohne tragisches Äußere, doch Böll unterstreicht seine ergreifende Banalität.  

This appearance of monotony is, nonetheless, merely an exterior disguise which hides an inner panic caused by the state of affairs in the contemporary world. In various essays Böll stresses the insecurity which the development of mass-destuctive weapons has created for man. In the face of such a threat, he can picture only two alternative reasons aside from those already discussed, for a continued existence:

Wer im Angesicht solcher Bedrohung nicht Selbstmord begeht, lebt entweder automatisch weiter, auf Grund jenes törichten Optimismus', den etwa eine Uhr ausströmt, indem sie weiter tickt - oder muß jenes Grau Himor besitzen, das ihn wenigstens zeitweise des Gefühls der eigenen Wichtigkeit enthebt.  

Böll himself is a master at detecting humorous elements which off-set the grimness of the reality he presents. At times his portrayal of incidents is indeed funny, for he never loses sight of the inherent comedy in life. But his attitude can be sarcastic, melancholy, and

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69 Henri Plard in Der Schriftsteller Heinrich Böll, p. 66.

70 "Über den Roman" in Erzählungen, Hörspiele, Aufsätze, p. 427.
bitter, too. Humour for Böll usually represents a delicate balance between the purely comic and the tragic.

Through his heroes the comic is portrayed mainly through irony and satire and often through the absurdity of a situation; irony, in particular, is an indispensable technique for showing up the incongruities of society. It is, however, subtle and can be easily overlooked in its casual presentation as the critic, Korn, well recognizes:

Böll trifft wie absichtslos schlimme Konstruktionsfehler unserer technisch organisierten verwalteten Welt.71

The absurd picture which the peasant in Münch und Räuber visualizes about an improbable greeting which the local parish priest might give to his drunken director, "Wieder besoffen gewesen, was?", has comical implications. Beneath the surface, however, there is an exposure of the priest's seriously hypocritical attitude which is the cause of so much discontent in the area. Similarly, in Zum Tee bei Dr. Borsig the ludicrous slogans of advertising lose much of their humorous quality when the exploitation of the public through them is pointed out by Robert.

In Die Spurlosen the situation is somewhat reversed. Instead of portraying the tragic through a comic incident, Böll throws a glimmer of humour on what could be an inherently serious situation of theft

71 Karl Korn, "Das Salz der Satire" in Der Schriftsteller Heinrich Böll, p. 86.
72 Erzählungen, Hörspiele, Aufsätze, p. 204.
and kidnapping. Brühl is abducted in the dark hours of the night by mysterious strangers who are aiming a gun at him. To avoid giving a wrong impression, however, the thieves assure him the gun is not loaded; and the attempts of the criminals to disguise their destination by blindfolding Brühl are disclosed as ridiculous as Brühl offers a running commentary, not unlike that of a guided tour, on their route.

Both comic and tragic elements achieve a much deeper intensity in Ein Schluck Erde. There is irony in the fact that Böll's heroes here are the lowliest creatures in their society, and a potentially tragic element is implied through the fact that these last preservers of the humane in mankind are ever in danger of extinction. In spite of the often humorous actions of the Kreten, there are almost always deeper connotations in these actions which are applicable to modern life.

The language used by the members of this society is perhaps the most obvious absurdity which has no better example than that in the parody of contemporary church liturgy:

Es ist etwas da, was nicht da sein darf. Und durch das Nichtda, das da ist, bist du, o Nichts, das sich im All verbirgt, erzürnt. Das Nichtda, das doch da ist, hat das Nichts erzürnt! O Nichts im All, halt zurück deinen Zorn über dieses Nichtda, das da ist.\(^73\)

Yet, when one looks into the meaning behind the grotesque, dadaistic sound, it becomes frighteningly tragic. The belief in a Supreme Being is theoretically no longer extant on this island. Still, when one of

\(^73\)Ein Schluck Erde, p. 47.
the tabus is broken, there is a feeling of a need for atonement for having offended some mighty power, but penitence can be directed only at nothingness, and comfort and absolution can come only from nowhere, once belief is lost.

The tabus themselves are another form of the absurd. Even the mention of such words as fish which is for them filthy cause the members of society to cover their eyes (not their ears), and the rites they perform to cleanse themselves are made to look all the more ridiculous by the non-participating and somewhat amused Krester. Again such an example can easily be related to the present and can cause one to wonder how much time and energy are wasted on meaningless rites which are taken seriously in the society of today.

Sometimes grimly amusing are such improbable laws as those of marriage where the practice of sex is carefully controlled by the authorities, so that there can be a perfect balance between death and the reproduction of life. The implications of such a law become terrifying, however, when the situation is compared to the present day. Among these last remnants of mankind precisely the same concern about birth-control as contemporary man displays is brought to the fore. If this is going to be the answer to the question of survival, it raises another question in its place: is survival worth the price of the elimination of human affection and personal communication?

In both Sprechblock and Konzert für vier Stimmen the tragedy of the loss of, the lack of, and the failure to achieve understanding on a personal basis underlies the whole comic exterior. Köhler hides his
true feelings beneath what Rebbach assumes to be a gay and apparently irresponsible-sounding laughter. Erwin Bass, on the other hand, takes drastic measures to try to attract some attention in the hope of finding understanding when he refuses to change his clothes or to wash himself.

Although Böll uses his grain of humour as an aid to living with a grim reality, that is not at all its only function. Lacking to a great extent in these dramatic works is the hilarity of Böll's satire which appears most forcefully in such short stories as "Es wird etwas geschehen" and "Doktor Markes gesammeltes Schweigen". Laughter at folly can really be seen in exaggerated circumstances only through the Krester in Ein Schluck Erde among the plays under consideration; the others maintain a tone which is much more serious. But humour need not always take the form of laughter, for according to Böll's own definition, a person with a humour is not necessarily a humorist:

... da das Wort humores Flüssigkeit, auch Säfte bedeutet und alle Körpersäfte, also Galle, Träne, Speichel, auch Urin meint, bindet es ans Stoffliche und gibt diesem gleichzeitig eine humane Qualität. 74

And Böll's humour is definitely humane. Where he criticizes through his humour, he does so in the hope of illuminating folly so that it can be all the sooner remedied or at least tolerated. Probably the critic, Wilhelm Johannes Schwarz, is correct in placing the court jester, such heroes as Böll's clown, and the author himself in

74 Frankfurter Vorlesungen, p. 107.
comparable roles, for through acute observation they all manage under
the guise of humour to lay bare the follies of society and of man's
behaviour. What represents Böll's greatest ideal in writing is the
insight and influence which Charles Dickens had in his initiation of
social reform combined with the humane humour of Jean Paul which
Böll so greatly admires, especially as opposed to the sadistic humour
of Wilhelm Busch which Böll so vehemently condemns:

... es ist der Humor der Schadenfreude, des
hämischen, und ich zögere nicht, diesen Humor
als antisemitisch zu bezeichnen, weil er anti-
human ist.

Böll's criticism and humour are love, not hate, for his fellow men, and
his own position is that of a moralist dedicated to the improvement of
society.

75 see Schwarz, p. 70.
76 see "Bekenntnis zur Trümmerliteratur" in Erzählungen, Hörspie-
le, Aufsätze, pp. 340-341.
77 Fränkfurter Vorlesungen, p. 104.
Böll: ein engagierter Dichter

Through their personal rebellion, their eventual isolation, and their final failure to find ultimate, mutually satisfactory acceptance in society, Böll uses his heroes to express and to illustrate his own personal concern with the modern world. While he adroitly attacks such all-powerful institutions as law and church, exposes their fallibility, and unmasks their hypocrisy, he is by no means a nihilist. He does not hesitate, for example, to express the greatest admiration where it is due for the upholders of these very institutions of society, as is shown specifically in the dramas through the favourable depiction of many of the priests. Only when the upholders of the institutions fail in their duty to serve humanity does Böll protest against them.

Seen in such a light, Böll becomes, in fact, one of his own heroes:

Unser Schriftsteller erscheint niemals als der distanzierte Betrachter und Berichter eines Geschehens, sondern ist immer in seinen handelnden Gestalten gegenwärtig, identifiziert sich mit ihnen oder mit einer von ihnen, fühlt und spricht mit ihnen.78

Indeed, he is even more heroic than most of the heroes he portrays be-

cause he never allows himself to sink into passivity as is so often the case; he continues his relentless fight for menschlichkeit, and he has the talent and tools to do it.

The acute eye which he so admired in Charles Dickens he, too, possesses. What the critic, Edgar Hättich, admires most about this acuteness is the significance in Böll's ability to relate common-place things to the essence of what is really important in life.79 Perhaps Hättich had in mind an incident similar to the one depicted by the dying soldier in "Wiederscheinen in der Allee" which has much in common with many of the ideas portrayed in Klopftzeichen:

Vielleicht lächelt dich eine an, und du lächelst zurück, und ihr geht beide weiter, ohne euch umzuwenden. Dieses kleine Lächeln, das ihr getäuscht habt, wird nie sterben, niemals, sage ich dir... es wird vielleicht euer Erkennungszeichen sein, wenn ihr euch in einem anderen Leben wiederseht... ein lächerliches kleines Lächeln.

Rather than merely preaching forth his ideas and beliefs in a dogmatic fashion, Böll incorporates them into pictures of every-day situations. By showing a concern for the graphic and sensuous details of these common situations, Böll does, in fact, create an amazing veri-

80 Heinrich Böll, Der Mann mit den Messern, Erzählungen, Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Jun., [1965], p. 46.
similitude in his portrayal of life. Because the word-pictures do indeed appear so life-like, the faults of life become all the more obvious from the standpoint of an onlooker. The critic, Wolfdieterich Rasch, believes that this accuracy in defining, especially what is evil or wrong, is an intentional means Böll uses to enable him to expose such folly all the more easily and effectively:

Er schildert die Wirklichkeit in diesen gleich-gültigen Dingen deshalb so genau, um sie besser verleugnen und entwerten zu können.  

Böll is aware, too, of the need to communicate with his public and, so, employs such traditionally effective methods as repetition in themes of various stories and in motifs within his stories in an attempt to make and to reinforce his points. One critic elucidates this point by referring to the methods used in advertising and propaganda:

Wiederholung ist Bölls bedeutendes Stilmittel. . .
- Gesetz der modernen Reklame und Propaganda. . .
Denn was Böll einkümmert, ist der rastlose Ruf nach dem Menschen. . .  

Probably in a novel like Und sagte kein einziges Wort the constant repetition of advertising slogans themselves in various places and under various circumstances illustrate most effectively by their perpetual contrast to reality what Böll is trying to expose. All Böll's works,

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81 Der Schriftsteller Heinrich Böll, p. 15.
82 A. Weber in Interpretationen zu Heinrich Böll, Kurzgeschichten 2, p. 103.
nonetheless, are repetitive examples of his one major theme: the preservation of Menschlichkeit in a dehumanizing environment.

In regard to the plays, Böll sees the problem of his major theme as a timeless one. Throughout the spectrum of time (as is seen from the setting of the past in Mönch und Räuber, right through the various aspects of the present to the far future in Ein Schluck Erde) man and his society are basically the same. The champions of humanity have been and probably always will be the lonely outcasts of society.

The fact that society is not improving and is, in fact, not likely to improve if Ein Schluck Erde be any prophecy would seem to be a ground for despair. Yet, Böll never leaves his plays on a note of total despair; along with his grain of humour lies another grain of hope. Chantox, for example, has hope in the son of Anne and Kurmen. Even for Robert Köhler there is the intimation that he will return, and maybe eventually, he, too, will regain something of what he has lost.

In spite of the efforts of society, the Kreiten are saved from elimination at least for the time being. In every case there is a question at the end rather than an answer, and it is intentional on Böll’s part, since he is trying to force his readers to think, to consider, and to be concerned:

Die Wirklichkeit wird uns nie geschenkt, sie erfordert unsere aktive, nicht unsere passive Aufmerksamkeit. Geliefert werden uns Schlüssel, Ziffern, ein Code - es gibt keinen Passepartout für die Wirklichkeit: Bücher, Tatsachen, sie sind immer nur ... Teile von oder Schlüssel
zu Wirklichkeiten. . . 83

Even the problem of loneliness has some positive dimensions, for it is a Christian loneliness as opposed to an existential aloneness. The heroes believe in a set of absolute values which are not of their own making and which remain constant through all time. There is always an affinity and a striving to some absolute goal beyond themselves and their environment, and a pending destruction of man's inner and outer world cannot destroy this goal, but rather can only strengthen it. Although society may lose sight of this goal, it cannot eliminate it.

Even the absolute "Nothingness" in "Nowhere" represents something to the Kreten; they still have an instinctive affinity to some greater power, even though they have lost sight of it during the passing of years. There is still "Something" which can be appeased. Böll is personally involved in his writing, but he never allows the experiences of life to defeat him:

... ich spreche, wie ich gar nicht anders kann, persönlich, doch nicht subjektiv, was bedeutet, obwohl gebunden, nicht unterworfen. 84

Nor does Böll limit himself to certain aspects of life. His "milieu-blindness" 85 allows him to examine all kinds of experiences

83 "Der Zeitgenosse und die Wirklichkeit" in Erzählungen, Hörspiele, Aufsätze, p. 346.
84 Frankfurter Vorlesungen, p. 16.
85 see "Verteidigung der Waschküchen" in Der Schriftsteller Heinrich Böll, p. 36.
which occur in day-to-day life. He picks out the pleasant as well as
the unpleasant, offers the positive as well as the negative in an at-
tempt to portray life objectively; yet, everything he portrays relates
somehow to the lives of everyone, and this, too, is intentional:

Es gibt nichts, was uns nicht angeht, das heißt,
positiv: alles geht uns etwas an. 86

The critic, Wilhelm Johannes Schwarz, maintains that it is precisely
this attitude in the problems Böll deals with which gives his work
such a universal appeal 87, and the fact that Böll deals with the fun-
damental question of the rights of the individual, as another critic,
Herbert Ahl, mentions, does indeed make the problems themselves uni-
versal:

Böll schweigt nicht, wenn er Unrecht sieht oder
hält. Er streitet für die Armen, Schwachen und
Unterdrückten. 88

Without reading Böll's essays one can see his obvious sense of
obligation in his writing. Yet, in spite of this conspicuous dedica-
tion, Böll's works are not emotional outbursts. In fact, they some-
times have such a calm, matter-of-fact tone to them on the surface

86 "Der Zeitgenosse und die Wirklichkeit" in Erzählungen, Hör-
spiele, Aufsätze, p. 344.
87 see Schwarz, p. 12.
88 Herbert Ahl, "Wirklichkeit - Botschaft und Aufgabe, Heinrich
that it could be possible to overlook what he is saying. Böll feels that a writer can only open the door to reality by first portraying the actual or what is immediately visible; then it is the reader's duty as a human being to step through that door and to really look around. 89

Portraying the actual, however, may not always be easy, when a writer must expose the atrocities and folly of authorities higher than himself. In such a case the risk in certain societies could be more than just loneliness and isolation. Yet, Böll maintains that once the decision to write is assumed, there is automatically an accompanying responsibility which is far greater than that of the average citizen in his work:

Der Schriftsteller, der sich den Mächtigen\footnote{By Mächtigen Böll is referring to pressures of conformity, be they from political authority or those merely demanded by society.}\footnote{see "Zeitgenosse und Wirklichkeit" in Erzählungen, Hörspiele, Aufsitze, p. 346.} beugt, sich gar ihm anbietet, wird auf eine furchtliche Weise kriminell, er begeht mehr als Diebstahl, mehr als Mord. 91

Böll's heroes are the means through which he presents not only his dismay at the lack of Menschlichkeit of man to man and at the los-

\footnote{91"Die Sprache als Hort der Freiheit" in Der Schriftsteller Heinrich Böll, p. 21.}
ing battle of the individual against the mechanical forces of society, but also his recognition of the few solacing aspects left for man in understanding, in being needed, in humour, and in love. He is didactic only in so far as he raises questions aimed at the essence of reality; he shows what is wrong by its juxtaposition to what, in his belief, is or could be good, and if his depiction of what is wrong and evil is more vivid than his portrayal of what is right and good, perhaps it is because his reader can still regard Böll's conception of good as an accepted standard and because wrong still strikes the eye as a deviation from an accepted standard, or perhaps it is, as the character, Müller, in "Keine Träne um Schreck" suggests, just easier to portray what is evil:

"Häß ist gute Tinte."
"Liebe nicht?"
"Nein, . . . Liebe ist die schlechteste Tinte, die es gibt. . . ."\(^92\)

It cannot be overlooked, however, that no matter how much bitterness comes through his writing, he does indeed temper it with the humane, and he only deals with evil and hate so that he can expose them for what they are and make way for love.

Like his heroes Böll advocates _Menschlichkeit_. He refuses to conform blindly to the standards of the moment, and like his more positive heroes he actively rebels against false and hypocritical values.

Although Böll is not obviously isolated from his environment, he does realize that he has at least the potential of being rejected, for he will not let society dominate over his responsibility and commitment as a writer.
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