

SOLDIER-AUTHORS AND THEIR SOLDIER-CHARACTERS

A Study of the Soldier as Central Figure

in

the *Trümmerliteratur* of Heinrich Böll and Wolfgang Borchert

by

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Abstract

The twentieth century has witnessed the two most costly wars (in terms of both money and human life) ever experienced, namely, the First and Second World Wars. No other conflict before or since has involved so many of the world's people or has had as great an influence on the development of modern society. This study examines the impact of WWII on two soldier-authors, Heinrich Böll and Wolfgang Borchert, and how their experiences during the war affected their writing during the late 1940s. An examination of each author's representation of the soldier as character reveals his own opinions concerning war, the fate of the individual, and the role of society.

There are many similarities between the two writers' styles and choices of content. In using a journalistic approach the authors focus the reader's attention on events as they are presented, without elaborating or explaining. Thus, they draw away from literary tradition and depict war as a harsh reality. Within this reality the individual character, particularly the soldier, serves a definite purpose: to emphasise the human side of war, to remind the reader of personal suffering, to represent what the authors believed to have been a universal experience during the war (*i.e.* psychological as well as physical trauma), and to act as a social criticism. The soldier is defined in relation to the war and to society.

The main differences between the two authors occur at the religious and moral levels. Borchert does not subscribe to traditional religious beliefs, whereas Böll believes in the existence of a Catholic God. As a result, Borchert's characters, concerned with the here and now, search for definite explanations for the war and their role in it. Böll focusses instead on the inhumanity of war, without examining its cause.

Despite their differences, Böll and Borchert come to similar conclusions: the effects of war are not confined to one set of people, but are universal, affecting all

members of the nations involved. Through their description of individual experience, they emphasise the inhumanity of war and the importance of preventing its reoccurrence.

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The true reality of war is to be found in the anguish, confusion, and motivation of ordinary combatants. (Stephen G. Fritz, "...Ideology and Motivation in the Wehrmacht..." 685.)

1. War and Literary Traditions

War has been a constant topic in European literature since the first texts were written. It figures in Greek epics and biblical stories, as well as such works as Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Remarque's *Im Westen Nichts Neues*, and Brecht's *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*. As long as war remains a part of civilisation, it will continue to inspire songs, poems, stories, and criticism. Traditionally, war has been glorified as a noble battle, fought for a worthy cause. However, with the advent of the twentieth century and mechanised warfare, people have begun to view it differently, and society now asks questions concerning the effects of prolonged combat on individuals, communities, and countries. Now we are more concerned with the "anguish, confusion, and motivation of ordinary combatants" than with noble societal ideals of patriotism and glory. This comes from a general societal trend to place more value on individual effort and human rights than ever before, which makes an examination of past wars, especially the two World Wars, difficult but very important.

1997 marks the fiftieth anniversary of Wolfgang Borchert's death, and comes just two years after renewed celebrations of the end of World War II, fifty years after the fact. Recently, interest in the events leading up to and encompassing WWII has resurfaced in the general population, with questions of responsibility at the forefront.¹ With this revived interest has come a new examination of the effects of such a war on society and on the individual. In Germany, an exhibition on the *Wehrmacht* renounces the traditional view of the German Armed Forces as "fern von allen Naziverbrechen, nur tapfer und treu das Vaterland verteidig[end]" ("Vernichtungskrieg...") and examines individual participation in the war. This exhibition has been protested by neo-Nazis and members of extreme right organisations, and the debate rages over the identity of the soldier as "pure" (right) on the one hand, versus human and therefore responsible (left) on the other. The question of individual participation in war has never been addressed satisfactorily, and remains as pertinent today as it was fifty years ago. As one soldier wrote to Borchert after the end of the war, "[i]n fünfzig Jahren ist nicht alles vorbei. In fünfzig Jahren ist ebenso Gegenwart wie heute und gestern war" (qtd. in Meyer-Marwitz 343). The problems which concerned soldiers like Wolfgang Borchert (1921-47) and Heinrich Böll (1917-85) at the time, questions of alienation, guilt, frustration, heroism, and personal control, still occupy people today. This study will examine a very small part of the literature which addresses these questions.

The intricacies of the Second World War, no matter how well examined by historians, remain very difficult to understand, especially for anyone not actually involved in the conflict. It is especially difficult, almost sixty years after the beginning of the war and from a North-American standpoint, to try and

¹ Inquiries into Nazi bank accounts in Switzerland and art treasure hoards in Austria, for example, have taken place in the past few years and continue to be of concern to the public.

define the average experience of a German soldier and the effect which the war would have had on him. How do we define this man, after all? Was the common soldier, as Allied propaganda would have it, really a "bloodthirsty Hun" or an innocent victim of a despotic government, an ordinary man doing his civic duty? These questions cannot be easily answered, because so many complexities arise that a simplistic response would be both misleading and unfair. The German nation, like every other country involved in the war, contained within it many contradictions and differing points of view, and its soldiers' beliefs, experiences, and opinions varied as much as those of their society.

Both Heinrich Böll and Wolfgang Borchert tried, through writing, to come to terms with the many differing images of the German soldiery which surrounded them during and after the war. Their works attempted to find some meaning in the recent events and at the same time to point out the futility of such an effort. Ultimately, they tried to come to terms with their own involvement in the war, and the sometimes circuitous and cyclical nature of their stories reflects the process; the poignancy, despair, pain, and even hope which lie therein often catch the reader by surprise. Both authors recognised the necessity of "working through" their experiences, and resisted the common post-war phenomenon of denial of, and withdrawal from the past.

A study, such as this one, of *Trümmerliteratur* must acknowledge the fact that particular authors base their characters on their own experience of the war and their own background as well as on political and religious adherences, the society's view of soldiers before, during and after the war, and the ability or inability to reconcile these often contradictory elements. This will not be an attempt either to lay blame for the atrocities committed during the war, or to

sanction them. This will be a study of literature but will take into account those elements of the war which have a direct bearing on the subject. An examination of the soldiers portrayed in the works of Borchert and Böll will provide insight into how the two authors tackled the war and its effects on the individual and society, as well as how they came to terms with their own involvement.

i. The Emergence of Modern Soldier-Authors

The appearance of modern soldier-authors such as Böll and Borchert began with the advent of the Great War (1914-18) and has continued through to the present day. Their works are of great value, because they allow other soldiers, less able adequately to express their thoughts and feelings of war, a method of addressing their past. Also, their literature allows a larger audience access to those same emotions, especially civilians and soldiers not involved in the front lines. Traditionally the stuff of legends and songs of glory (wherein the grim reality of battle disappears), the reality and horror of war become through the new soldier-authors universal experiences.

Historically, European armies were divided into two sections: the officers, generally wealthy noblemen, and the rank and file, professional soldiers who came mostly from the lower classes of society. Many of the enlisted men grew up in the military environment, being sons of soldiers themselves, and others were recruited along the way.

These traditions lasted through the Napoleonic Wars and beyond, until the advent of the First World War. Suddenly, and mainly because of technological advances, war took on a whole new, and much larger, scale.

Instead of wars being fought far away in a glorious Neverland of honour and chivalry, battle came closer to home and its reality involved many more members of the civilian population. The sheer number of people required meant that it was no longer possible to rely only on the professional soldiers, and to supplement their numbers the army gathered volunteers from the general public. These new men entering the rank and file were not the peers of those already there, and came mostly from the middle classes, and as a whole were more literate and articulate than soldiers before them had been. In the German army, educated members filled all combat roles and all ranks, which meant a more evenly distributed number of writers and artists throughout the Armed Forces (Fritz 686). From them, the society at home received a much more detailed image of the reality of war than it had ever done in the past. Through letters, poetry, music, and art, the new soldiery expressed its feelings of horror, of repulsion, of humour in the face of seemingly senseless violence, of pride, of hope - in short, of life in the trenches. They brought the reality of modern warfare to the "Home Front".

As the *Wehrmacht* became an increasingly large group of men gathered from all walks of life and all sections of the German community, its internal views came to reflect those of the society at large. There can be no description of an average soldier of the Third Reich, since the ranks of the *Wehrmacht* filled with fanatical Nazis and anti-Nazis alike, with those fighting for the Führer and the Fatherland, as well as those who believed they were defending their wives and children. It is also not easy to separate the Nazi soldier from those who did not adhere to the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*, because by its very nature the Nazi ideology allowed differing degrees of acceptance and belief (as long as general adherence existed). A conscript army naturally takes on the

variations of the society which provides its soldiers, and this one was just as divided in its opinion as any other. This should be remembered when we examine the works of our two authors, and it should also be recognised that although each writes about his own interpretation of events, every soldier had a different opinion, simply because each came from a different background, education, and set of ideological constructs. Literary soldiers, then, reflect the author's own views of the war as a whole, and embody various aspects of his own experience.

The Great War, although it became a war of attrition, began in the tradition of previous "glorious" battles, and many of its soldiers believed that it would be short and cleansing. Some found the reality of war horrible, like Erich Maria Remarque (*Im Westen Nichts Neues*), who saw it as a waste of human life and a terrible comment on a race capable of inflicting such pain and suffering on itself. Others, such as Ernst Jünger, found in WWI a parable for life itself. For him and others opposed to the Weimar democracy, war "was the great majestic, mystical experience that had unified the nation" (Feuchtwanger 199). Jünger adhered to the front-line ideology of the *Stahlhelm*, Germany's largest non-party-political nationalist organisation of the time. He, along with Möller van den Bruck, expressed in their works the ideology of "revolutionary conservatism", which condemned democracy and "exalted the power of the irrational and subconscious [...] Life had no meaning for [the young conservative revolutionaries of the 1920s] outside a biological struggle for existence; conflict and war was the very essence of life" (Carr 268-9). The social and political climate of the Weimar republic made Jünger's books more appealing than Remarque's, as the depressed German society searched for some meaning for the losses incurred during the war. Jünger's cleansed and two-dimensional

view of war as glorious and soldiers as “real men”, fighting and falling for a divine purpose, appealed much more to the public spirit than Remarque’s more realistic and yet depressingly nihilistic stance. With the rise of the National Socialist party, the politicians lauded the conservative revolutionary image of the pure, heroic soldier, presenting it as an example for German youth. It is becoming increasingly common for historians to view the Second World War as a continuation of the First, rather than as a separate entity, and the emergence and subsequent success of Hitler’s *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP) as a direct result of the trench experience and its effect on the men even after the war. This success was possible in part because of such images of war as those which Jünger presented in his writings.

ii. The Weimar Years

The complexities of the period in which both authors grew up left them with the inability to objectify their experiences, and led to their exploration of them through writing. Life in the Weimar Republic was difficult both politically and personally, and the rise of the Nazi party took place amidst general electorate confusion. The unstable economy of the late 1920s provided the previously weak party with a newly receptive audience: beginning with panicking farmers and landowners, the Nazis gradually grew in power as they convinced more and more sections of the population that acceptance of their movement (ostensibly socialist) would be the only way to save the failing economy (Zeman 30-31). The National Socialist Party’s success in taking over the government and running the country as a dictatorship resulted from many years of social unrest as well as a gradual shift in attitudes in the general public,

both of which have been examined in detail by Hans-Jürgen Eitner in his book *Hitlers Deutsche*.

The terms of the Treaty of Versailles, signed in 1919, left Germany saddled with great responsibility: the Allies held her solely accountable for the destruction caused by the war (of people, places, and societal order), she had to bear the total cost of the war, her Armed Forces were severely limited, and her lands divided and shared amongst the surrounding countries.²

The drastic inflation which then occurred in Germany resulted from the huge amount of money the country had had to pay in restoration, and the ensuing economic change divided the German people into two groups: the rich and the poor. As usual, the poor vastly outnumbered the rich, and the frustration and poverty of the masses found an outlet in crime and violence. The practically lawless nature of life, which had become a struggle to survive, turned what had been a middle-class, stable society upside down. The *Währungsreform* of 1923 managed to alleviate some of the economic pressures, but related in-fighting in government left the society without a strong directional force in government. The perceived lack of control on the government's part in the face of the economic crisis, and the criminal state which it apparently condoned, cost it the faith of the electorate and left a feeling of mistrust in its wake. "Dieses **soziale Trauma** der Inflation, daß Moral bestraft und Unmoral belohnt wird, vergiftet nachhaltig das gesellschaftliche Klima in Deutschland" (Eitner 19).

² The Nazis later used the terms of the Treaty of Versailles as one of the reasons for continuing the battle which started with the Great War, calling on national pride and a need to compensate for past losses. As well, the development of the "stab-in-the-back" theory, the annexation of lands for which Germans had fought, and the economic paralysis resulting from the debts Germany still owed were all used as fuel to fire the growing sense of injustice in German society. (For more on this, see Fraser, 64.)

Compared to the weak government of the time, the rising NSDAP offered a frustrated and confused *Volk* the economic rejuvenation and the strong leadership which it craved. Many thought its militaristic discipline would compensate for the weakness of the Weimar government. The NSDAP gave life new meaning, because it allowed each member of society (albeit each "real German" member) to value every contribution made to the "new Germany" which the party envisioned. It also provided a meaning for the sacrifices and losses of the Great War - instead of facing the realisation that fathers and brothers had died in vain, suddenly the struggle was ennobled by the idea that it was not yet over. For those who had just missed fighting in WWI, Hitler's militaristic organisations allowed them the feeling of pride which goes along with a sense of belonging. In short, the National Socialists under Hitler's leadership offered a guiding light and a new authoritarian hero to a populace which had found itself unable to deal with a completely democratic form of government. It took refuge in a familiar form of obedience to an almost tyrannical authority, in the hope that the end result would be a country changed for the better. "Wer an Hitler glaubt, der opfert Freizeit und Geld, sogar das Leben im Bewußtsein, einen wichtigen Beitrag für die strahlende Zukunft Deutschlands zu leisten" (Eitner 30).

iii. Böll and Borchert

Böll himself, although born in 1917 and raised, as Reid says, at the same time as the new German democracy, did not begin publishing until that democracy had passed through its most difficult stage. His first writings

appeared in print in 1946³, and so as an author he did not have to work within the confines of the Nazi dictatorship, although as an observant and reflective young man he would have seen the difficulties his contemporaries were facing. Since Böll was by his own admission always caught up in the times ("Ich bin ja Zeitgenosse - leidenschaftlicher Zeitgenosse" (*Werke: Interviews* / 401), the development of the Nazi regime and its effect not only on the German intellectual state, but on the society as a whole, had a profound impact on him and made him critical of restrictive authority.

There was a strong existentialist or anarchist element in Böll's outlook which made him suspicious of all rigidities in social life, whether structures of authority in Church or State, or patterns imposed on personal life from without. Literature had the function of 'corroding', calling into question these structures. (Reid 7)

Despite Böll's intolerance of the Nazi regime, he somehow managed to survive the war unscathed, despite falsifying leave documents, despite desertion. That he managed to escape penalty resulted from a combination of luck, charm, and cleverness. After the war he pursued the career he had tried to start earlier - he began to write, and as the war had made a lasting impression on him it became his main topic. Through his writing we can see his anger and bitterness at the futility of battle, with the waste of life that goes with it, and at the same time sense the compassion he has for the soldiers who are stuck in the hell of war.

Böll's later novels and short stories now form a regular part of the German school curriculum, and countless books and articles have been dedicated to the study of his works. However, that was not the case in the years

³ Böll's very first stories, written before the war when the author was still a teenager, have recently come out in print in the United States, in an anthology entitled *The Mad Dog* (trans. Breon Mitchell). However, as Böll made no attempt to publish his earliest works himself (presumably because he considered them unpolished and immature), they will not be examined here. For more on the anthology, see D.J. Enright, "Lone Wolf".

immediately following the war. As Reinhard Zachau tells us, the critics of the time attempted to make Böll's stories fit into the popular "jargon of authenticity" (70), a derivative of Heidegger's existentialist theories. This resulted in a flurry of almost incomprehensible interpretations, with which Böll himself lost patience and finally refused to read (Zachau 71). The unwillingness of academics and politicians to address directly the effects of the recent war certainly contributed to the lack of concentrated work on the stories in their own right.

Things only changed with the publication of *Ansichten eines Clowns* in 1963, and with the beginning of the student revolts in 1968, when Böll was hailed as a forerunner of the new movement (Zachau 72). From then on, he became publicly involved in political affairs and contemporary issues, and his later novels received wide-spread discussion and close analysis.

However, his early stories remain less well-known and not as readily available. The possible reasons for this are manifold. The stories themselves directly address the reality of the war and its legacy in no uncertain terms, an unwelcome boldness in the recuperating Germany of the late 1940s. Today some may see a close study of them as an irrelevant or unnecessary re-opening of old wounds. Also, Böll has himself stated the importance of being "in tune with" *contemporary* events, and for many the Second World War happened too long ago to have any relevance to the present day. However, WWII had such a great impact on the formation of late-twentieth century society, in almost all parts of the world, that an examination of it leads naturally to a better understanding of its legacy in our own lives. Although the author's later works continually refer back to the war, the immediacy and clarity of the images are nowhere as strong as in his first stories, and thus this examination will concentrate on them.

Borchert's writing, in contrast to that of Böll, appealed immediately to the public, despite the collective societal wish to forget the past. His stories spoke directly to those soldiers who, like himself, had difficulties coping with post-war reality, as well as to those who had lost loved ones and/or had been disillusioned with the Third Reich, in short, to anyone who felt as if the previously stable world, in all its aspects, had been turned upside down. His literature reached out to those faced with the task of rebuilding, and who felt themselves insufficiently equipped (both physically and psychologically) to even begin. The overwhelming public response to his books indicates the number of people who must have felt that way at the time. In June of 1947, Richard Hermes, a publisher, wrote to Borchert that he had hardly ever seen such a strong reaction to an author's works: "Ich habe es eigentlich bisher nie oder höchst selten erlebt, daß sich die literarische Welt so stark für einen Dichter eingesetzt hat wie für Sie" (*Allein...* 212).

From reading letters which soldiers wrote both to Borchert himself and to his mother, many reasons why his literature spoke so strongly to them become apparent. There is an undeniable sensation of release for some of them, because Borchert managed to put into words what they had been struggling to describe and define for so long. One such soldier writes:

Der Ring des eisigen Schweigens, das wirksamste Mittel unserer Abwehr gegen eine uns fremd gewordene Heimat, ist an einer Stelle durchbrochen!... schreibe für uns, für Deine Kameraden, schreibe für die tausende von Beckmanns, für die Einsamen und Verlassenen, für die in keine Heimat Heimgekehrten, für die Verzweifelnden und sich überflüssig Glaubenden, für alle, die Draußen vor den Türen stehen. (qtd. in Bahners *et al.* 19)

Another agrees that society in general, and soldiers in particular, live a farce wherein each person acts out a part, while the truth and reality of the gruesome face of war lie buried. "Dies ganze Verhalten ist nur eine Maske," he writes, "hinter der sich das Grauen verbirgt und die Sucht, sich selbst zu betrügen und zu betäuben" (qtd. in Bahners *et al.* 20).

Borchert provided a voice for this particular section of the German population, for those who grew up with National Socialism, whose coming-of-age ritual consisted of entering the war, whose adolescent innocence was shattered by horror, and who found themselves, as trained soldiers in peacetime, without any real knowledge of how to survive in the post-war society. He criticised war from the beginning, but at the same time he felt a solidarity with his fellow soldiers, founded on compassion and companionship. In 1944, after his arrest for parodying Dr. Goebbels, he wrote to Carl Hager, "Solange ich Soldat bin, ist die Kasernenstube meine Wohnung und meine Kameraden sind meine Familienmitglieder - auch wenn ich sie nur flüchtig kenne" (*Allein...* 119). This statement, which some would perhaps have regarded as naive, characterises the atmosphere prevalent in most of Borchert's work: there is always a compassion for other soldiers, always an impression of solidarity, no matter how alone the individual feels. The ability to put into words what so many of his contemporaries felt, as well as his own compassion for their suffering, made him the hero of many a soldier. His death came as a personal blow to many, as some of the letters written to his mother in the following weeks indicate:

Mit seinem Tod ist die Leere um uns noch endloser geworden.
Der winzige Streifen Licht, der einen Augenblick lang das Dunkel
zerriß - erloschen. Es ist wieder Nacht. Tiefere Nacht als zuvor...

Sein Tod ist der erste Tod, der mich in meinem Leben berührt hat.
Tief. Ganz tief. Plötzlich war aus mir ein Stück herausgebrochen.

Für mich genügte, daß ich in ihm lesen dürfte. Daß ich plötzlich erschrak und wußte - Du bist nicht allein. Da ist ein Mensch. Ein Mensch, der spricht wie Du. Der denkt wie Du. Der leidet wie Du. Ein Mensch. Das hat mir froh gemacht. Das hat mir Kraft gegeben. (qtd. in Meyer-Marwitz 334-35)

The magic of Borchert's literature lay in the comfort it provided the readership; not that which comes from knowing that everything will be all right, because that is precisely what is so doubtful to his characters, but rather the knowledge of the commonality of the helplessness felt by so many. The awareness that others suffered equally gave the individual the reassurance of shared difficulty, which usually seems easier to overcome than any suffering one has to face alone.

Like Böll, Borchert spent the war years fighting (both the Allies and the German government) and did not begin publishing his stories until the later 1940s. He, too, criticised the government's restrictive force, having for so long been on the receiving end of its ferocity. The contrast between the government sanctioned and encouraged public worship of the soldier and his own mistreatment must have contained a bitter irony for him.

Both these men exemplify the soldier-author, who experiences and writes about life in combat. Like Remarque, both set themselves against the militaristic regime and criticise the traditional heroic image of the glorious warrior. They focus on the realism of war as opposed to the idealism propagated by the Nazi Party.

The Nazi image of the soldier, as hero and pure warrior, was like a beacon of light to the people, many of whom had felt themselves becoming a society of criminals and loose morals. Many of those who wanted a better life

for themselves and for their children saw the Nazis as the only choice, and the youth/soldier/warrior ideal became the perfect role model for the new generation. However, the almost metaphysical image of the pure soldier and the divine Cause did not survive the Second World War. The loss of the second great national battle in forty years proved too much, and the society collapsed in the face of defeat. Soldiers quickly went from being the embodiment of the German Cause and moral rectitude to being a bitter reminder of the loss, not only of the war, but of loved ones, property, faith, and honour.

Of course, there were those, like Böll's mother, who mistrusted Hitler from the start⁴, and others, like Borchert himself, who were far more interested in groups like the *Swing-Jugend* than the *Hitlerjugend*.⁵ For these people, the question of leaving home or of rising up in anger against the leader did not present itself. Theirs was a passive resistance, which led in Böll's case to avoiding front duty and falsifying leave documents, and in Borchert's to parodying the German leaders while he was in barracks. Both experienced the dichotomy of being German and at the same time of disagreeing with Nazi ideology and with the war. Many others who disagreed with the government faced this dilemma, and yet found themselves unable to leave their homeland. For them, the image of the Nazi soldier was a farce, but the reality was difficult if not impossible to express.

Common themes for both Borchert and Böll include the contradiction of the soldier's propagandistic image and the reality of war, as well as his subsequent fall from grace and resulting inability to reintegrate into a post-war society. After the war they found themselves caught in a second dilemma of

⁴ *Was soll aus dem Jungen bloß werden?*, 35.

⁵ In 1940, before he entered the army, Borchert was investigated by the Gestapo because of his connection to the *Swing-Jugend* movement, and also because of a few poems he had written and passed around his circle of friends (*Allein...* 25).

having been German soldiers against their will, and yet unable to rejoice in the new non-German democracy of the post-war years or to return to a state of peaceful normality. They and many others needed first to reconcile all the opposing images and emotions resulting from the war, and for the two authors the search for an explanation was possible only through writing.

Ich glaube, das ist eines der wichtigsten Prinzipien bei der Beurteilung von Literatur, daß man in die Zeit, in der sie geschrieben ist, zurückgehen muß, und zwar ganz. Sich auch vorstellen muß, wie war das damals, was passierte damals, als das geschrieben worden ist. Ich kann gar nicht anders lesen. (Heinrich Böll, qtd. in Reid 1.)

2. The Development of the Soldier-Figure

The advent of the soldier-author during the First World War and the brutal images of trench warfare which suddenly became available to the population at large did not do enough to prevent the outbreak of a second war. Realistic views of war were rejected in favour of the idealistic. The Nazi government made a determined effort to foster the old image of the warrior-youth and stifle any opposing voices: it achieved this in various ways, with the new Ministry of Propaganda keeping very busy in the process. Let us examine more closely the factors which contributed to the image of the Nazi *Soldat* and the effect this image had on the various levels of German society before, during, and after WWII.

i. Langemarck and Verdun

The First World War saw the transition from traditional combat to modern warfare, and for the first time people at home became directly involved in its

outcome. Because of this, it became necessary for governments to convince their people of the justice of their cause. They found it particularly useful to maintain the image of war as a glorious struggle between Right ("Us") and Wrong ("Them"). The propaganda machines worked constantly to counterbalance horrific rumours and first-hand reports, and to make the general public believe in the necessity of war, despite its horrific nature.

In Germany, a few myths were cultivated around which the Home Front could rally, and upon which it could call to raise its spirits. The two main myths retell in glorious terms the battles of Langemarck (beginning of WWI), and of Verdun (middle of WWI). The first belongs more to the traditional view of the soldier as a youthful and enthusiastic hero, whereas the second shows an evolution of this image into a new, tough, "man of steel". The Nazis called upon both myths repeatedly, in slogans, speeches, and posters, to incite the German people to war. Böll and Borchert show in their literature how far from reality the two *Soldaten* really stood, as their own more "human" characters directly contrast the abstract ideals.

However, both authors examined the soldier's actual experience in war, with which the myths only have a tenuous connection. Because of changes made by the *Oberste Heeresleitung*, a report which reached the German public early in WWI stated that "west of Langemarck young regiments singing 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles' broke forward against the front line of the enemy's positions and took them. Approx. 2000 men of the French regular infantry were taken prisoner and six machine guns captured" (qtd. in Hüppauf 74). Through this careful retelling, the truth of this military disaster turned into the basis for a very strong myth indeed. It depicted the German soldiers involved as youthful, valorous souls, accomplishing their patriotic duty for the

Fatherland and the Kaiser against all odds, upholding German honour, decency, and purity in the face of the enemy. Their sacrifice was tragic, but noble at the same time.

The reality of the situation naturally differed considerably from the official version of events. In his article "Langemarck, Verdun and the Myth of a New Man in Germany after the First World War", Bernd Hüppauf describes the Langemarck story as "a traditional myth of heroism and personal sacrifice" (Hüppauf 70), and a product of the old German ideals of honour and valour in battle which had coloured previous wars and which were still present in the German conscience at the beginning of WWI. The German regiments involved in the battle in question were new, and formed of inexperienced troops, many of whom had volunteered, although their number and the ratio of youths among them were later exaggerated. They were not only new to the front, but also undernourished, due to military inefficiency (lack of rations), and confronted with seasoned members of the British and French armies. Officers who still adhered to the old ideals of glorious warfare led them, completely unprepared, into the machine-gun fire which decimated their ranks. As Hüppauf says, "soldiers were sacrificed by a military leadership with no overview of the strategic situation, no clear knowledge of the terrain, the strength and positions of the enemy, or of appropriate fighting tactics" (73). In short, the catastrophe of the real "Battle of Langemarck" should have been an excellent example to the Germans of what *not* to do, instead of a source of inspiration for further sacrifice.

In contrast, the myth of Verdun is based not on a single event, but on a prolonged stint of trench warfare, on a battle of attrition, namely the long struggle between the Allies - mainly the French - and the Germans at Verdun during 1916. The image of the youthful, idealistic, and impulsive Langemarck

soldier no longer fits, as the war becomes more and more a battle of technological advancement and collective endurance. Instead, the warrior who reigns supreme in this environment is tough, hardened by months of horror, deprivation and inhuman conditions. He has survived what has become *Materialschlacht* and thus bears the title of “man of steel”. Enthusiastic ideals do not drive him, but rather the instinctive will to survive at all costs. “The enemy as well as one’s own comrades who were too weak to survive this hell were considered unworthy of living and subsequently destroyed” (Hüppauf 86). For many, including Hitler, trench warfare was the “ultimate test”, the only way that the real men could be distinguished from the boys. This myth, differing considerably from the earlier ideal of noble sacrifice and gentle youth, underlines the rapid evolution, not only of the German army, but of war itself during those first two years of WWI.⁶

These two myths may seem conflicting on the surface, but each serves to give a noble meaning to death and dying for one’s country. Each one appealed to a certain side of public and private feeling, and each was a strong image, in its own way, of what a valiant German could and should do for his country. Both define the German soldier as a human of superior moral standing, who remains pure and noble despite defeat. The careful Nazi manipulation of these myths turned the defeat of WWI into a perverse kind of victory for the German spirit.

As WWII progressed and became in turn a war of attrition, the ideal of the Verdun soldier became the preferred Nazi symbol of valour, steadfastness, and strength. Both Böll and Borchert take issue with this image, and throughout

⁶ Another, more concrete, example of the changes brought about by modern warfare is the evolution of the German battledress. The traditional *Pickelhelm*, so beloved by the officers of the old 4th Army, had to be quickly replaced by the more practical steel helmets with which we are now so familiar. Not only was the leather construction found ineffective in protecting the wearer from modern bullets, but the spike on the crown, which tended to be too tall for use in trenches, proved a perfect target for enemy sniper fire. Old Prussian finery had to give way to modern practicality. For more on the evolution of the *Stahlhelm*, see Stephen Bull.

their works offer a more realistic picture of the soldier's life, sometimes in direct contrast to the myths. For them, such Nazi ideals counteract any healthy examination of events, any compassionate view of the soldiers as human beings. Because the propaganda machines did their job so thoroughly, the post-war society had an easier time denying the reality of personal involvement in the war: everything could be reduced to symbolism and abstract ideals, which could then be easily repressed. However, Böll and Borchert recognise the importance of confronting the issue of individual participation in war, and their writings attempt to draw the reader's attention away from the impersonal myths and towards the brutal reality of battle.

ii. The Divine Soldier-Saviour

From the very beginning of their time in power, the Nazis geared the Third Reich for war. The rhetoric of the early speeches presented Germany as a threatened nation, and called on its people to react in defense of their country. Hitler introduced the idea of divine justice, of having God on the side of National Socialism, early in his campaign. On February 1st, 1933, in his first radio speech, he already spoke of the Grace of God in relation to the Nazi cause: "Möge der allmächtige Gott unsere Arbeit in seine Gnade nehmen, unseren Willen recht gestalten, unsere Einsicht segnen und uns mit dem Vertrauen unseres Volkes beglücken. Denn wir wollen nicht kämpfen für uns, sondern für Deutschland!" (qtd. in Eitner 69). Already, Hitler used terms such as *für Deutschland kämpfen*, implying a need for nationalistic saviours, ready to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the endangered country. This early

reference to *kämpfen* naturally translated later into a call to arms for Germany's youth.

Lindley Fraser recognises the Nazis' manipulation of the German people from the moment they gained power:

The third main task facing the National Socialists when they came into power was to groom and discipline the German people for the ordeal that lay before them. They had to be made to support the National Socialist policy wherever it led: to economic and industrial mobilization there had to be added political and psychological mobilization. (97)

Fraser goes on to enumerate the "weapons" that the Nazis used to accomplish this task: "terror, bribes, habituation to war-time conditions, and propaganda" (97). It is not surprising that the last element was one of Hitler's favourite tools. In studying the Great War, Hitler found that the German command had sorely misused propaganda, which in turn contributed greatly to the Allied victory. In *Mein Kampf* he recognises the great power that propaganda, if properly used, can have over the masses (178). The successful leader is one who can direct the majority of the populace in a certain direction, meanwhile making them believe in the justice of the cause. (Hitler also recognises the autonomy of the "scientifically trained intelligentsia" [179]: they cannot be fooled by advertising which reaches for the emotions, but need to be convinced with logic. If this does not work, they must be removed.) As the intelligence of the masses needs to be reduced to its lowest common denominator to facilitate complete control over it, the propaganda required for such a huge undertaking has to be

simplistic and direct, as well as non-stop. Therefore, from the Day of Potsdam⁷ on, one of the most important sections of government was the *Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*, and one of the most important men was its minister, Joseph Goebbels, who controlled the German media and engineered some of the largest propagandistic demonstrations in European history.

The image of the soldier was particularly dear to the Ministry of Propaganda. It strove to establish and keep a positive public image of the German soldier, and to set his heroic nature against that of the “evil barbarians” who were his enemies. It was absolutely necessary to strengthen the ideal of the Nazi fighter, so that not only the civilian population, but the soldiers themselves would believe in the rightness of the Nazi cause and the purity of their battle. This soldier came in fact to represent all the ideals of the Nazi cause - strength, courage, purity, and moral rectitude. His image could be seen on innumerable posters, including appeals for War Bonds, calls to arms, encouragement for workers on the home front, *etc.*

In the time leading up to the war, the Nazi government orchestrated a gradual shift towards a militaristic society even before the re-strengthening of the *Wehrmacht*. It introduced new labour societies such as the *Arbeitsfront* along with the *Hitlerjugend*, and marches and processions became patriotic celebrations of discipline and hope. Eventually the soldier replaced the worker as the national focus of attention, and represented all that was good in German society. He was Germany's brightest hope for the future, and its greatest

⁷ Although there had been parades and speeches since Hitler first became chancellor, this was the culmination of them. On the 21st of March, 1933, Hindenburg gave Hitler his political blessing in one of the most contrived ceremonies in German history. From the choice of setting (in a solid old Prussian church, to underline the traditional values so dear to the Nazis) down to the choice of text for the sermon (“*Ist Gott für uns, wer mag wider uns sein*”), everything was carefully calculated to appeal to the broadest possible audience and to solidify Hitler's image as the only possible leader for the new Germany (Eitner 88-91).

treasure.

Nazi films both chronicled and nurtured the excitement and overwhelming feelings of hope which accompanied the rise of the militaristic community. The most famous, *Triumph des Willens*, directed by Leni Riefenstahl, not only helped to deify Hitler in the eyes of the populace at large, but also furthered the idea of the workers being akin to soldiers, and as such the strength of a new Germany. Riefenstahl carefully filmed and directed the waves upon waves of young strong men seen goose-stepping through the streets with their tools resting on their shoulders to catch the military aspect of the celebrations. The excitement in their eyes is surpassed only by that of the hordes of people lining the sidewalks to see them. Now, the film says, we see the beginning of a glorious future for Germany, which will soon recover from its stagnancy and rise again with pride, with the young, pure workers/soldiers of the new *Reich* leading the way. The soldiers themselves were seen as heroes because of their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the Fatherland, and their link with the *Führer* and the Cause lent them a certain sanctity.

Although the widespread use of propaganda did not convince everybody, and in fact many individuals did not subscribe to the Nazi ideology at all (including the Böll and Borchert families), the effect on the society as a whole was astounding. Organisations such as the *Hitlerjugend* and the two Nazi paramilitary organisations (the SA and the SS) unofficially took over the schools and the streets to a large extent and helped to disseminate and embody the official propaganda. Fanatical *Hitlerjugend* members strove to conform to Nazi ideals of the Aryan warrior.⁸ Membership in the organisation

⁸ The appeal of the militaristic structure was as much one of a proof of strength and a coming-of-age ritual as anything else, and peer pressure played a large role in swelling the ranks of the organisation. As Eitner says, "Es gehörte zeitweise mehr Mut und Opferbereitschaft dazu, sich der HJ anzuschließen als den freien Jugendbünden... mit ihrer Pfadfinder-Romantik" (Eitner 344).

was by several accounts far from constricting - in fact, many found it to be a supportive, positive, and strengthening experience for young people (boys and girls aged 14-18), who were taken seriously, given responsibilities, and treated as adults. Manfred Rommel remembers his adolescence in the *Hitlerjugend* with fondness, not for its ideology, but for its organisation: "Das NS-Regime habe 'die junge Generation außerordentlich geschickt behandelt' und ihr... 'auch die Minderwertigkeitsgefühle, die mit der Pubertät verbunden sind, gemildert durch Beförderungen...'" (qtd. in Eitner 355). With the support and positive influence of the *Hitlerjugend* leaders, members easily believed in the moral rectitude of the cause and in the importance of pure German youth to the future of the country. The *Hitlerjugend* leader, young, strong, clear-minded, and prepared to do anything for his country and for his *Führer* became **the** image of the ideal German soldier in the Third Reich.

The societal belief in the future of the German race as pure and unsullied reflected the (engineered) image of their own warriors, gathered from the populace as well as from the ranks of the *Hitlerjugend*: strong, with divine Right on their side, these men were undefeatable. Goebbels ordered the production of several political and propaganda films which furthered the image of the German race as pure and sacred. One of these films, *Hitlerjunge Quex*, provides a portrait of the ideal young Aryan type, "glorif[ying] the party and its youth" (Zeman 49). Propaganda posters also emphasised the youth and purity of the German soldier who would lead his people to victory. The physical beauty of these representations added to the noble character of the German cause which the Nazis were projecting, and offered the populace an ideal hero-figure around which to rally.

Reality came as a shock. For those soldiers who went to the front and experienced the “real war”, no comparison could be drawn with the mythical world. The man who survived at the front was a far cry from the ideal Nazi *Soldat*. Death came in most cases in a far from glorious manner, and mutilation was more common and more painful. No bright shining light of Truth and Right guided them - in fact, in many cases, especially near the end of the war, not even adequate human leadership existed. However, the soldiers fought on, many “for women and their laughter, for beauty, for the homeland, and for [them]selves” (Horstmar Seitz, qtd. in Fritz 691). In other words, personal reasons kept them going, not idealism. They fought for survival, they fought because if they didn't they would die. This reality of war made more of an impression on Borchert and Böll than did the abstract ideals. They did not easily overcome the shock of transition from what was for them a peaceful, almost stable world to the chaos of war, and the same hell of contradictions surrounds their soldier-characters.

iii. **Fall from Grace: the Post-War Years**

After the Second World War, the image of the ideal Nazi warrior evaporated, and society faced a brutal reality: its men had been defeated. The reality of the fallen soldier **never** coming home replaced the abstract glory of falling for the Fatherland, which had seemed so important before. Those unlucky enough not to have been killed outright were maimed for life and unable to find employment. Those who escaped physically unharmed were often at worst affected psychologically, at best left with no prospects of employment, because their Nazi *Abitur* and *Hitlerjugend* education had not

prepared them for anything other than warfare (Glaser 57).

As for the glorious image of the dedicated Nazi *Landser*, even the reminder of him became a source of bitterness to the *Volk*. People quickly erased all traces of former adherence to Nazi ideals, as they scrambled to avoid the denazification process. He who had been a symbol around which the German people could rally, who had inspired songs, poetry, and the hearts of thousands of young men and women, became a symbol of their defeat, and therefore had to be repressed. The societal idealisation of the soldier as saviour of the German race quickly changed to the image of him as an embodiment of the shame of defeat and even of participation in the war. Many of the young men themselves quickly embraced the new civilian life, adjusting to post-war reality in order to survive: "Die zelotische Jugend, lange Zeit den Mythos des unbesiegbaren deutschen Helden verkörpernd, wurde mit einem Schlag zivil" (Glaser 54).

The contrast between war and peace especially affected the soldiers themselves, as those returning found themselves suddenly without a place or role in society. Those who so recently had been the proud symbol of the German people were now a shameful reminder of loss, and as such found themselves unwelcome in the post-war society. In order to adjust, any veterans wishing to progress in the new democracy had to forget the war and concentrate on building a new life economically instead of militarily. Some managed this transition without much problem; however, many others were left feeling abandoned and directionless. This type of soldier, personified in Borchert's Beckmann (*Draußen vor der Tür*), was embittered, without authority either over others or over himself, without the honour of having fought for a good cause (the post-war society usually refused to acknowledge the cause at

all, or at least not in positive terms, Glaser 54). Because of the state of the economy, societal stability was not immediately restored, and most people kept busy just trying to survive in any way possible. Often this meant that the soldier was left to his own devices, without even his wife, sister, etc. because the women frequently had to consort with the occupying Forces in order to procure food and clothing. He drifted - having followed orders for years he suddenly found himself alone, without support and without direction, with no training to survive in the post-war disordered society.

It is with this soldier as well that Böll and Borchert identify, and his otherwise stifled voice finds expression in their works. They have written for those who could not write for themselves; they have described not only their own experiences, but also those of many others.

iv. Guilt, Responsibility, and Victimisation

It is almost impossible to look back at the events of the Second World War and assess who was guilty for what, and to what degree responsibility should have been borne for atrocities committed (on both sides!).⁹ All that can be done is to examine documents of the time, in this case literature, and try to view the situation through the eyes of contemporary authors, many of whom addressed the issue directly. They include, among others, Günther Weisenborn, Albrecht Haushofer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Werner Bergengruen, Theodor Haecker, Nelly Sachs, and Wolfgang Borchert (Glaser 104). Borchert belongs in this group as the question of guilt and responsibility reappears at many levels throughout his literature. Böll, as will be seen later on, does not

⁹ For example, the Nuremberg trials, held immediately after the end of the war, became a mockery of justice as they tried to establish exactly who bore responsibility for what and to what degree.

explicitly address the issue, although it appears implicitly from time to time in his works.

The collapse of German unity led to a concentration on personal rather than political problems, which in turn led to massive disinterest in the war itself, relieved only by a few courageous or tormented enough to keep returning to the subject and search for an explanation for the whole affair. How had it been allowed to happen? How does one come to terms with the death of one's comrades and the deaths of very similar and yet "enemy" soldiers? When youth and enthusiasm have been sacrificed to this "cause", leaving the body and mind wasted, what does one do next? Is there a reason to continue? Who is to blame?

Borchert's play *Draußen vor der Tür* most accurately poses the question of responsibility for the war at all its levels, when Beckmann visits his colonel and asks who bears the guilt for the lives lost in the war. At what level is the responsibility to be held? Is it personal or collective? How far up the chain of command does it go? For what is each soldier accountable, and how should he deal with the guilt? Beckmann's inability to come to a satisfactory answer indicates the confusion of society in general, and reflects the post-war reality of Germany.

Through general observation as well as through individual case studies, Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich have extensively examined the psychological phenomenon of post-war societal denial of events, which results in a lack of any examination of either personal or public guilt in relation to those events. In 1967 they published *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern, Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens*, in which they identified various ways that Germans tried to come to terms with involvement in the Second World War and its atrocities,

which they involuntarily or half-consciously supported and enabled, either as soldiers or as civilians. The Mitscherlichs observed derealisation, denial, victimisation, and displacement, but no mourning or facing of responsibility. Both Borchert and Böll recognise the existence of these psychological blocks in their society, and each realises that they must be overcome in order for life to continue in a healthy way.

For fervent Nazi supporters, Hitler's failure was almost impossible to believe. For those who had followed along, believing in the purer aspects of Nazi ideology, the reality of the Reich's extremism (*eg.* concentration camps, political persecution, *etc.*) came as a real shock. For others, who had no love for the Nazis and had not actively participated in the atrocities of the war, the shame of belonging to a society which had sanctioned them was almost too great to bear. The natural progression for all these people, whose very existence had been shaken to the core, was to set up psychological barriers between themselves and the past. The experience of losing the Second World War was disastrous in so many ways that in order for the society to maintain a semblance of normality, defeat had to be denied. This resulted in the historical disinterestedness and political apathy which followed the end of WWII in Germany, an outward symbol of inner suffering: "[w]hat now survive are remnants of external habits, patterns of behaviour and conformisms that, like stage props, conceal a very inarticulated way of life" (Mitscherlich 11).

Political apathy spread as quickly after the war as fervent Nazism had during Hitler's dictatorship. To a certain extent this is understandable: Germans had for a long time followed a very charismatic leader, who unfortunately went too far and not only caused the war, but also lost it. Defeat left society in a state of shock, and the ensuing Allied occupation left it

seemingly without control over its own destiny. “[...] the Germans [...] had received a blow to the very core of their self-esteem” (Mitscherlich 24). What had been a unified people, with a strong identity and purpose (no matter how we think of those aims today), became almost overnight a divided country with no central leadership and faced with not only the failure of the whole campaign, but also disillusionment with its leaders, the latter following naturally from the former.

The reader (and the author) must address another haunting question, namely: Who is the victim of this war? Does the average German soldier deserve to be grouped with others such as the Jews, the Communists, and the liberal thinkers, who all suffered terribly under the Nazi regime? Is he merely a pawn of the government, or does he have control over his actions? Naturally, conflicting reports exist which can support either argument, but more and more evidence shows that in general the German soldier had much more power over his own destiny than is commonly recognised. For example, although many soldiers involved in the slaughter of Jews later pleaded that they had had no choice and had been forced to participate on pain of execution or imprisonment, overwhelming evidence suggests the opposite. Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, in his recent bestselling book *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, states

...despite the enormous effort made to unearth such cases (the defense at Nuremberg was allowed into the SS internment camps to seek out instances) and the enormous incentive that all perpetrators had for providing such evidence - we can conclude only that the likelihood of any SS man ever having suffered such punishment for refusing to kill Jews is small. (Goldhagen 380)

At the same time, it is also important to note that in less moral and more technical matters the same freedom of choice was not allowed. The average

German male, once he received the famous postcard¹⁰ from the *Wehrmacht* command, had to respond immediately and effectively belonged to the government from that moment on. Any mention of wanting out of the army on moral or ethical grounds would have been ignored, whereas a similar request on political grounds would have landed the soldier in jail at best, in a concentration camp at worst. Criticisms of the government, even those in jest, like Borchert's parody of political leaders, led to severe punishment.

Just as it may be argued that there are differing degrees of responsibility, so do levels of victimisation differ, even within one person. Although a person may have been recruited against his will, can he thereafter blame all the violence which occurs because of him on the government? According to Borchert especially, in each situation a soldier has a certain degree of choice, even though it may be restricted. However, where is the line drawn, and when does the victim become the perpetrator? These questions are as difficult to answer as those of guilt and responsibility, and they all contribute to the confusion of relating the war experience.

Both Böll and Borchert stand out because of their willingness to write about the war so soon after its end, and also because of their ability to convey the loss, the grief, and the hopelessness which so many felt at that time. The two sets of literary works which will be examined here are similar in many ways, despite some philosophical differences, such as their authors' respective approaches to religion and responsibility. Both authors concentrate on the individual's experience of the war, in particular the soldier's, to achieve several goals. The first is an emphasis on the human side of war: they remind the reader that war is neither abstract (it affects all citizens of the countries in

¹⁰ Böll's short story "Die Postkarte" shows how one man's life changed completely on the morning he received the postcard from the government, telling him to report immediately for battle duty.

conflict) nor absolute (it does not follow sharply defined lines of good and evil). War cannot be avoided or easily directed, and its victims are found on all sides of the conflict, in all forms of political and religious belief. Secondly, Borchert and Böll use particular cases to exemplify what they believe to have been common during the war, for example, psychological suffering and confusion regarding personal participation. No story is unique, as every character is affected in some way by similar events and circumstances. The continual appearance of common emotions and similar events emphasises the universality of any given soldier's experience. Thirdly, the authors set their soldier-characters against society, in part to portray how it influences the individual, in part to show, inversely, how that individual can and does influence society (the latter aspect is more prevalent in Borchert's works).

These stories do not simply serve as a lesson for the contemporary audience. They also provide the authors themselves with a way to explore their own emotions, their own confusion and frustration, their own horror at the effects of war. Their writings are also personal explorations of the "truth", attempts to find a resolution to the questions which troubled them and many others - questions mainly concerning the human condition. Through this exploration, Borchert and Böll reached out to a certain element in the contemporary readership experiencing similar problems, that is, veterans who were having difficulty adjusting to post-war life and who still struggled with unresolved issues. This study will expand on those issues most important to Borchert and Böll, and thus clarify the position in which German soldiers like them found themselves, both during and after the Second World War.

Wir sind oft Zeugen ihres Todes gewesen, wir hörten aus ihrem Mund nicht Sprüche, wie sie auf Denkmälern stehen, wir hörten Schreie, hörten Gebete, Flüche, wir sahen, wie viele von ihnen still wurden auf eine Weise, die der Verachtung gleichkam, Verachtung, die die erdrückende Gleichgültigkeit der Nachgeborenen vorauszuahnen schien. Sie nannten den Namen ihrer Frau, ihrer Mutter, verlangten nach einer Hand, nach einem Schluck Kaffee, einer Zigarette, nach irgend etwas von dieser Erde, als letzten Gruß, während die kalte Majestät auf sie zukam. (Böll, "Heldengedenktag" 222)

3. Heinrich Böll

The above quotation, taken from the speech Böll made on *Volkstrauertag*¹¹ in 1957, encapsulates his vision of, and attitude towards, what he saw as the common experience of suffering in war. The image which Böll conjures up is that of men dying painful, lonely, and anonymous deaths, as they instinctively reach out for concrete facets of earthly life rather than abstract heroic ideals. Questions of guilt and responsibility, usually paramount in a reflection on the Second World War, are absent here; in the face of what he sees as a tragic waste of life, his reaction is always first and foremost that of compassion for the sufferers. This humanism is a constant feature in his stories, as the individual soldier, whether officer or enlisted man, of good or of bad character, is always described by the forgiving author as a victim of the abstract War Machine. Indeed, sometimes Böll's compassion for the soldiers

¹¹ November 16.

overshadows questions of personal and collective guilt, of optimism in the face of tragedy, or of a constructive approach to the problems of war and dictatorship. He, like Borchert, presents the reader with a bleak image of the effects of large-scale warfare, wherein he seems to have captured the most desperate and disturbing moments for the individual, and yet he has more difficulty than Borchert in overcoming the apparently anonymous entity of war to confront the human element controlling it. The author himself is too close to his subject to be able to cast a truly objective light on what was a real problem of despair among the troops. The emotional side of the whole situation, the highly sensitive nature of the subject, overwhelms him. The stories written in the immediate post-war era will be examined, then, not so much as solutions to the issue of large-scale conflict, but rather as explorations on the part of the author himself, wherein he searches for meaning in his own wartime activities.

For fanatical Nazi supporters, Heinrich Böll's war record would have been far from shining. By his own admission, he spent his time in the army trying to avoid the almost inevitable trip to the Front. His upbringing had been Catholic but also fairly liberal, and since his family did not welcome the idea of living under Fascist rule, Böll never became a member of the *Hitlerjugend*, nor did his family support the Nazis any more than was necessary for survival (his mother hated Hitler from the beginning of his time in office - she called him "Rövekopp", *Was soll...* 36). Böll was never taken in by the Nazi rhetoric and never became an enthusiastic soldier. His resistance to the Reich, and that of his family, were passive: there was no question of leaving the country, but participation in the war effort was kept to a minimum. Böll's experiences as a soldier¹² were mostly those of waiting in various garrison towns, although he did

¹² Since he showed no interest whatsoever in military advancement or distinction, Böll's rank remained that of private, Reid, 31.

see action on the Eastern Front late in the war. The influence of both settings can be seen throughout his *Trümmerliteratur*, and the view he takes of them is mostly that of his own peers, of the common soldiers.

i. *Trümmerliteratur*

Trümmerliteratur was a category used to designate the writings which emerged from the ruins of German society after the war. The majority of German society did not welcome it, and preferred a return to classical culture (works such as Goethe's *Iphigenie* enjoyed renewed popularity) because it contained a harmony and beauty not found in post-war reality (Glaser 20). Böll was of the opinion that the term captured the essence of his own as well as his contemporary authors' subject-matter, and that their concentration on harsh reality was not only necessary, but positive. He points out in "Bekenntnis zur Trümmerliteratur" that the ruined society was exactly what they were trying to describe:

Wir haben uns gegen diese Bezeichnung nicht gewehrt, weil sie zu Recht bestand: tatsächlich, die Menschen, von denen wir schrieben, lebten in Trümmern, sie kamen aus dem Kriege, Männer und Frauen in gleichem Maße verletzt, auch Kinder. Und sie waren scharfäugig: sie sahen. Sie lebten keineswegs in völligem Frieden, ihre Umgebung, ihr Befinden, nichts an ihnen und um sie herum war idyllisch, und wir als Schreibende fühlten uns ihnen so nahe, daß wir uns mit ihnen identifizierten. (31)

Further on in the same essay, Böll mentions the danger inherent in the common inclination of the time, to idealise the past or ignore it altogether. Had he and his fellow authors subscribed to this tendency, they would have participated in a

denial of reality, and that would, in his opinion, have made the eventual confrontation with the truth, that is, with the realisation of personal involvement in the war, more difficult and painful than it had been already:

...man schien uns zwar nicht verantwortlich zu machen dafür, daß Krieg gewesen, daß alles in Trümmern lag, nur nahm man uns offenbar übel, daß wir es gesehen hatten und sahen...

Die Zeitgenossen in die Idylle zu entführen würde uns allzu grausam erscheinen, das Erwachen daraus wäre schrecklich, oder sollen wir wirklich Blindekuh miteinander spielen? (31)

The idyll to which Böll refers represents the idealisation of (and therefore abstraction from) the war, which occurred in German society during the late 1940s and early 1950s. People, led by government, honoured the dead with national ceremonies such as *Volkstrauertage*, removing the personal aspects of their suffering and creating instead a national symbol of heroic loss. Although the post-war governments did not use the image of fallen heroes in as militaristic a fashion as the Nazi regime, their simplification of events and reduction of soldiers to an heroic type as effectively erased images of individual personalities and individual suffering. Böll struggles against this typification throughout his literature, and tries to present the way things really were, through fear that "das alles könnte als etwas erscheinen, was es *nicht* war: überaus heroisch" ("Hoffentlich kein Heldenlied" 237). The *Erwachen* from a state of self-imposed ignorance would come as a terrible shock, although, like Borchert, Böll considers such an awakening to be necessary despite the pain related to it.

Böll divides immediate post-war literature into three categories: *Kriegs-*, *Heimkehrer-*, and *Trümmerliteratur*, but his own stories are not always easily amenable to particular divisions. Throughout the early stories, there is a certain amount of self-consciousness; in other words, the author shows in varying

degrees that although he may be writing war stories, he does so with the hindsight of one who has survived, of one who has seen his society thrown into a state of confusion and large-scale misery. This explains in part the helpless, defeatist tone and also the cynicism of many of these stories, as his view of the war has been coloured by post-war events. Therefore, the three categories of literature are so strongly influenced by each other that it is impossible to divide them completely, and for the purposes of this paper they will be treated as one, *i.e. Trümmerliteratur*. As will be shown in the course of this chapter, Böll's own version of *Trümmerliteratur* proves in many ways as unproductive as that of his contemporaries. He manages to present what he sees as the psychological and physical problems (aside from political influence) faced by soldiers and civilians caught in a war, but fails to overcome his emotional proximity to the topic to reach an objective overview of its inherent problems.

ii. Existentialism

Böll's style reflects his own perception of the war as well as the influence of authors he himself had read. Both Klaus Jeziorkowski and J.H. Reid mention the influence of existentialism on Böll and find evidence of it in his works. The writings of foreign existentialist authors were not banned in Germany in the 1930s, and Böll was familiar with and influenced by many, including Søren Kierkegaard, Albert Camus, and Graham Greene (Reid 48). However, before we label Böll himself as an existentialist, the nature of the movement must be understood to a certain extent. Existentialism can and has been viewed as a tendency rather than a strict philosophy, since thinkers grouped together under the one term often disagree on important points (Cooper 6). Böll, for example,

with his Catholic beliefs, opposes Nietzsche at the spiritual level (for Böll, God is an integral part of everyday life, while for Nietzsche He no longer exists); yet both follow existentialist lines of logic. Their perspectives on the world are shaped by the same basic ideas, but a flexible application of those ideas allows them to reach very different interpretations of what each sees as "existence".

Existentialism addresses three basic concepts (among others): *Angst*, death, and absurdity. *Angst*, although not easily definable, describes the "mood which summons a person to reflect on his individual existence and its 'possibilities'" (Cooper 128). This reflection will naturally result in one of two responses: a joyful, solidly grounded acceptance of the way things are, or a complete rejection of responsibility leading to unpredictable behaviour. Böll's characters very often experience this self-examination, with differing results. Perhaps the most striking example of this occurs in *Wo warst du, Adam?* when Ilona comes face to face with Commander Filskeit, in the knowledge that her fate depends on him. She has experienced the existentialist self-examination which comes in the face of certain death, and she evinces the first reaction, that of joyful acceptance: since she has a strong faith in Christianity, she does not perceive death necessarily as a bad thing. She chooses the *Allerheiligenlitanei* when Filskeit requires her to sing: she "sang schön, und sie wußte nicht, daß sie lächelte, trotz der Angst, die langsam höher stieg..." (*Wo warst du...* 102). Filskeit himself, when confronted with the absolute negation of all his dearly beloved stereotypes (and thus with a total contradiction of his image of reality), exemplifies the second existentialist tendency and goes berserk, firing on Ilona and ordering the execution of all other Jews in his camp.

Existentialism focusses on the individual, on the self and its relation to existence. Central to such an examination is a definition of existence itself, and

for the existentialist this means a setting of limitations: existence is defined by and contained between birth and death. Death defines life as an *end* to that life; therefore the individual's attitude towards death defines the quality of his or her life. Cooper quotes Jaspers to support this argument: "From this nothingness [*i.e.*, death] alone can I obtain my assurance of true *Existenz*" (133). As such, death does not necessarily represent a bridge to the afterlife, although Böll himself often adds mystical elements to descriptions of soldiers dying. Most importantly for the existentialist, the "anticipation [of death] utterly individualizes *Dasein*" (Heidegger, quoted in Cooper 136). In other words, death (or the recognition of one's mortality) removes the individual from any kind of contact with other things (*eg.* people, places, circumstances), and at the same time lends that individual life a wholeness, a completeness (Cooper 136). In death each person is alone; it is the ultimate individual experience. Böll recognises this, and defines many of his soldiers, such as the main characters in "Wir Besenbinder" and "Wiedersehen mit Drüing", solely in relation to their experience of death.

Existentialist views of absurdity also influenced Böll's war stories to a great extent. His fascination with the concept, which essentially points out the futility of attempting to determine life according to logic, appears again and again in his war literature. He obviously shares Sartre's view that absurdity cannot be overcome, that it is "an essential, ineradicable aspect of the human condition" (Cooper 145). In fact, Reid states that Heidegger's idea of war as an absurdity rather than a moral evil (therefore excluding the possibility of any kind of moral decision or judgement) had a profound impact on Böll (Reid 49). Many of the stories from Böll's *Trümmerliteratur* are written, it seems, for the sole purpose of exploring this absurdity. Klaus Jeziorkowski sees *Wo warst du*,

Adam? as “ein Grunddokument des deutschen Nachkriegsexistenzialismus” (273), wherein Böll has taken the philosophy of the earlier Existentialists and added to it a German view of WWII. The result is visible not only in the novel, but also in the short stories: the overwhelming sense of sadness, of the tragedy of being trapped in a senseless survival game which has no rules and where the prize (life in a country ravaged by war) has little appeal.

Jeziorkowski also points to absurdity as one of the main characteristics of war which Böll tries to communicate, and existentialism as one of the tools he uses to this end. Böll frequently resorts to this view to communicate what he sees as the lunacy of war, its anonymity and the alienation of the soldiers, and the universality of the war experience, amongst other things. Böll himself refers to “the soldier’s experience of existential uncertainty” which results either in active brutality or in passive indifference:

Ich glaube eher, daß die Generation, die aus dem Krieg kam oder den Krieg noch mitgemacht hat, sehr stark geprägt worden ist von einem gewissen Nihilismus, der mit der völligen Unsicherheit des Soldatenlebens zusammenhängt, auch Unsicherheit gegenüber Leben und Tod, und daß dieser Typ, [...] beide Potenzen in sich hat. Die Brutalität oder Härte oder Kälte, die zum Erfolg nötig ist, aber auch die Gleichgültigkeit diesem gegenüber. (*Werke: Interviews* / 544)

This view is reflected in his soldiers who have lost the will to fight, who just let things happen to them without worrying, and those also who look for death as a release, like *den unbekanntem Soldaten*.

“Mit diesen Händen”, presumed to have been written in 1947, offers a detached look at the various deeds and misdeeds performed by one man’s pair of hands, both at home and at the front. Within this story are contained almost all of the elements which define Böll’s style and viewpoint, and which will be

examined in greater detail further on. The narration, in the third person, provides an almost extra-corporeal view: the emphasis is on the hands without relation to the body, so that they take on a life of their own. The reduction of the soldier to the actions which his hands perform distances those actions from any personality, and the anonymity which Böll often uses to emphasise common emotions and experiences becomes apparent in his abstract narration. Humanism conflicts here with existentialism, as the description of the violent acts combines with the almost journalistic stance of the author. The paradox of normality and corruption, the co-existence of tenderness and violence is called into question:

Du hast damit [mit den Händen] Papierkügelchen zum Pult des Lehrers geschossen, hast sie an dem ewig lädierten Füllfederhalter beschmutzt, und zu einer Zeit, die du nicht mehr kennst, hast du die Brüste deiner Mutter damit berührt, du hast die Schulmappe damit umklammert, von vielerlei Blut waren sie befleckt, schwarz von geronnenem Blut, das dir die Poren verstopfte, Blut von ihm, oder Blut von dir, sie waren wie Metzgerhände, diese Hände, die dein Kind abends im Spiel mit seinem unschuldigen Mund berührt, wenn du das Zeichen des Kreuzes auf seine Stirn zeichnest. (96)

Böll does not present us with separate identities, but rather with the contradictions inherent in Everyman, which become more extreme and more noticeable in times of war. The violence here is not sudden or jarring - in the narration brutal acts are interspersed amongst the list of the mundane: hitting the Lieutenant in the face comes between lifting a soup spoon to the mouth and bartering over a piece of clothing. The fusion of opposites, for example the brutal and the affectionate, the violent and the innocent, the stains of ink vs. those of blood, the infantile and the adult, makes Böll's point even clearer:

because of the mind-set required to survive, in war violence becomes routine and as easily washed away as the dirt on one's hands. The detached viewpoint and the objective list of acts combine with the plaintive tone of the last paragraph (quoted above) to provide an existentialist version of reality, as Böll calls into stark contrast the child's innocent hands that once touched the breasts of its mother (sacred image!) with the butcher's hands which they have become.

Böll addresses the question of guilt and responsibility implicitly if not explicitly: the narrator expresses his opinion when he describes the hands as "Metzgerhände" (96), but he does not go so far as actually to accuse the protagonist of any misdeed. There is a certain bias in the choice of words, as when the narrator states, "Viel haben diese Hände empfangen und wenig gegeben" (96), but the distance between narrator and subject is maintained. Obviously Böll does not approve of the violent acts which are performed as a result of war, but he presents the situation to the reader without offering a cause, or a context for it, and without commenting on the possible consequences of the soldier's actions.

Mit diesen Händen hast du manches tiefes Loch in die dunkle russische Erde gegraben, hast du in tiefster Dunkelheit gierig und hastig das Kochgeschirr mit Suppe oder Kaffee zum Mund geführt, mit diesen Händen hast du den Leutnant ins Gesicht geschlagen, eine Minute bevor er fiel... (95)

The theme of the alienation of the soldier from his actions, present in most of Böll's stories, appears here in a more existential manner: the hands, representative of the soldier, can easily be distanced from the actions which they perform, through the simple act of washing. These hands, which have torn bread, raised food to the mouth, and caressed the forehead of a child, have also

taken the shoes from a Russian body, have searched dead soldiers' bags for food, have traded on the Black Market, have falsified documents. However, when all is said and done, the hands can always be washed clean, and no trace remains of sin or corruption: "Diese Hände hast du millionenmal gewaschen, und immer wieder waren sie sauber, rein und unschuldig, und kein Mensch hat sich gefürchtet, sie anzufassen, obwohl du tödliche Granaten damit in den Trichter des Werfers gesteckt hast" (96). The physical act of cleansing the hands reflects the psychological "cleansing" which was so common in Germany during the post-war years. The entire story can, indeed, be seen as a commentary on what Böll saw happening around him in the late 1940s.

Böll captures the image of the war as a machine and of the soldier as a cog in that machine in his writing style: the rhythmic construction of the narration, together with the (seemingly) indiscriminate order of related events and the (seeming) indifference of the narrator, mirror Böll's view of the mechanical existence which war engenders. Related to this theme is that of the arbitrariness of war, again in evidence here, as the situation determines and controls the actions of the hands. They, and by extension the soldier, react to whatever stimuli surround them, whether they handle dirty glasses in Rumanian bars, clean ones in Flemish bars, or whether they dig trenches in Russia (95). There is no evidence of an individual directing and discerning will, but rather one which has become the pawn of circumstance.

The death to which Böll refers in this story ("Metzgerhände", "tödliche Granaten") again reflects the existentialist influence, as does his use of the dead and dying as narrators, which can be found in other stories. For example, both "Wir Besenbinder" and "Wiedersehen mit Drüng", written in the past tense and in the first person, relate the story of death from the protagonist's point of

view. Böll therefore allows not just the dying to tell their tale, but the dead as well. The stories written in this style provide accounts from beyond the grave, and often see death as a final relief from the horrors of war, as the final release of the soldier from his bindings to the hell which the world becomes when men start killing men and morals take a second place to power.

Death is not always seen as a release, however. As Speirs points out, sometimes particularly violent deaths (such as that of the soldier in "Wiedersehen in der Allee", whose head gets blown off as he is dreaming of his girlfriend) are added for their shock value (51). Böll lulls the reader into a hopeful vision of peace and happiness for the soldiers, then suddenly introduces a violent reminder of the reality of war: there will be no reunions with loved ones, no return to childhood homes where remembered innocence made them safe and peaceful, because very soon the dreamers will be dead, blown apart by men very much like themselves - men who will also probably not make it home alive.

Böll combines his existentialist outlook with other beliefs (eg. Catholicism) and qualities (he often moves beyond the existentialist self-concern to a characteristic compassion for all who suffer in war). When his work is examined with this in mind, the many possible levels of interpretation and the many themes inherent in it become apparent. These will be examined in greater detail in the rest of this chapter.

iii. The War Machine

For Böll, war is a phenomenon which, although created by human beings, becomes an entity in itself, and as such takes on its own characteristics

and power. This abstraction from concrete reality, the ability to set aside the direct control exerted over the situation by human beings, has allowed Böll almost to mythicise the idea of the war as machine. This theme pervades his writing, as individual soldiers become helplessly caught up in an apparently directionless existence.

The reality which comes in wartime often radically changes peace-time "norms" of behaviour, and people become creatures they would not otherwise be. The mad character of war takes over entire societies and changes their members, sometimes beyond recognition. Some turn into brutal animals, some into radical pacifists, but all extend their peace-time characters to accommodate the new rules and morals of war. This is not to say that Böll excuses their actions, or that he sees no variation in the levels of their brutality - on the contrary -, but he does offer war as a reason, as a setting for their excesses. The circumstance is evil, not the people, as W. Lee Nahrgang has stated ("To Know..." 82). The war is guilty of perverting the people affected by it. Certainly, some of Böll's characters, like Commander Filskeit in *Wo warst du, Adam?*, fall more easily into step with the vagaries of a violent lifestyle, but generally speaking they would not be so violent if there were no war with which to contend. When the situation is viewed in this light, Böll says, "da wird... die Frage, ob der eine schuldiger war als die andere, uninteressant, ganz uninteressant" (*Eine deutsche Erinnerung* 13). Personal guilt can be difficult to assess when the circumstances are as complicated as they were in the Second World War, and almost impossible when one applies modern ethics to past situations, but going to the other extreme does not help either. Böll proposes that war controls people, which to a certain extent is true. However, despite the complexity and wild nature of war, it is controlled *by* people, at many different

levels. Böll's war stories completely lack recognition of this fact. The higher ranking officers are presented as just as tired and helpless as their men, unable to find within themselves the power to take decisive action, and they are caught like all the others in the hopeless game of war, where the outcome is never certain, but the stakes extremely high. In *Der General stand auf einem Hügel*, the General knows that his troops are about to begin an attack which they have no hope of surviving, and yet he is unable to rescind the order:

...weil er in seinem Innern uneins war; weil er sich fürchtete, der klaren Einsicht zu folgen, die ihm sagte, daß es nicht zu verantworten war, auch nur eines Menschen Leben noch in dieses hoffnungslose Spiel zu werfen...

...er zauderte, sollte er alle Befehle widerrufen, oder? Da hörte er das gräßliche, leise und trockene Geräusch der Abschüsse, und kurz darauf riß die furchtbare Rasanz der Einschläge die letzte Müdigkeit aus den Gliedern aller Umstehenden... (5-6)

Böll does not take into account the fact that war at every level is prompted, organised, controlled, and continued by people.

Böll's stories contain few concrete references to the politics behind WWII. "Die Verwundung" includes one of the few references made to Hitler (Böll's silence when it comes to the higher ranks of the Nazi Regime is almost complete), and even here it is only in passing, as a drunken soldier insults the *Führer* in order to gain the friendship of some Hungarians. The terms used ("Arschloch", 131, and "Schwein", 135) are vulgar, but there is no attack on the Regime here, no attempt to lay blame where blame certainly belonged. Instead, Böll offers an interpretation at the most basic level, *i.e.* that of the common soldier and the "working class", without seeking to hold any one person or group of people responsible for the war and its effects. This results from his attempt to show the perspective "from below", from those immersed in the

fighting and who have no real link with those in power. His concentration on the microcosm of the soldier's existence precludes a discussion at the political level. Because of this, Böll cannot address (or does not see the point of addressing) questions of personal control or of personal choice.

In a similar vein, Nahrgang suggests that negative characters in Böll's stories are not necessarily evil ("To Know..." 77). The author's compassionate view invariably shows the reader their human side, although they sometimes commit atrocious acts. Any character which develops at all becomes multi-faceted, and loses his/her absolute qualities, making that character much more human and allowing Böll to explore the reasons why such "normal" people become murderous in times of war. However, this all-embracing, forgiving humanity threatens to sweep away questions of guilt altogether. If each character is complicated, if each has a past which affects his behaviour in the present, if each has insecurities and worries, in short, if each is *human*, then how can one be made to bear guilt? No one person can bear the responsibility for the war or its effects - not at the societal level which Böll addresses, anyway - and no single cut-and-dried explanation will do for the actions of many.

The characters to whom Böll gives names (as opposed to those who appear in symbolic or token roles) develop into individuals, and each one brings a personal history to the field. However, although each soldier's view of the war and method of participation are different, Böll still acknowledges that war itself is very much a shared experience. Far from seeing it in a traditional light as a sequence of battles and prolonged action, he chooses to concentrate on the more frustrating stretches of time when nothing takes place. A lot of his soldiers spend hours waiting - either for battle or for leave, for the enemy to start firing or for a shift change, sometimes for death - and the author explores how

the seemingly endless waiting affects them individually and collectively. The effects become almost physical, as Böll's characters again and again suffer from *Gleichgültigkeit*, from apathy, and become gradually less and less effective as human beings. Instead of fighting against a concrete enemy and for a distinct purpose, characters find themselves carried by the arbitrary forces of war, as in "Wir Besenbinder", where the enemy is never seen, and the soldiers do not really know where they are going. Far from having a goal and carrying out a mission, they flounder in a state of confusion and often the action goes on around them without their direct participation: things happen *to* them rather than *through* them. War, indeed, ends up taking over their lives and souls completely, such that they become, like the boy soldier in "Wanderer, kommst du nach Spa...", unrecognisable as their former selves. Even in the stories which are ostensibly relating battle events, such as "Der unbekannte Soldat", there is always a contemplative tone to the narration, as the characters resign themselves to the action taking place around them.

The soldier in "Wanderer, kommst du nach Spa...", is transported through the halls of his old school (now a field hospital), and this short trip becomes a philosophical voyage of deciphering his surroundings. Written in the first person, the account tells of *being* taken, of *being* carried, of *being* given water, etc. The main character remains physically passive - only his mind is at work, trying to figure out his location. His inability to recognise the school where he spent so much of his life (and which he left so recently) extends to his inability to recognise himself in that former life. He has become completely a part of the war machine, and as such, no longer able to function independently. His being now depends on the war, as he passively allows the action to take place around

him.¹³

The pervasive sense of the war as Other, of the situation taking on a life of its own, is almost tangible in all of Böll's "war stories", and the surrender of the characters to this Other replaces possible feelings of guilt and responsibility. Many of his figures experience helplessness, a lethargy and a seeming inability to take control. As David Hill states in "The Theme of Religion and Humanity in the Early Fiction", "the characters themselves appear to be at the mercy of anonymous, arbitrary forces" (90). The existentialist influence appears here again, since the state of subjugation to an outside force represents an aspect of *Angst*. Kierkegaard, in fact, defines *Angst* as "the position of someone whose life, a contented one perhaps, hinges on a condition outside of itself" (Cooper 13). Thus, it is not necessarily a negative state, although when Böll uses it in conjunction with the absurdity of war, he is not able to arrive at a positive conclusion.

Any resistance, however small, to these arbitrary forces would appear to be futile, as can be seen in the cases of Dr. Greck and Feinhals in *Wo warst du, Adam?* Greck, whom one would assume to be over thirty, indulges on a day off in activities of which he knows his mother would not approve. These activities, including drinking a glass of schnapps and playing on the swings for a while, are not normally considered dangerous, but they end up costing Greck his life. His overly sensitive digestive system reacts violently to the unusual strain and leaves the man, paralysed by stomach cramps and unable to reach his

¹³ The tool which Böll uses to indicate the change from independent to dependent being is the writing which the soldier sees in the classroom. It is a remnant of school exercises, from the time before the building became a field hospital, and the writing is his own. This is the only thing which he definitely recognises, the only thing which defines both his surroundings and himself. The bitter irony of the situation becomes apparent when the reader realises that the soldier is now handless, and will never again be able to write anything. The war has destroyed the one thing which identifies the soldier's previous life beyond doubt, the one thing which symbolises his earlier personality: his handwriting. Compared to his previous life, the soldier is no longer active, no longer independent, for the war controls him now.

retreating unit, at the mercy of an invading force. He dies buried in the effluence of the exploded latrines. Greck's little personal rebellion against the restrictions of his physical state, although it provides him with a short-lived feeling of victory, turns out to be his undoing. His attempt to change the balance of his life, to change even a little bit "the way things are" is frustrated by the illness which sets in as a result. War, although it has become an entity in itself, is an arbitrary force which shows neither compassion nor malice, and whose effects cannot be predicted or avoided.

At one point Greck recalls a letter in which his mother writes about the neighbours' sons: "Beckers Hugo war in Urlaub hier. Er hat das EKI... Wesendonk ist schwer verwundet, man sagt, er wird das Bein verlieren.' Auch das war etwas, ein Bein zu verlieren" (58). Although Wesendonk will have to have a leg amputated, there is no indication in the text that this resulted from an heroic act. One may safely assume that he was wounded like millions of others, simply by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In trench warfare, the rain of shells is indiscriminate, and neither sustaining nor avoiding injury is an indication of personal prowess, but rather of chance. There is a criticism here on Böll's part, as he personifies the naive expectations of the Home Front in the voice of Frau Greck. She sees only the glory associated with sacrificing one's limbs or one's life to the Fatherland; for her, both Hugo Becker and Wesendonk are heroes, whereas Greck himself continues to be a disappointment because he has neither medal nor wooden leg. Soon after this, Greck also becomes a victim of war, as his life ends a few steps away from the latrines. It is not an heroic death, nor is it one that would make his mother proud, but that is Böll's point: the soldiers have no choice as to how they die, and many deaths in war are as pointless and as inglorious as Greck's. With this injection of realism, Böll

also criticises the Third Reich's tendency to glorify death in battle. When compared with the Langemarck and Verdun myths, where strong, "manly" men sacrificed themselves for higher ideals, Greck's pitiful, personal death becomes a poignant example of what really happens in the confusion of combat.

Feinhals, on the other hand, would appear to be lucky: he manages to survive until the end of the war, and he even finds love in the person of Ilona. The bitter irony of the situation, though, is that although the war brings them together, it also separates them. Because of the categories defined by the time and into which each one falls, the relationship they would like to have proves impossible. Ilona, a Jewess according to Nazi definition despite her Catholic upbringing, is packed into a green furniture van along with the inhabitants of the local ghetto. Jewish by birth, she must therefore be taken away. The machinations of war, especially one waged by a regime that supports ethnic cleansing, do not make allowances for ambiguities; there is no grey area, no middle ground. Feinhals himself, loaded into a red furniture van, travels in the opposite direction from Ilona. He and other stray soldiers are taken directly to the front.

No one person is responsible for what happens to these two. Rather, the state of war dictates their fates - once again, the anonymous and arbitrary force is at work, and the two characters become its victims. Ilona's Catholicism brings her no earthly mercy, as Commander Filskeit finds himself unable to cope with the duality of her character and is driven to shoot her. Feinhals' incredible feat of escaping the war unscathed is reduced to ridicule as, arriving home at the end of it all, he is blown up by a shell at the entrance to his parents' house (141). Böll offers no traditional resolution of the story line, and once again neither death is heroic. Goodness goes unrewarded, just as evil remains

unpunished. The only judiciary system at work would appear to be an anarchic, chaotic and ironic force whose effects lack any kind of meaning; again, this reflects the influence of existentialism on Böll's writing.

The arbitrariness of war and of life itself also fundamentally affect Commander Filskeit, whose version of the war focusses on the differences between Germans and the Jews he has under his control. His is an inner as opposed to an outer war, waged on members of his own society who do not fit into the new Reich. According to the "rules" of the Nazi *Weltanschauung*, "good" Nazis are blond, blue-eyed, and Christian, and their enemies, the "bad" Jews, are dark-haired, small, mean people with "heather" beliefs. This has been at once a source of inspiration and of insecurity for Filskeit, as he believes in the ideal but does not actually fit it himself. His chief source of insecurity lies in the knowledge that he is not, nor will ever be, a true member of the pure Aryan race, "weil er schwarzhaarig war, zu klein und offenbar dem pyknischen Typus angehörte" (95). Furthermore, in the Hungarian concentration camp, he finds himself surrounded by tall blonde Jews. The familiar Nazi rules, being fairly primitive and based on stereotypes, make it difficult to explain genetic evolution. The appearance of Ilona, the apparent perfect realisation of German beauty and Christian faith, is the last straw, bringing on an animalistic anger which focusses his hatred. She embodies everything he ever wanted to be, and yet she is Jewish. The dichotomy proves too much for him, and he kills her viciously, firing on her again and again, thereby furthering the absurdity of the situation, since by his own definitions he destroys in Ilona all the positive aspects of German society. The arbitrariness of Nature, which created them both, combined with the capriciousness of war, which brings them together, destroys the ordered yet unnatural world which the guidelines of Nazi ideology

have created.

This presentation of wartime society as an anonymous, unstructured force is a bleak one, but David Hill argues that it does have its uses, as it allows the reader to empathise more with the characters, and to understand to a greater degree the futility of war and how it destroys lives and communities for nothing: "...this technique allows the reader to share with Böll's isolated protagonists their experience of the central features of society's inhumanity: its anonymity and the meaninglessness of the activity it demands of its members" (91). This is undoubtedly partly why Böll uses this particular approach, which continued to be a major technique in some of his later works as well (particularly in *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum*, where society is again seen as an inhuman force). However, it also allows the author to distance himself to a certain extent from his subject, and, again, provides an escape from the necessity of any deeper, more particular examination of the fundamental workings of war.

In all of Böll's *Trümmerliteratur* one finds the same lack of any real directing force, and hence a lack of any entity, either governmental or personal, which is ultimately responsible for the violence and deaths incurred as a result of the war. As was mentioned previously, Böll thought it was a waste of time to try and pinpoint guilt. He contextualises the traumata experienced by the people; that is, they occur only because of the war. Even though on the personal level there are more and less brutal people, people who tend towards one or the other extreme of Good and Bad behaviour, this is seen as a necessary part of the whole, and not the fault of the individuals in question. To put it bluntly, somebody has to be good and somebody evil, and the questions of who fills those roles and why are irrelevant to Böll, as it depends on context

as much as personality. Every person contains both qualities, as Böll shows, so to a certain extent we are all the same. The whole unnatural situation which results from war cannot be measured by the same yardstick used during peace time, because the number of exceptional war-related situations in which the character finds himself is so great:

war,... employed by Böll as an allegory for the social processes in general, appears to be largely a mechanical activity in which the good and the evil cogs merely play their preassigned roles... all human beings, the relatively evil as well as the relatively good, are at the mercy of various economic, political, historical, cultural, and social forces. (Nahrgang, "To Know..." 82)

Not only does Böll see the impossibility of determining individual levels of guilt, but he also rejects the idea of collective guilt (*Eine deutsche Erinnerung* 29), as the administration of one punishment to a group of people cannot be seen as fair: in fact, he goes as far as to say it is criminal. By extension, all the members of a society cannot be held equally responsible for the crimes of a section of its population. This holds true, as far as Böll is concerned, for German society as much as for Russian, French, etc. The individual case must be examined, and the difficulties inherent in applying today's standards to a past time of war make it impossible to distinguish clearly lines of guilt and innocence or even degrees of the same. This leaves no room whatsoever for any examination of guilt or responsibility, and the author has to have recourse to the image of the war machine in order to offer any explication at all. However, this image can be used too easily to exonerate participants from responsibility for their actions, and Böll frequently allows the helpless atmosphere to overcome his characters. His works contain both a sharp criticism of the Third Reich and a helplessness in the face of its effects, making

the stories more complicated than they appear at first reading.

iv. Heroes / Anti-Heroes

Böll's own stories completely lack the traditional heroic character of Germanic war/battle stories. Gone is the warrior of the *Nibelungenlied* with his bloodthirsty drive and his righteous indignation; gone the ideal of fighting for one's honour at any cost, a common theme from the medieval *Artusmythos* to the works of Ernst Jünger. Instead, Böll presents a "hero" involuntarily caught up in a situation beyond his or her control. His "hero" in fact contradicts German literary traditions, and as such is designated an *anti-hero*. He is trapped in a struggle to survive, with no higher ideals of Justice, of Right or Wrong - Böll's characters embody more human faults than heroic virtues. They contradict the carefully cultivated Nazi myths of the ideal warrior, and as such are more accessible to a post-war audience. The readership identifies more readily with Feinhals as a human being than it would with the sacrificial idealists of the Battle of Langemarck, for example. With this portrayal of the soldier as a human being rather than an ideal, Böll criticises the traditional view of war as a meaningful, dignifying activity. To fall for the Fatherland and for the Cause implies choice on the part of the soldier, whereas Böll recognises that many, like himself, fought according to the dictates of the government and not out of personal conviction.

The new tradition of the anti-hero, which continues to this day, did not begin with Böll or even with the advent of the Second World War.¹⁴ Already after the First World War, the shock of the magnitude of its effects drove many to

¹⁴ Many critics see Büchner's Woyzeck (1836-7) as the prototype of the modern anti-hero. See Pörnbacher et al.

question the wisdom of a type of warfare where so much is lost for so little gained. Erich Maria Remarque's soldier Bäumer in *Im Westen Nichts Neues* (1929) anticipates later anti-heroes, as he struggles to understand his role in the war, and to try and find something meaningful in it. All his attempts at making sense of the situation are frustrated and he himself dies without glory, the victim of a sniper's bullet. Remarque and Böll both suggest that fighting for a common idea such as "nation" or "Fatherland" destroys more than it gains, as individuals such as Bäumer and Besenbinder are lost in the process.

Attitudes such as Remarque's, although they were shared by many after the First World War, were discouraged once the National Socialists came to power in the 1930s. Instead, as was seen in Chapter 1, there was a resurrection of the myth of the Germanic Hero, which became the basis for Nazi propaganda. Once the war was over and the Third Reich destroyed, however, there was a resurgence (albeit a slow one) of the earlier, less comforting yet more realistic anti-hero, and that is what Böll presents most often in his early stories.

By looking at personal histories and experiences, Böll is able to show what happens to humanity during war, and by extension the reader can come to see and understand the very strong opinions held by the author. For Böll, each soldier in war has a face, a name, and a story. These are not action-packed adventures, but most often the tragedies of men dying far from home, frequently in painful or distressing circumstances, without any immediate benefit to the overall campaign. He emphasises that soldiers are people, not numbers, and that most people who fell "for the Fatherland" would really have preferred to stay home. His "heroes" are not fervent Nazis, nor are they militant anti-Fascists, but they represent what Böll saw as the majority of the soldiers, all caught in a trap

not of their own making. In his speech on the occasion of *Volkstrauertag* in 1957, he underlined the difference between the Nazi ideal of the hero and the reality which the fallen faced in the moments before death:

Waren sie alle Helden, die in den Stellungen, in Lazaretten, auf Fluren, in Kellern, auf Lastwagen und Bauernkarren, in Eisenbahnwaggons schrien und beteten, fluchten oder auf eine Weise still wurden, die der Verachtung gleichkam?
 Ich glaube, die meisten hätten diesen Titel, der als Ehre gedacht ist, nicht angenommen, hätten sie von den Morden gewußt, die unter dem Zeichen geschahen, unter dem sie starben...
 Der Heldentod, der ihnen so großzügig bescheinigt wird, ist politische Münze, ist als solches Falschgeld. ("Heldengedenktag" 219-20)

He stresses that although the Nazi government and the Ministry of Propaganda liked to view each German death as a sacrifice for the Fatherland, in reality soldiers ultimately die alone, and for them death is completely personal and totally apolitical. During the Third Reich, the government used the concept of "honour" to sanction the mass sacrifice of so many of its citizens. Their lives were used to bring about the *Endlösung*. Although this never happened, the image of the soldiers as heroes continued, and Böll criticises a similar tendency in the government of the 1950s to idealise the deaths incurred by WWII. Even though the dead now appear as martyrs to the Nazi tyranny, this also denies them a personal voice.

In his article "Nontraditional Features of Heinrich Böll's War Books: Innovations of a Pacifist" (1979), Nahrgang addresses the many ways in which he believes literature from the Second World War differs from that of the First. These include the pessimism of the later works, the lack of a sense of purpose or traditional heroes, and the fact that "most of the characters are isolated

individuals, who are caught up in a repulsive mechanical process which leaves them lonely, desolate, and helpless" (50).¹⁵ Part of the reason for these changes derives, as has been mentioned previously, from the changing face of war itself. With its growing materialism and advanced technology the Second World War loses its individual soldiers in an overwhelming mass of mechanised armament, and the battles of attrition become months of waiting for technological rather than logistical advances. Böll's characters are most often to be found in this state of waiting. For example, "Im Käfig" minutely details the soldiers' state of inactivity, whereas it makes no mention of the reason for it. The men are simply "Hungergestalten, die in der Hitze zur Latrine torkelten, Lehm und Zelte, wieder Draht, wieder Hungergestalten, Lehm und Zelte bis ins Unendliche" (62); they have no individual existence - they are merely bodies waiting to be used. Similarly, the characters in *Wo warst du, Adam?* often find themselves waiting for transport without knowing where they are going or even where the enemy resides in relation to them. Often the inhumanity and the anonymity of war itself are described through these moments when the soldiers become no more than bodies bereft of all personality.

Because of the greater strength of the war, any positive individual moments are fleeting and ultimately suffocated or cancelled out by the circumstances of violent battle. War becomes normal for soldiers and civilians, to the extent that Böll cannot extract himself from it. His proximity to the subject and his inability to stand back and take an objective look very much cloud his views of the war at this point. His stories possess an emotional basis, which, although it makes the characters more sympathetic, also denies a pragmatic interpretation of the events which he describes.

¹⁵ Böll is not alone in his depiction of the soldiers as helpless - not only is he joined by Wolfgang Borchert, but by other authors and filmmakers such as Edgar Reitz, Helma Sanders-Brahms, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder. (See Bartov, *The Conduct of War...* S43.)

The reader, according to Ronald Speirs, identifies with the characters through common human emotions as well as minute descriptions of clothing, food (or lack thereof) and sensations such as hunger and cold (55). This attention to detail figures prominently in most of Böll's works, and serves not only to humanise the characters themselves, but to show the reader that these are people just like any others, who go through the same mundane actions and experience the same physical and psychological feelings. In fact, this careful description allows the reader to get "inside the skin of the protagonist" (Speirs 55). For example, in "Der unbekannte Soldat" the main character, who remains nameless and whose history is unknown, becomes familiar to the reader through descriptions of thirst, hunger, exhaustion, and cold, states with which one can easily empathise. The *Soldat* himself can be seen as a prototype for Böll's typical, average soldier. His feelings and thoughts are described in detail, and then the reader learns that all the other soldiers around him are in exactly the same state of exhaustion or despair. These sensations lead the soldier to a state where dying becomes preferable to living, simply for the relief it brings. He succumbs to *Gleichgültigkeit*, that indifference to the war and to his fate so common in Böll's descriptions of soldiers. Although this man has yet to face battle, he is already worn out as a consequence of the endless waiting for action:

Es war kalt, und es nützte gar nichts, den Mantel immer enger zu ziehen und am Kragen zu zerren, als könnte man ihn verlängern. Auch die Handschuhe waren zu dünn, und er hatte nicht einmal Lust zu rauchen, so kalt war ihm, und er war gräßlich müde. Die Augen fielen ihm immer zu, aber er konnte nicht schlafen, weil ihm schlecht war...

...Er wollte nicht mehr leben. Ihm war wirklich sterbenselend zumute. Mit jedem Atemzug schien er neue Übelkeit einzuziehen... Und es war ihm zum Kotzen schlecht und er wäre

froh gewesen, wenn jemand Mitleid mit ihm gehabt hätte und hätte ihm die Pistole an den Kopf gesetzt und abgedrückt... (219-20)

The soldier's death wish is eventually granted, but not before the narrator stresses the universality of his experience, as it seems all the soldiers in his unit share the same outlook:

Und dann schlug wieder eine Granate ein, dann mehrere, es war nur noch Krach und ein grauenhafter Gestank, und wieder schrie einer, jetzt ein anderer, denn Willis Schreien waren sie jetzt schon fast gewohnt. Er wußte nicht, wer schrie, er wollte nur schlafen, dann schloß er die Augen und schrie, schrie weiter, ohne zu wissen, daß er schrie, bis Gott seinen Wunsch erfüllt hat... (225)

Although some other members of the unit are named, the protagonist is not, indicating his representative status as the average soldier. His history, beyond references to being on parade and in barracks, does not warrant mention because of its unimportance. He typifies every man who has come to this point on the Front, and so it does not matter what he once believed, or what political or social values he used to hold. Sooner or later, all soldiers at the Front become the same physical mass of exhaustion, the same automaton performing its duties mechanically and waiting for an end. As the relief unit to which the soldier belongs arrives at its post, it meets the unit leaving, and there the faces are all exactly the same:

...sie sahen alle ziemlich dreckig aus und furchtbar gleichgültig... Er hatte immer gedacht, wenn sie nach vorne kämen, richtig nach vorne, würden sie verächtlich angesehen, weil sie doch das erstemal kämen. Aber keiner guckte sie verächtlich an, sie waren eher gleichgültig und ein bißchen mitleidig... (223)

Even the Commanding Officer, the Lieutenant, shows evidence of the same state: "sein Gesicht war ganz grau und vollkommen gleichgültig" (223). If this image is compared to that of the ideal Nazi soldier, for example the Langemarck youth, the differences are remarkable. Gone is the inner light of divine right, gone the tireless devotion to the cause. The realities of physical exhaustion, shell shock, and hopelessness have replaced these patriotic ideals. At this point, Böll shows his overwhelming concern for the suffering of these soldiers. There is no explicit questioning on matters of guilt; there is no search for the reason behind their suffering. The author simply presents it to the reader almost as a character in itself, as a tangible presence, with no explanation offered for the state of these men. For Böll, the essence of his message lies in human suffering, pure and simple, and in the face of it the author, and indeed the reader, are brought to a standstill. War means suffering on a grand scale, and that suffering must not be forgotten by the survivors; otherwise the deaths really do become meaningless.

v. Alienation and Anonymity

Clearly, the most important aspect of war for Böll is its effect on the individual, which in turn affects society as a whole. One of the most dangerous of these effects is the loss of individuality itself - the amalgamation of the particular into the whole, in which people become numbers and abstract quantities instead of human beings. Many of Böll's characters show a certain degree of alienation from reality as well as self-alienation, *i.e.* they become so involved in the mechanism of war that they lose their own personalities, and are unrecognisable as their former selves. All this, of course, contributes to the

anonymous nature of war itself, as the men forfeit any semblance of independent life and become - to put it crudely - the cannon fodder to which we so frequently refer today. In showing us that alienation, Böll seeks to remind us of the human beings buried within those shells, and the individuals who have become the fodder.

Part of the alienation experienced in war comes from having to witness or commit brutal acts, another part results from a different distribution of power than that normally seen in peace time. Within the hierarchy of the *Wehrmacht*, power, embodied in the authority of one rank over another, was direct and unquestionable. At the front (especially the Eastern Front), the Commanding Officer's order was law, and as Omer Bartov writes, "senior commanders insisted on draconian punishment, including the death penalty" for infractions ("The Conduct of War..." S34). This allowed the officers and men involved to use their rank as a reason for meting out punishment, without necessarily stopping to think first. The ability to hide behind one's rank, so to speak, allows the soldier to abstract his own conscience from the situation. This led many veterans to exonerate themselves quite easily, as they distinguished between war and peace-time rules of behaviour. Wolfgang Borchert's *Oberst* in *Draußen vor der Tür*, who brushes off questions of responsibility with an easy "So war es doch nicht gemeint" (126), epitomises this attitude, but one can detect the same alienation at different levels throughout Böll's stories.

Böll describes the absolute power referred to above in the story "In der Finsternis", where a soldier caught stealing gold fillings from corpses is summarily shot, in the darkness, crouched over the bodies, and without either a trial or a chance to repent. Böll depicts wartime justice in its abstract, anonymous, absolute form. It is not a General who performs the execution, nor

a member of the SS, but a fellow soldier, whose rank remains unknown to the reader. This is "the way things were" according to Böll; the characters have no names, but rather are identified through description: "der Jüngere", "der Ältere", "der, der aus der Erde gekommen war" (243,250). They are not individuals *per se*, but rather allegorical figures, representing the abstraction, the anonymity which emerges when individual men become the embodiment of their positions. Seen this way, they are almost indistinguishable in the dark; yet one has the power to kill another without a higher authority being called in: "Der, der den anderen aus der Erde gerufen hatte, wandte sich ab, denn der, der aus der Erde gekommen war, hatte seine Pistole dem, der unten hockte, an den Kopf gesetzt und drückte jetzt ab" (250). Böll purposely reduces these individuals to types, to their function within the war machine, to emphasise the collectivity of their experience, the universal similarity of lives led during a campaign. One should not take this as the description of an isolated incident; the anonymity of the language reflects the anonymity of war, and the ambiguity of the soldiers' identities means that they represent all soldiers who may have been in similar situations.

Also in this text, Böll points out the confusion inherent in trying to lay blame on one particular person. The inaccurate description of the characters makes them practically indistinguishable, and any distinction between right and wrong also becomes blurred. The particular situation of the story reflects the general position of the post-war society, as deeds which seem self-evident and justified at the time of their execution become difficult to explain in concrete terms. How, for example, does one distinguish between a soldier with the right to administer punishment and one who deserves to receive it, other than, in this case, one coming out of the bunker and one kneeling in the trench? An

examination of particular guilt cannot be so absolute, because every soldier participates in the war and therefore none is guiltless.

Böll does not depict only extremes of circumstance, however. Many of his characters simply suffer from the boredom and apathy resulting from forced and prolonged inactivity, which continues without much chance of relief.¹⁶ In such conditions, the characters are sometimes reduced further to an animal state, where all rational thought is either useless or nonexistent; they rely only on instinct or are at the mercy of their bodily functions. So it is with Greck when he faces his turn to die: he is left crawling through excrement and paralysed by physical pain which his spirit cannot overcome. Very often, the text employs the word *tierisch* and other related terms to describe a soldier's physical state, and to draw a comparison between it and animalistic behaviour. "Im Käfig", for example, sketches a little scene of soldiers waiting (presumably before moving on to a posting) in the heat of the day, and the description of the men reminds the reader of that of dogs in a pound or cows in a field. In a fenced-in area, they are concerned now only with the heat and how to minimise its effect:

Nichts Menschliches sah er vor seinen Augen; und hinter ihm - das sah er noch deutlicher, ohne sich umzublicken! - war das blanke Entsetzen. Um den unantastbaren Fußballplatz herum (denn heilig, heilig, heilig war der Fußballplatz!) lagen sie, die anderen, eng aneinandergerückt wie faulende Fische im Mittag; dann kamen die peinlich gepflegten Latrinen (denn dreimal heilig auch war die Hygiene!), und irgendwo dort hinter ihm lag auch das Paradies: die schattigen Zelte... leer... leer, von feisten Polizisten bewacht... (62)

¹⁶ Omer Bartov states that the soldiers on the Eastern Front were caught not only by bureaucracy, but also because of the futility of escape. The fear of the Russians ahead and the Germans behind made them stay put: "the individual soldier was physically and mentally trapped, able neither to advance and conquer nor to run away" (*The Conduct of War...* S38).

This reduction of the soldiers to the state of animals is not only an alienation from their function as soldiers, but a self-alienation as well: they are no longer recognisable as human beings, as they conduct themselves in response to instinct rather than intellect.

A similar self-alienation can be ascertained in the protagonist from "Vive la France!", although not to the same extent. One of two sentries on night duty in a small town, he is fighting both boredom and exhaustion, stuck as he is in a town between the danger of the Front and the safety of the more peaceful areas. Towns like this one dwell in limbo - there is no action, and yet they are still considered potentially dangerous. At the beginning of his shift the soldier is already exhausted:

Er brachte nicht einmal die Kraft auf, nach einer Zigarette zu fragen, den Mund überhaupt zu öffnen; er war gelähmt von dieser hoffnungslosen Müdigkeit, die ihn erdrosselte.

Er befand sich in jenem Zustand, wo die Müdigkeit tödlich wirken kann... (47)

This exhaustion is not only physical, but also mental, brought on by the psychological stress associated with his position. He has come to the point where the fatigue is dangerous, threatening to overtake his mind completely. Already at the outset of the narration the soldier's own individuality begins to slip away, as his ability to fight the boredom of his shift becomes weaker and weaker. The mind games he tries to play to make the time pass more quickly, the routine measuring of minutes by cigarettes and paces - all prove useless, as the hands on the watch seem to move more and more slowly. The sentries perform their duty, but at the same time one of them dreams of home and his wife, and the other feels as if life itself were a dream.

Böll carefully relays the prolonged and detailed description of this man's evening, not usually a riveting enough subject-matter for war stories, because it represents the drudgery and futility of daily warfare, where the only relief can be found in an abstraction from reality through memory and imagination. One of the sentry's mental monologues feelingly relates the absolute frustration which results from living in this state of limbo:

Und der Krieg stand still! Dieses Ungeheuer trat auf der Stelle!
 Ein Schrecken ohne Ende. Tag und Nacht die Uniform und die
 Sinnlosigkeit des Dienstes, die hochmütige, kreischende
 Gereiztheit der Offiziere und das Gebrüll der Unteroffiziere!...
 Manchmal erschien ihm die Erinnerung an die Front, wo das
 Ungeheuer wirklich blutig und zähnefletschend gewesen war,
 erträglicher als das unsehbare Warten in diesem Land, das
 zwischen bössartiger Stummheit und einer lebenswürdigen
 sanften Ironie schwankte. (55)

Compared to the action at the Front, horrendous as it is, the apparently futile duties required of the soldier in this town seem infinitely worse, as the lack of physical or mental occupation, while still being in a state of constant danger, allows the mind to be pushed to the edge of sanity. The soldier's alienation from this world is clearly stated here - he cannot relate to the *Sinnlosigkeit* of the perpetual waiting and the empty repetition of his duties. This estrangement brings him to the point of collapse, of total frustration, as he finds himself completely unable to do anything to alleviate it.

There are, on the other hand, individuals who do not suffer from a deep depression or a feeling of total helplessness - those who manage to continue living with a semblance of normality in the midst of the insanity of war. However, very often these characters are even more withdrawn from their surroundings: indeed, only through an almost complete abstraction from the

reality of the war are they able to continue *as if everything were normal*. Some figures resemble Schröder and Plorin, the drivers of the green van containing the doomed Jews in *Wo warst du, Adam?* Nahrgang categorises them as belonging to the insensitive types, who “sing sentimental songs and study family pictures as they drive a truck filled with screaming Jews to an extermination camp” (“To Know...” 79).

These various forms of alienation affect almost all of Böll's characters to a certain extent, and become especially apparent in those with enough time to reflect upon their situation. If the alienation persists, it results in loss of identity (“Im Käfig”), inhuman behaviour (Schröder and Plorin), and/or psychological breakdown (“Vive la France!”). Such alienation experienced during the war naturally influences a soldier's state afterwards, when he must reintegrate into “normal” society.

vi. Death and Dying

Quite often Böll uses the dead and dying as narrators or protagonists, and he captures their moment of death through their own eyes. This view of the war, from those whom it no longer affects because they have moved beyond it, underlines the fatalistic side, not only of the protagonists, but of the author himself. It also reinforces Böll's focus on the individual experience, because everybody faces death alone; it is the ultimate “moment of truth”, and as such defines a person absolutely. Once again, existentialism shows its influence. In “Wiedersehen mit Drüng”, for example, a wounded soldier waiting in a field hospital finds himself lying next to a dead former schoolmate. The soldier is the narrator, and the story, related in the third person as an extra-corporeal

experience, takes us through the events leading up to his hospitalisation, his operation, and his subsequent death. The story ends with the two soldiers holding a conversation, as they find the previously dark room now full of light (emanating from Drüing's abdominal wound). Finally, the nurse appears to them as an angel and leads them away:

...plötzlich sahen wir, daß das Licht verlöscht sein mußte, der Docht war versunken kein Zipfelchen ragte mehr über die wächserne Oberfläche hinaus, und doch blieb es hell - bis unsere erstaunten Augen Dinas Gestalt sahen, die durch die verschlossene Tür zu uns getreten war, und wir wußten, daß wir nun lächeln dürften, und nahmen ihre ausgestreckten Hände und folgten ihr... (350)

Death releases the soldiers from the hell of war, and the Christian views to which Böll adheres make the spiritual afterlife something beautiful and restful, in direct contrast to the horror and pain of war. This creates an impression of a release from pain, hunger, and exhaustion to a state of utter relief and hope.

A similar account concerns the boy-soldier Besenbinder, the narrator of his own story, who is killed during his first transport flight ("Wir Besenbinder"). As in "Mit diesen Händen", any feelings of guilt or blame are absent, as the soldier surrenders to the abstract forces at work. The text presents a layering of the different components affected by these forces: although the soldier remains at the centre of the narration, a larger group of men who are equally affected surround him. They in turn are all contained within the airplane (on whose fate they depend), while the airplane itself is at the mercy of enemy bullets. The narration is cyclical, beginning with a concentration on the particular (Besenbinder), moving gradually towards the universal in the moment of attack, and ending with a renewed emphasis on the individual as Besenbinder relates

the moment of his own death. Böll clearly brings together both the existentialist views of life (that it is bounded by birth and death) and an aspect of Christianity ("earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust", BCP 602) in this one death. To reinforce the cyclical nature of the experience, Böll informs the reader early on that Besenbinder's only proficiency in school was the ability to make perfect circles. This pattern symbolises Böll's views on war and its effects; he could have chosen any soldier in the plane to be the narrator, and the story would have remained fundamentally the same, as each one faced death individually.

Böll writes the narration in the first person, and in so doing not only emphasises the individual impact of death, but also lends an existential nature to the story. Besenbinder acquires the power to relate events from beyond the grave, and he can also see beyond the physical. His fellow-passengers are all linked by their common experience, and resemble each other in their fear. Presumably they reflect Besenbinder's own state, as they are all "...grauen müden und verzweifelten Soldaten, in deren Augen kein anderes Gefühl mehr zu lesen war als das der Angst - denn lange schon war die Krim eingeschlossen..." ("Wir Besenbinder", 203). Later he refers to the silence in the plane as "[das] Schweigen der Schicksalsgenossen" (204). Once the plane has been hit, Besenbinder describes his own death in slow-motion detail, as he concentrates on joining the blazing lights in the sky into a perfect circle. As soon as he succeeds in this endeavour he enters the last stage of death - his life has come full circle, and he has completed his part in the cycle.

Böll's *Trümmerliteratur* emphasises absurdity and the waste of lives which come from death in war. The deaths which he describes are either ludicrous, pointless, accidental, or useless: none is heroic. The reader is constantly challenged to find a reasonable explanation for the destruction of

human life. In death especially, Böll's characters are anti-heroes, as they face the ultimate sacrifice with no supportive idealism, no comfort.

The boy in "Wanderer, kommst du nach Spa..." provides a perfect example of the new soldier, as Böll contrasts his story with all the mythical, legendary figures of the past. The title itself indicates the irony inherent in the narration; Böll quotes Schiller's translation of "an epitaph inscribed on the tomb of the 300 Spartans [...] who died defending Thermopylae" (Thayer 262). It continues: "verkündige dorten, du habest / Uns hier liegen gesehn, wie das Gesetz es befahl" (qtd. in Thayer 262). The quotation, studied by the soldier in school a few short months beforehand, tells of warriors who died protecting their land from foreign attack. The Spartans are heroes in the traditional sense, sacrificing everything in a fight for freedom. This, along with the busts of ancient heroes which line the school walls, reflects the education of German youths during the Third Reich. This soldier learned all about the glorious deeds of ancient and recent civilisations, but an attempt to reconcile them with his own wounded state fails. Throughout, the soldier tries to connect his reality with the legends of the past, but he never succeeds. Böll stresses the absolute difference between glorious myth and painful reality.

At one point in his progression along the school hallway, the soldier imagines the inscription that would follow his own name on the war memorial: "zog von der Schule ins Feld und fiel für..." (301). The sentence is purposely left unfinished, as Böll challenges his contemporary readership: what exactly was the reason why this boy, and hundreds of thousands of others, were forced to leave their civilian lives and sacrifice themselves? The question is pointed and present at many levels, and Böll himself is unable to answer it. For him, no reason suffices to explain the slaughter of so many people.

vii. *Heimkehr*

Böll's soldier, being defined by the war and completely controlled by it, finds it very difficult to re-integrate into the post-war society. In the stories written right after the end of the war and dealing with that time, the soldier finds himself still at odds with the government, still unable to make sense of his participation in the war. This time, he confronts a reality which undervalues the sacrifices he has made for the war effort: the soldier, for so long held up as an ideal, for so long touted as the treasure of the German society, suddenly no longer has a place in that society and discovers that his sacrifices have been reduced to a matter of Marks and Pfennigs. People want to forget the war, and the beaten soldier is a shameful reminder of Germany's defeat. At the same time, society soothes its conscience by providing a financial reimbursement to the veterans. Although this is a practical and helpful thing to do, Böll sees it as placing a material value on human life and suffering. This happens to the soldier in *Mein teures Bein*, who finds himself having to place a monetary value on the leg that he lost during the war, so that his pension can be determined. The story emphasises the absurdity of the situation, as the soldier cynically twists the system, listing the reasons why his leg is so expensive:

"Mein Bein hat nämlich einer Menge von Leuten das Leben gerettet, die heute eine nette Rente beziehen."

"Erst waren wir zwei, aber den haben sie totgeschlagen, der kostet nichts mehr. Er war zwar verheiratet, aber seine Frau ist gesund und kann arbeiten, Sie brauchen keine Angst zu haben."

"...hätte ich das Bein nicht verloren, wären sie alle tot, der General, der Oberst, der Major, immer schön der Reihe nach, und Sie brauchten ihnen keine Rente zu zahlen..."

“...es ist schade, daß ich nicht auch zwei Minuten, bevor das mit dem Bein kam, totgeschossen wurde. Wir hätten viel Geld gespart.” (227-228)

This reduction of personal courage and sacrifice to a monetary value, accompanied by a complete lack of sympathy on the part of the official who interviews the veteran, indicates Böll's own cynicism in the face of post-war insensitivity. In his other stories dealing with *Heimkehr*, Böll's veterans also remain soldiers first and foremost, completely dominated by the events of the war.

Through his consistent concentration on the individual, Böll draws the reader's attention to the very real sacrifices which members of any society are called upon to make during a war of attrition. At the same time, the individual becomes the vehicle for Böll's political criticism, providing a human frame of reference. The number of people killed or maimed during the Second World War is far greater than any such reckoning for any other war, and Böll is trying to show that those men were not just statistics. They were for the most part normal members of society caught up in the political events of the day who ended up, like Böll himself, a small cog in a very large machine.

This machine takes a very large percentage of the male population and uses it freely to its own end. Once the war is over, however, the men are left to their own devices, and very few survive unscathed. The many ways which the war affects these people *individually* include 1) depriving them of their lives; 2) taking away their homes and loved ones; 3) removing limbs or organs, leaving them physically unfit for most work, especially in a society struggling to rebuild, and where only the fittest survive; 4) leaving them psychologically scarred and unable to reintegrate into a normal society (it must be remembered that many German soldiers were raised with the *Hitlerjugend* and a Fascist government,

not with Western ideals of democracy); 5) leaving them unskilled and insufficiently educated for a peace time workforce - Böll himself received his *Abitur* without any difficulty, because at the time the Nazis were whisking students through their last qualifications in order to get them quickly into the army.¹⁷ The policy of granting the *Abitur* without really stressing the work requirements meant that many returning veterans who had been students at the beginning of the war held a certificate which was not highly prized by prospective employers, and had no skills other than those required for warfare (Glaser 57).

The crippling emotional and political state in which the soldiers find themselves during the war, and which is heightened for veterans after the war, mirrors the similar political and economic state of the country itself. The war functions, as has already been cited, "as an allegory for the social processes in general" (Nahrgang, "To Know..." 82), and the individual within it represents all those affected by those processes.

viii. An All-Embracing Humanism

Böll's average soldier is, as we have seen, caught in the cyclical nature of war: usually young, he has reached that point in his life where action and enthusiasm tend to be at their strongest, and yet he is continually frustrated by the overwhelming presence of war. Böll offers a very compassionate view of the soldier, taking into account all the possible difficulties and extremes of situations with which the soldier might be faced and which might affect him adversely. Since the soldier-character is never his own master, always

¹⁷ See Reid, 11, where he describes the essay "Den Nazis verdanke ich mein Abitur", which was later to be expanded and become Böll's autobiography, *Was soll aus dem Jungen bloß werden?*

controlled or affected by the outer forces of war, Böll portrays him as a victim of war rather than an actively thinking and responsible participant.

Böll's stories bear evidence of his compassion for all soldiers of every nationality. He recognises the fundamental similarity of the war experience at the level of the combatants, whether on the "winning" or the "losing" side. In a war of such proportions as WWII, each army has its logistical and political difficulties, and each army makes its share of tactical mistakes, a situation which leaves soldiers on all sides at the mercy of the vagaries of battle. War shows no consideration for the nationality of the sufferers - the war machine (as Böll sees it) indiscriminately inflicts suffering on all sides. The dead Allied soldier feels as little triumph after victory as the dead Axis soldier feels shame after loss. This universal compassion, accepted and even expected today, shows Böll's strength of character at a time when many societies were reeling from the effects of war, still influenced by the image of the enemy as Other. While people maintained this psychological distance (even today many who experienced the war from the Allied side do not discuss the Germans), Böll overcame prejudice and painful memories to view all those affected by war as equal. A soldier is a soldier, Böll seems to say, and war is war. This attitude, although humane, leaves the reader wondering who exactly *is* responsible for the suffering caused in war, if responsibility is not to be found within the armies themselves.

Over thirty years later, in the atmosphere of the Cold War and the "Iron Curtain", Böll still showed an ability to look beyond stereotypes and see the human beings involved in conflict. Discussing (*circa* 1982) WWII and its effects on Russian citizens, Böll states: "Menschen sind sie alle! Menschen waren die zwanzig Millionen Opfer, Menschen ihre Angehörigen, Menschen waren es, deren Häuser, Dörfer, Städte zerstört wurden; anders ausgedrückt: sie sind von

unserer Art" ("Notwendiger Blickwechsel" 67). Further on in the same essay, Böll maintains that the psychological effects of the war will only be over when *all* sides recognise and acknowledge the suffering and the humanity of the others. Germans must learn to view Russians as human beings and *vice versa*:

"Wisse ein jeder - niemand ist vergessen, und nichts ist vergessen." Wenn Sieger und Besiegte in dieses "Niemand" auch all die einschließen, die nicht auf ihrer Seite standen, könnten die gegenseitigen Verrechnungen endlich beendet werden. (68)

The suffering of citizens and soldiers alike was universal, and Böll's reduction of the situation to its basic element, *i.e.* war means human beings killing and maiming other human beings, drives the point home. The pointless infliction of pain and suffering on the Russians becomes, when seen in this light, a paradox: since they are fundamentally the same as the Germans, any violence done to them reflects back upon the instigator, and the violators become the violated.

As we have seen before, an individual often represents a certain group of people, especially in relation to the universality of the war experience. Many of Böll's stories describe the action surrounding the main character in terms of general suffering, not related through circumstances to a particular German experience. One such story is "Die Essenholer", where a detail sent out to find a fallen comrade is blown up on its way back to the trenches. Before being hit by the grenades, one soldier comments on the weight of the dead man they are carrying: "Jeder Tote ist so schwer wie die ganze Erde, aber dieser halbe war so schwer wie die Welt. Allen Schmerz und alle Last des ganzen Weltalls schien er in sich aufgesogen zu haben" (290). Here, the one dead man represents all the victims of the war, and all their suffering, reminding the reader of the unifying quality of death. Suffering and pain unite all casualties (physical

and psychological) of war, in all parts of the world.

The universality of the war experience culminates in the universality of each death. Dead men are all the same, and through them we are reminded most strongly of the real costs and the real effects of war. In an essay written in 1952, "Der Wüstenfuchs in der Falle", Böll summarises his opinions on the waste of life that results from war, the useless glorification of the dead, and the meaninglessness of their sacrifice: "Mögen sie willig oder widerwillig in den Tod gegangen sein unter dem Oberbefehl Rommels: gleichgültig weht der Wind der Wüste über ihre Gräber" (46). This comment could be seen as an existentialist expression of the futility of life in that there is no higher destiny and no intrinsic meaning to it. However, given Böll's strong Roman Catholicism and his great love of humanity, it is more accurate to view this as a cry against the waste of human life: despite the sacrifice of so many soldiers, the Earth continues without them. For Böll war does not justify human sacrifice; rather, it is a waste of human potential and resources.

Böll's political humanism explains his frequent use of anonymous soldiers as well as his obvious compassion for any suffering character, no matter what the rank, station, or race (as in *Wo warst du, Adam?*, where he treats Feinhals and Ilona with the same sympathy). Unfortunately, this standpoint allows the author to paint every participant in the war as a victim: the perspective of universal suffering makes every member of society alike and leaves no room for questions of any kind relating to responsibility. Böll's all-embracing compassion, extended to positive and negative characters alike, exonerates everyone. It can be argued once again that this stems from the author's being too close to his subject, too affected by the very real suffering of the people to be able to stand back and ask *why* they were suffering. However,

although war eventually takes on certain characteristics of its own, *people* begin and direct it, and unfortunately Böll seems to have neglected this point in the early stories, preferring to concentrate on the less challenging, although very emotional, task of describing the suffering of the individual.

Wolfgang Borchert war achtzehn Jahre alt, als der Krieg ausbrach, vierundzwanzig, als er zu Ende war. Krieg und Kerker hatten seine Gesundheit zerstört, das Übrige tat die Hungersnot der Nachkriegsjahre, er starb am 20. November 1947, sechsundzwanzig Jahre alt. Zwei Jahre blieben ihm zum Schreiben, und er schrieb in diesen beiden Jahren, wie jemand im Wettlauf mit dem Tode schreibt: Wolfgang Borchert hatte keine Zeit, und er wußte es. (Böll, "Die Stimme Wolfgang Borcherts" 118)

4. Wolfgang Borchert

In contrast to Böll's seeming streak of pure luck in avoiding the Nazi law machine, Borchert was imprisoned and punished for his various crimes against the party. Erwin Warkentin enumerates these "crimes" in his recent book *Unpublishable Works*. The Nazi government arrested Borchert four times, once before he entered the army, under suspicion of being a homosexual, then three times during the war: for self-mutilation, for "insidiously attacking the state and party" ("gegen heimtückische Angriffe auf Staat und Partei", *Allein...* 88), and for unflatteringly parodying Dr. Goebbels (Warkentin 98). At the age of twenty, Borchert found himself imprisoned for eight weeks for the third offense, with the knowledge that he would soon be executed, in part because of these words, contained in various letters to his friends and family:

"Meine Kameraden, die vor 14 Tagen herausgekommen sind, sind fast alle gefallen für nichts und wieder nichts."

"Ich empfinde die Kasernen als Zwingburgen des dritten Reiches."

"Ich fühle mich selbst als wesenloser Kuli der braunen Soldateska." (*Allein...* 88)

He eventually received pardon for questioning the wisdom of the party and expressing concern at the futile destruction which it engendered. This allowed him to return to his duties at the Front, and he experienced war in all its horror and filth until its end. During this time he also spent one more term in prison because of the parody of Dr. Goebbels which he enacted in the presence of other soldiers, some of whom denounced him to the authorities. After nine months in prison the government again released him, but because of his illness and wound (he had injured his left hand) he was deemed unfit for active service, and instead rejoined his unit in garrison in Jena.

At the end of the war, the unit surrendered to the French, but Borchert managed to escape and covered the 600 km home by foot (*Allein...* 135). This trek would have been exhausting for anyone, but for Borchert, already suffering from jaundice and liver inflammation as a result of his period of incarceration, it proved the last straw. He made it home, but his health steadily deteriorated and he spent the last two years of his life almost constantly in bed. In that time he wrote prolifically, producing letters, stories, poems, and his famous play, *Draußen vor der Tür*. The main struggle which he tried to resolve in the little time left to him was, as with Böll, that of the war and its many ramifications, eg. his own place in it, its place in society, society's reaction to it, and its effects upon the individual. For him, the questions of guilt and responsibility, of deception and self-deception, betrayal and self-betrayal, denial, resistance, and

preservation of life and self-esteem are the most pressing. His works belong more to the *Heimkehr-* and *Trümmer-* than to the *Kriegsliteratur*. This emphasis differs slightly from Böll, as Borchert concentrates on the attempt to reconcile personal, inner suffering with the exterior world. He uses the soldier-character to express his own experiences and to help him put the war into perspective.

The literature which Borchert left consists not only of dramatic prose, poetry, and plays¹⁸, but also of explicit political and societal criticism, found in such works as "Das ist unser Manifest", "Dann gibt es nur eins!", and "Generation ohne Abschied". These last, less narrative texts clearly express the themes which reappear consistently throughout the literature, *i.e.* that every member of society bears a certain degree of responsibility for a war and its aftermath, that the individual's role in society is of paramount importance to the possible prevention of a war, and that reconciliation with the past and with the present can only be found within the individual. Borchert concentrates on the recreation of identity which all veterans (and, indeed, all civilians) must face in order to survive in the post-war age.

Borchert stresses as much as Böll that the individual experience represents a greater, universal one. Borchert's soldier is a central character in all the stories, and many critics see his different personae as sharing the same characteristics which have come to define Borchert's own generation. Bernhard Meyer-Marwitz addresses the subject first in his 1949 *Nachwort* to the *Gesamtwerk*. In reference to Borchert's fellow-youths he writes, "Borchert gab dieser Jugend ihre Stimme zurück, er fand sich mit ihr im gemeinsamen Schicksal und half ihr, diesem Schicksal zu begegnen" (Meyer-Marwitz 343). These men were eleven when Hitler came to power, eighteen when the war

¹⁸ See Warkentin, *Unpublishable works*, wherein he examines three early plays which remain unpublished.

broke out, and sacrificed their youth to the "Nazi Cause". The literary soldier-figure based upon their collective experience undergoes a crisis of belonging, both during the war and after it, representing the generation so prized by society in wartime, and so neglected by it afterwards. Borchert portrays this soldier, young enough still to feel the pain of separation from his mother and yet prematurely aged to withstand the horrors of war, in all his confusion, suffering and pain.

i. A New National Identity from the Ruins

Borchert recognises the difficulties which face soldiers of his generation when they try to return home after the war. He concentrates on portraying what he sees as the main problems facing those soldiers, but unlike Böll he also moves towards a resolution, with the recognition that hope for a brighter future lies within the individual. Although most of the characters experience alienation to some degree (either from society, the war, or themselves), Borchert's belief in individual strength eventually surfaces. His *Trümmerliteratur* is therefore slightly more constructive than Böll's: although both authors detail the suffering of soldiers and civilians alike, Borchert finds a way to use the painful experiences of war as a lesson, whereas Böll allows himself to be overwhelmed. Borchert's later works, such as "Dann gibt es nur eins!" show evidence of his earlier expressionist philosophy, where he indicated the desire to construct a new world out of the chaos of life. His *Trümmerliteratur* invites the reader to build a new existence out of the ruins of war, while acknowledging the painful psychological self-examination which must first take place.

Borchert addresses the difficulty of reintegration into postwar society most directly in Beckmann from *Draußen vor der Tür*. The various levels of alienation which Beckmann experiences represent and magnify the impressions of those returning "home". Borchert recognises Beckmann's representative status, and in discussing the loss of faith which soldiers of his generation experienced, as well as the relation of this to the play, he asks:

...wie soll ein junger Mensch unserer Zeit, ... der durch *diesen* Krieg und *diesen* Frieden hindurchgeht, wie soll er an das Gute, an das Göttliche glauben?... Stehen wir dann nicht aber "vor der Tür"? Geistig, seelisch, beruflich? Haben wir Jungen nicht alle ein Stück Beckmann in uns? (in a letter to Max Grantz, *Allein...* 195)

Although the play concentrates on the negative impact of the war on its soldiers, many other stories move beyond this focused approach and broaden the image of the soldier, encompassing other character traits and shifts in philosophy. Borchert's literary outlook is similar to Böll's, in style and content, but his own strong personality lends poignancy and immediacy to his search for the truth and for resolution.

Borchert realises that individuals have more power than many are willing to admit, and that by asserting themselves from the beginning, rather than ignoring events, individuals can combine to prevent a war. In "Dann gibt es nur eins!" he addresses society members individually according to their job or role in life, whether they be factory workers or barmaids, priests or pilots, etc. and states explicitly that if each refuses to contribute to a war effort, that effort will fail. He also points out the horrors that will befall the country and its citizens if they do not refuse, and the ease with which a similar occurrence could happen again: "all dieses wird eintreffen, morgen, morgen vielleicht, vielleicht heute

nacht schon, vielleicht heute nacht, wenn-- wenn-- wenn ihr nicht NEIN sagt" (321). The role of the individual as a deciding force in society is clear and for Borchert terribly important.

Kurt Fickert writes that "the surface realism which prevails in a good part of Borchert's stories, manifestoes, and his play attests to his ability to capture the *Zeitgeist* of the era in which they take place", and goes on to state that the journalistic, objective style which permeates many of the works results from the author's driving need to express the "basic truths" which are at the heart of his writings (Fickert 9). Borchert was certainly driven by a sense of urgency, and many of his works seem raw and bold. However, this unfinished and direct style appealed to many people because of its simplicity, and it captures the essence of his message better than another, more detailed approach would have. As Carl Zuckmayer wrote in a letter to Borchert shortly before the author's death:

...die Stärke Ihrer Sachen ist, man hätte sie auch aus dem Papierkorb in irgendeinem überfüllten Bahnhofswartesaal herausklauben können, sie wirken nicht wie "Gedrucktes", sie begegnen uns, wie uns die Gesichter der Leute oder ihre Schatten in den zerbombten Städten begegnen. Ihre Welt ist wirklich bis ins Unheimliche, Ihr Talent ist echt.
(*Allein...* 240)

The unaffected and unpolished style which Borchert employs contrasts with traditional stories and legends of war. When compared to the Langemarck myth, for example, Borchert's prose is abrupt, completely lacking in idealism or poetic imagery. The unfinished style expresses the psychological and physical "fragmentation" of people's lives at the time. Because of this, it speaks directly to the reader, and the reality of the description reflects the author's standpoint. He does not see war and its effects as legendary and honourable; rather, he

detects the physical and psychological liabilities which result from it, and he translates these directly into his stories. The outcome, as Zuckmayer says, is a living narrative style which lends familiarity to the content, so that the reader recognises the post-war society in the stories. This is both the strength and the weakness of *Trümmerliteratur*, because although it contains a certain shock element and a rough reality, it can become immersed in the world of war without being able to objectify it. Borchert's post-war literature shows a progression from the early stages of immersion to a later, more focused style, although his premature death cut short any further development.

During the war itself, Borchert says, participants gain a certain insight through proximity to death and suffering, allowing a deeper understanding of the main questions which generally trouble the human spirit, and in a way he almost echoes the earlier WWI pro-war, "real man" views when he writes:

Aber man wird *wahr* und bekommt ein ganz anderes Verhältnis zu den großen Dingen wie Leben, Leid, Liebe, Tod und Unsterblichkeit und Gott. Nur daß man davon nicht sagen kann - *noch* nicht... Glück ist es und Reifen, dieses Grauen innerlich zu bestehen und zu überwinden. (*Allein...* 105)

The tragedy comes when these inner insights cannot be reconciled with the outer world, as happens with Beckmann and many other of Borchert's characters. They have to work through the ruins of their own lives before they can address the physical and psychological *Trümmer* of society.

ii. A New Cosmos Out of Chaos

Even before Borchert entered the army and experienced the chaos of war, he welcomed the inspiration available from such a disordered existence. As he wrote in a letter to Ursula Litzmann in 1940,

...Ich bin Expressionist - mehr noch in der inneren Anlage und Geburt als in der Form. Expressionist sein, heißt: Den Mut und den Willen zum Chaos zu haben! (Das Wort Expression erkläre ich so: Wirkliches durch Seelisches, Ideenhaftes ersetzen, neu gebären!) Allerdings trennt mich etwas doch hiervon: Aus diesem Chaos, das vor allem auch eine Jugenderscheinung ist, will ich den *Kosmos* bilden - ja - *meinen* Kosmos! Dieses voraus ---
(*Allein...* 42)

Borchert's own brand of expressionism consisted of examining the chaos of life (of which there was plenty during the war) and creating a new, personal world out of the fragments. In 1940 he revelled in the possibilities presented by the intellect's ability to abstract ideas from reality and from them to create a new, individual truth. His recognition of the disjointed elements of life echoes that of Böll, but Borchert moves beyond Böll's submissive state to attempt to reach an understanding of them. Only through analysis of the chaos can one attain the new "cosmos", the new perception of the universe and one's own position in it. This is achieved first of all by an immersion in the disorder of the surrounding world, and secondly by a distancing of the self from that world. Many of Borchert's characters find themselves caught in the necessary descent into turmoil which comes before any possible constructive state, and the fragmented style of his literature reflects not only their position but his whole expressionist philosophy. Even in the later works, where realism becomes the stronger style, a search for order in the ruins of lives and of society is essential.

It was in Borchert's nature to search for the abstract qualities of life, to change or to observe reality from the standpoint of the theoretical. The ability to step back from the accepted view of the world and see things from a different perspective enabled Borchert to put into words the emotions and experiences of many "average" soldiers. The soldier-characters which he himself created speak with similar penetrating voices, as their narratives move beyond the emotional and into the practical realm of searching for answers. Borchert's soldiers always ask questions, always want to know "why?" and "who?". They can see more of the abstract side of the human condition during and after the war than contemporary reports and dry history books offer.

Beckmann and Fischer are perfect examples of Borchert's expressionist philosophy, as both have psychological barriers within them which remove them slightly from the "real world". In his article "Through a (Dark) Glass Clearly; Magic Spectacles and the Motif of the Mimetic Mantic in Postwar German Literature from Borchert to Grass", Alan Frank Keele discusses Beckmann's role as a seer, as a visionary (49). Beckmann is the only character in the play to see beyond appearances to the essence of things, thanks to the relic of the war, his pair of gasmask glasses. These glasses, Keele argues, set him aside both in appearance and in perception, and underline the difference between *Sein* and *Schein*, between Being and Appearance (50). Beckmann and the director share a reliance on their glasses as interpreters of the world around them (Keele, 49): the director changes his views according to which pair he has on ("Meine ganzen Einfälle, meine Wirkung, meine Stimmungen sind von ihnen abhängig" [*Draußen*, 132]). Beckmann himself has no choice, and oscillates only between communication with societal reality (glasses on) and the world of the dead, the world of war and absolutes (glasses off) ("ich

sehe ohne Brille alles verschwommen. Aber so kann ich alles erkennen" (*Draußen*, 120)). Gerhard Rupp shares this view of Beckmann's glasses as the link between the two realities within him. He writes, "Die Brille... steht für die Wahrnehmung und Bewältigung der jetzigen, wenn auch furchtbar zerstörten Welt. Wenn Beckmann sie nicht trägt, wird die innere Welt (Visionen, Traum, Erinnerung, Gewissen) stärker" (90).

Beckmann's "privileged" insight into the chaos of war represents the author's own perspective, although Beckmann at the end of the play has yet to reach the positive, constructive aspect of expressionism which Borchert mentions so enthusiastically in his letter. Perhaps seven years later optimism is not such an easily attainable state.

By 1946 Borchert's literature took on a more realistic style and content, and he was fully aware of its contrast with more traditional techniques. In a letter to Hans-Ulrich Cassebaum, written in April of 1947, he states, "[a]uf der anderen Seite weiß ich natürlich, daß so eine nackte Realistik (im Inhalt und im Stil) sich durchaus davon entfernt, was man bis heute Poesie und schöne Literatur genannt hat" (*Allein...* 200). However, Borchert also recognised the necessity of his hard-nosed realistic style, such as that employed in "Das Brot", to reflect accurately the times in which he was living and which he wished to portray. This style, combined with the continuing expressionist content of his works, came to characterise all of his *Trümmerliteratur*.

Borchert does not, therefore, limit the combination of Realism and Expressionism to Beckmann. The soldier-character Fischer ("Die lange lange Straße lang") resembles Beckmann in many ways - he, too, is plagued by questions of guilt and responsibility; he, too, has lost his family and sense of belonging. His view of reality is as chaotic as Beckmann's, as visions of the

past mingle with aspects of the present to create a confused and yet perceptive version of events. He expresses doubts about the possibility of reconciling *Leutnant Fischer* with plain old *Herr Fischer*:

Kann ich Herr Fischer sein, einfach wieder Herr Fischer? Ich war doch Leutnant Fischer. Kann ich denn wieder Herr Fischer sein? Bin ich Herr Fischer?...
 Und Herr Fischer geht die Straße lang... Aber Leutnant Fischer kommandiert: Links zwei drei vier vorwärts, Herr Fischer! Weiter, Herr Fischer! Schneidig, Herr Fischer, kommandiert Leutnant Fischer. ("Die lange lange Straße lang", 246)

The division between Fischer's identity as a soldier and as a civilian remains until the end of the story, when he simply becomes "ich".¹⁹ For Fischer, the mental fragmentation resolves itself when he approaches death: running through the streets towards the tram, he is no longer either Herr Fischer or Leutnant Fischer, but simply a person:

Ein Mensch läuft mit seiner Angst durch die Straße. Der Mensch bin ich. Ein Mensch läuft vor dem Schreien davon. Der Mensch bin ich. Ein Mensch glaubt an Tomaten und Tabak. Der Mensch bin ich. Ein Mensch springt auf die Straßenbahn, die gelbe gute Straßenbahn. Der Mensch bin ich. (264)

Borchert here reduces the confusion and complications of Fischer's life to a common human denominator: at the end of the day, he is defined neither by his military nor his societal position, but by his humanity.

Fischer has replaced reality with an abstraction; the street which leads to the tram has become a stage on which he explores the different aspects of his inner life and those of society, and tries to reconcile them. He comes across

¹⁹ The themes of self-alienation and duality present within Fischer recur throughout the literature, in stories such as "Radi", where the main character bemoans his final resting-place in Russia: "Alles ist fremd," he says, "Alles so fremd [...] Auch man selbst" ("Radi" 188).

many symbolic characters, representing the different themes which Borchert addresses so frequently, including religion, poverty, the search for meaning in sacrifice, and the attempt to define responsibility in war. Sometimes these characters are seen clearly and meaningfully; at other times they are all presented to the reader in a confused jumble. However, this jumble is far from random, as it represents Fischer's own exposure to the expressionist chaos.

Unlike *Draußen vor der Tür*, this story certainly ends with the death of the main character, although the reader is left in a similar state of bewilderment as to his ultimate fate. Once Fischer reaches his final destination, that is, the tram, he finds that many of the other characters have already assembled there. At this point there is a slight shift towards existentialist uncertainty, as the *Straßenbahn*, where Fischer joins his Company, his mother, and others who have died, becomes a possible link to the afterlife, although even that soon becomes doubtful:

Aber wohin fahren wir denn? frag ich die andern. Wir müssen doch wissen: wohin? Da sagt Timm: Das wissen wir auch nicht. Das weiß keine Sau [...] Und der Schaffner macht ein unbegreifliches Gesicht. Er ist ein uralter Schaffner mit zehntausend Falten. Man kann nicht erkennen, ob es ein böser oder ein guter Schaffner ist. Aber alle bezahlen bei ihm. Und alle fahren mit [...] Und keiner weiß: wohin. (264)

Fischer finds no comfort inside the tram, as none of the passengers knows where it is going, or whether the end result will be positive or negative. Fischer echoes Borchert's own drive to know when he says, "wir *müssen* doch wissen"; the same urgency is present here as in the play, with the main character seeking the ever-evasive *Antwort*. Fischer must remain in his unenlightened state, as nobody on the tram can answer his questions. Even the image of the

Schaffner, an archetype borrowed from literary tradition, becomes ambiguous in this context.²⁰ The “uralter Schaffner mit zehntausend Falten”, the ancient image of death itself, has neither a positive nor a negative connotation: nobody knows whether he “ein böser oder ein guter Schaffner ist”; the only certainty lies in the fact that everyone must pay him upon entering the tram. In other words, there is a complete lack of any religious certitude - although the characters have died, they have yet to discover what that means. All they know is that everybody ends up on the tram; everybody dies at some point. Other than that, they are merely a collection of people hurtling through the unknown towards the unknown.

iii. Nihilism

The reputation which Borchert had for many years, and which is still popular among critics today, is that of a nihilist. Many look at *Draußen vor der Tür* and take its despairing tone as representative for all of Borchert's literature. However, a closer look at the prose, poetry and letters, both preceding and following the play, shows otherwise. True, Nietzsche's writings (especially *Also sprach Zarathustra*) had a marked influence on the younger author. Warkentin finds many examples of Nietzschean philosophy in the early, unpublished plays, where some of the key characters show definite qualities of the *Übermensch*, but he is also quick to point out Borchert's shallow application of the philosopher's ideas. “The understanding of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* [...] is that of a seventeen-year-old trying to make sense of the world around him. It is not the *Übermensch* of the critical philosopher” (Warkentin 31). The attraction of the Superman for Borchert comes from the idea of the individual moving above

²⁰ The image of a conductor who leads souls from Earth to the afterlife is an ancient one. Other examples can be found in such works as Dante's *Inferno* and the *Nibelungenlied*.

and beyond society, and finding strength in a position outside the realm of the common.

By the time Borchert wrote *Draußen vor der Tür*, his concept of the individual had shifted. In the later play the main character no longer has any input into society, but rather is defined through a relationship with it. Beckmann's inability to create (or recreate) such a relationship leads to his final identity crisis. The ending of the play, open to interpretation, has led many to believe that Borchert intended Beckmann to succumb to his despair and let it destroy him. However, in his *Nachwort* Meyer-Marwitz defends the author from possible over- or mis-interpretation and reminds the reader of the speed with which Borchert wrote the play. The eight-day writing frenzy resulted in a raw emotional work, more a psychological necessity for the author than a polished drama: "er fand keine Ruhe, bevor der letzte Federstrich getan war" (340). The play, written without much thought to form, reflects in style what it does in content, that is, the directionless cry of the young *Heimkehrer* who finds himself bereft of purpose or place in society: "*Das ist Borcherts Stück: Schrei! Nur so kann es begriffen und gewertet werden*" (341).

Although the author offers no resolution to Beckmann's crisis in the play itself, he later expands on the ideas which led to its ending. In the previously quoted letter to Max Grantz, Borchert addresses the question of God and what happens when youths are faced with the possible nonexistence of the traditional figure portrayed by the Church, by schools, and by parents. However, he does not subscribe here to the Nietzschean "Gott ist tot" philosophy which is central to nihilism. Instead, he offers a more positive solution: "[Beckmann] fragt nach Gott! Er fragt nach der Liebe! Er fragt nach dem Nebenmann! Er fragt nach dem Sinn des Lebens auf dieser Welt! Und er

bekommt keine Antwort. Es gibt keine. *Das Leben selbst ist die Antwort* (Allein... 195, italics mine). The challenge for each character, and indeed, for each person, lies in realising that the strength to carry on comes not from society but from within the individual.

This concentration on the individual as the directing force behind each life, as the ultimate power behind each destiny, leads in Borchert's case to a near-nihilistic outlook. However, he takes this nihilism beyond its destructive to its constructive stage. Once the individual acknowledges total control over the spirit, then that individual must start building a strong foundation for it. Once the outer constructs of society are recognised (philosophically) and negated, then the quasi-nihilist must begin to posit new, personal constructs based on inner conviction. For example, Borchert discounts the existence of a divine entity (God) but goes on to suggest that the divine is to be found within the individual and within life itself:

Weder die Schule noch die Kirche oder das Elternhaus klären das Kind auf, daß diese Gottesvorstellung falsch ist und so muß der junge Mensch mit zunehmender Reife eines Tages die Erfahrung machen, daß es *diesen* Gott nicht gibt, daß es keine Macht gibt, die uns beisteht, die sich herbeiflehen läßt und das Böse verhindert [...] Das Göttliche ist *in* uns und *in* allem Leben. (Allein... 195)

This could be seen as a dangerously anarchistic message to be spreading, as it advocates an individual freedom to negate societal "norms" and create new ones based on personal preference. However, Borchert sets a positive restriction, insisting that this brand of nihilism be based on love and compassion, and be therefore constructive and healthy. "[...] Wir müssen in das Nichts hinein wieder ein Ja bauen" he states, and goes on to reason why:

“denn wir lieben diese gigantische Wüste, die Deutschland heißt. [...] Wir wollen dieses Deutschland lieben wie die Christen ihren Christus: Um sein Leid” (“Das ist unser Manifest”, 313). This love encompasses all Germans who have suffered during the war: mothers, brides, soldiers who have been afraid and exhausted, pushed to the extreme and beyond, even those idealists (“die Hölderlinhelden” [314]) who have seen their illusions shattered and replaced by grim reality. Where once the country was officially united through a “common” political struggle, now it is truly united through common suffering, and only self-realisation and compassion will help the society overcome its pain.

The constructive realism presented by Borchert in his prose contradicts the earlier nihilistic tendencies of his plays, but this makes perfect sense when one examines his works in conjunction with his life. While writing *Draußen vor der Tür*, Borchert was trying to come to terms with post-war society and his own position in it as a wounded, sick, and unproductive member. Later, his zest for life, so noticeable in the pre-war letters and early poems, returned, and as Meyer-Marwitz notes, life was more important to him than anything:

Er liebte das Leben so sehr, daß er sogar einen schweren Verzicht auf sich zu nehmen bereit war: “Ich will keine Zeile mehr schreiben können”, flüsterte er einmal in den letzten Monaten seines Lebens, “wenn ich nur mal wieder über die Straße gehen dürfte, mal wieder Straßenbahn fahren - und an die Elbe gehen, immer wieder an die Elbe gehen!” Nein, er war wirklich kein Nihilist! (347)

iv. “Deutschland, Kameraden, Deutschland! Darum!”²¹ ?

Borchert, like Böll, addresses the subject of death in war, with its tension between political heroic overtones and harsh reality, although Borchert’s

²¹ “Die lange lange Straße lang”, 250.

approach is more direct and demanding. Whereas in Böll's Catholic belief death provides a release into a positive afterlife, for Borchert the only life that matters is on Earth, in the here and now. Therefore, he feels a driving need to find out the whys and wherefores of battle, because without that knowledge the individual's ability to move on and begin anew is severely hampered. The search for a satisfactory reason, either for the war or for the soldier's own participation in it, can be seen in many stories, notably again in "Die lange lange Straße lang", as Fischer searches for meaning in the post-war world. As a result of surviving a battle which killed all the other members of his Company, he has been reduced to a state of mechanical movement ("...links zwei vorwärts, Fischer! schneidig, Fischer! drei vier atme, Fischer! weiter, Fischer, immer weiter zickezacke...", 244) and permanent mental confusion as he searches for an explanation of the deaths of his fifty-seven men. They, like Beckmann's soldiers, come to him in a dream and torment him with their need to know why they fell; they cannot rest until a satisfactory cause has been found, but Fischer cannot help. As the dream progresses, they in turn ask their (representative) father-figure, the *Ortsvorsteher*, and a priest, none of whom provides an answer. When they ask the General, he does not even acknowledge the question. Finally, they come to the Minister, who feeds them the same propaganda line as from the pre-war years: you have died for Germany:

57 fragen nachts den Minister: Minister, warum? Da hat der Minister sich sehr erschreckt. Er hatte sich so schön hinterm Sektkorb versteckt, hinterm Sekt. Und da hebt er sein Glas und prostet nach Süden und Norden und Westen und Osten. Und dann sagt er: Deutschland, Kameraden, Deutschland! Darum! [...] 57 liegen bei Woronesch wieder ins Grab [...] Und sie sagen die Ewigkeit durch: Darum? Darum? Darum? (250-51)

This ambiguous answer resolves nothing for the men, just as nothing is resolved for Beckmann. The Minister's empty repetition of a patriotic appeal leaves the dead soldiers uncomfortable and unsatisfied, but they must make do with this answer and ponder it for eternity, because nobody can provide them with a better explanation. Borchert's social criticism surfaces here again, as he points out the unwillingness of the post-war society to face the past. The Minister represents not only the official party line, but also the silence of the general community. His empty political gestures (toasting all areas of Germany) and comments ("Deutschland, Kameraden, Deutschland! Darum!") serve to cover up his underlying embarrassment and discomfort when confronted with the chilling reality of the dead men. Even his physical position ("Er hatte sich so schön hinterm Sektkorb versteckt") underscores his unwillingness to connect with the truth of war, the sacrifice of so many lives.

After this confrontation Fischer continues down the street until he meets the organ-grinder, and there he finds a different meaning behind the actions of war. Among the carved figures which move about the organ are a boxer (fighter), a rich man, a general, and a scientist who creates the toxins used in chemical warfare. Each represents a different facet of society which either contributes to, or is affected by, war. Fischer destroys the scientist-figure, but the organ-grinder quickly replaces it with a new one from his bag. It is then that Fischer discovers that the figures do not move by themselves, but are controlled from the outside. All the components of war are dictated by the one man: "Aber der [Brillenmann] bewegt sich so fürchterlich, schrei ich. / Nein, er bewegt sich nicht, er wird er wird doch nur bewegt. / Und wer bewegt ihn denn, wer wer bewegt ihn denn? / Ich, sagt da der Leierkastenmann so fürchterlich, ich!" (263). Fischer cannot reach this man: the closer he brings himself to him, the farther

away the organ-grinder goes, and the illusion of having found one responsible goes with him.

This scene echoes Beckmann's own quest for the truth, when he visits the *Oberst* and tries to return the responsibility for his dead men to him. Beckmann is also unable to sleep, because the dead men appear to him every night, demanding an explanation for their deaths. The *Oberst* cannot provide him with an answer; he merely glosses over the question by denying its importance: "Aber mein lieber Beckmann, Sie erregen sich unnötig. So war es doch nicht gemeint" (*Draußen* 126). This elicits a response wherein Beckmann questions the *Oberst's* logic:

Doch. Doch, Herr Oberst. So muß das gemeint sein.
Verantwortung ist doch nicht nur ein Wort, eine chemische Formel,
nach der helles Menschenfleisch in dunkle Erde verwandelt wird.
Man kann doch Menschen nicht für ein leeres Wort sterben
lassen. Irgendwo müssen wir doch hin mit unserer
Verantwortung. Die Toten - antworten nicht. Gott - antwortet nicht.
Aber die Lebenden, die fragen. (126)

This directly contradicts the traditional heroic view of a soldier's death, as Beckmann (and hence Borchert) deny the validity of allowing people to die for empty ideals. The *Oberst* is stuck in the abstract world of the old soldier, and although Beckmann manages to impress him with his description of the dead, he cannot really communicate the essence of the message to him: that the reality of war is death, and that somebody must be held accountable for it.

The responsibility is simply not that easy to pinpoint, and remains anonymous and unreachable. However, Borchert's characters at least make the attempt, in contrast to Böll's inability even to begin questioning the human components of accountability.

In order for any characters to begin the questioning process, they must first be made aware of the complicated nature of war and their place in it. The two soldiers in "Die Kegelbahn", for example, are reasonably happy sitting in their foxhole and firing at the enemy until they stop and think about it. Then the question of why they are killing so many men who are so like themselves prevents them from sleeping. The fact that somebody ordered them to do it does not soothe their troubled consciences and they begin discussing their position: "Aber man hat es doch befohlen, flüsterte der eine. Aber wir haben es getan, schrie der andere" (170). A similar attempt to lay the blame on God, an even higher authority, is rebuffed with the argument that God cannot be brought to account since He does not exist. Each soldier represents one facet of society, with the first resorting to denial in the face of accountability ("Aber man hat es doch befohlen [...] Aber Gott hat uns so gemacht [...], 170), and the second confronting the truth ("Aber wir haben es getan", 170). Neither side comes to a resolution; both remain unable to sleep, and yet when a new order is given to resume firing they do so unquestioningly. The ultimate realisation of their own responsibility does not prevent them from continuing in battle; they merely pass on the greater responsibility to a higher level ("einer hatte es befohlen", 170). The two men cannot reconcile their actions with their image of themselves as human beings; therefore they return to their original state of denial of responsibility. Borchert points out the invalidity of this standpoint, as each person carries responsibility at a specific level. The universal experience and the particular are brought together here: the men are responsible for their own actions, but someone else is responsible for even more, someone who gives the orders.

Und immer, wenn sie einen Menschen sahen, schossen sie auf ihn. Und immer war das ein Mensch, den sie gar nicht kannten. Und der ihnen nichts getan hatte. Aber sie schossen auf ihn. Dazu hatte einer das Gewehr erfunden. Er war dafür belohnt worden.
Und einer - einer hatte es befohlen. (170)

This cold description of war duties again contradicts the heroic, idealistic traditions. Each person does his duty, with no higher idealistic motive. The soldiers fire with a machine gun because they were issued it; the man who invented the more efficient artillery piece was well paid for his work. However, a concept of shared responsibility underlies this cynical approach. Each member of society who contributes in any way to the war effort, whether as combatant following orders or inventor on salary, shares a certain degree of the burden of *Verantwortung*. The inclusion in the same section of the "one who gives orders" with the soldiers and the anonymous "enemy" brings all the human elements closer together. Not only the Generals and the Commanding Officers (or in Germany's case, the *Führer*) can be held accountable, but everybody.

The voices of the dead are of paramount importance to Borchert, as they reappear again and again in his stories. They allow Borchert to communicate his difficulty in reconciling their sacrifice with the demands and needs of a society which seemed to forget them so quickly once the war was over. Their recurring presence emphasises his belief that concerns over their deaths must be properly addressed before survivors can move on to the next stage of life. The dead soldier Radi ("Radi") represents all his comrades: he cannot find peace in death because of the emptiness and desolation of his position:

Du, lach nicht, aber es ist nicht schön, in Rußland tot zu sein. Mir ist das alles so fremd. Die Bäume sind so fremd. So traurig, weißt du. Meistens sind es Erlen. Wo ich liege, stehen lauter traurige

Erlen. Und die Steine stöhnen auch manchmal. Weil sie russische Steine sein müssen. Und die Wälder schreien nachts. Weil sie russische Wälder sein müssen. Und der Schnee schreit. Weil er russischer Schnee sein muß. Ja, alles ist fremd. Alles so fremd... Auch man selbst. (188)

Again, the narrator makes no mention of glory or heroism. Radi concerns himself only with the various physical components of his grave; only once the living narrator convinces his dead friend that the earth in Russia is the same as the earth in Germany can his soul rest. The communication between living and dead, and the comfort which the dead receive from this, are the only things which allow them to rest in peace. This one example can be applied by extension to all the other voices - each is a soul like Radi's, whose story needs to be told and remembered, whose death needs to be acknowledged. The souls of the dead and of the living can only find peace when the past has been properly addressed and when the soldiers are remembered for who and what they were.

v. "Jetzt hat uns keiner hingeschickt"²²

On many occasions Borchert's characters explore the possible avenues of relief from the torment of guilt, of not knowing where responsibility lies, and in the process they question various traditional elements of society. God never answers such direct questions satisfactorily ("Ich kann es nicht ändern, meine Kinder, ich kann es nicht ändern", *Draußen* 104). Superior officers are equally incapable of providing an explanation ("So war es doch nicht gemeint", *Draußen* 126). Government offers empty responses from well-worn propaganda slogans ("Deutschland, Kameraden! Deutschland! Darum!" ["Die

²² *Draußen vor der Tür*, 158.

lange lange Straße lang" 250]). Society itself is too impersonal and self-centred to react ("So was Dummes, sagt mein Alter, von dem Gas hätten wir einen ganzen Monat kochen können": Frau Kramer, in reference to Beckmann's parents' suicide [*Draußen* 142]). In the end, the answer is always to be found within the individual himself. Beckmann's cry at the end of the play is echoed and answered by another soldier-character in the short story "Gespräch über den Dächern":

[Beckmann:] Gebt doch Antwort!
 Warum schweigt ihr denn? Warum?
 Gibt denn keiner Antwort?
 Gibt keiner Antwort???
 Gibt denn keiner, keiner Antwort??? (*Draußen* 165)

"Sind wir ohne Antwort? Oder du, antworte. Sind wir am Ende endlich selbst diese Antwort? Haben wir sie in uns, die Antwort, wie den Tod? Von Anfang an? Tragen wir Tod und Antwort in uns, du?" [...] Der Frager am Fenster hat sich mit seiner Frage selbst geantwortet. ("Gespräch über den Dächern" 57)

Borchert shows in many scenes such as these how people try to project their own responsibility onto others. However, these attempts to displace guilt are always unsuccessful, and the characters always end up turning their questioning inwards, searching for the answers within themselves. Borchert's designation of the character in "Gespräch über den Dächern" as a *Frager* is not coincidental, and is in fact representative of all the soldier-characters, who search relentlessly for the answers to their endless questions. These answers differ from person to person, and the strength to confront them is as personal as the journey towards it must be. According to Gerhard Rupp, the realisation of individual guilt - the knowledge that no-one else can resolve questions of responsibility other than the self - and the inability to blame it on the nature of

war result in the character's being overcome almost completely. Individual freedom (mental and physical) is reduced to a minimum (G. Rupp 91). This is especially evident in Beckmann's character, as his tenuous link to the "real world" of the post-war society gradually weakens until he is left completely alone with his fear, guilt, and confusion, in a state of physical as well as mental exhaustion. The other characters are unable to help him, and he must face the truth of his own position by himself in order either to reconcile himself with it or be overcome by it.

Despite the inability to place guilt on any one person, the ambiguity surrounding the laying of blame suggests the possibility of a more general explanation of responsibility. Again, Borchert sees the role that each member of society plays in allowing a war to happen, and mostly this is more a passive than an active role. Individual contributions combine, though, and create together the stronger societal will. Those who go along with the building of a warlike society, those who allow others to become enthusiastic, will to a certain extent become so themselves, and, worst of all, will do nothing actively to stop the onslaught of war. Beckmann realises that it was the individual members of society who combined to send him and his schoolmates off to war, to the sound of marching music and Langemarck celebrations, but now that he has come back from the horror of combat, he cannot find one person who will admit to it:

Und da haben sie uns dann hingeschickt. Und sie waren begeistert... Keiner hat uns gesagt, ihr geht in die Hölle... Nur - Macht's gut, Jungens! haben sie gesagt... Und jetzt sitzen sie hinter ihren Türen. Herr Studienrat, Herr Direktor, Herr Gerichtsrat, Herr Oberarzt. Jetzt hat uns keiner hingeschickt. Nein, keiner. (*Draußen* 158)

With this comment, Borchert points out what the post-war society wants to forget, namely, that it was not just fanatical Nazis in the higher echelons who sent the society to war, but all facets of society. He refers here to traditionally solid and trustworthy members of society - the teacher, the director, the lawyer, the doctor - who represent the breadth of respectable society, who approved of the war at the time, and yet who refuse to acknowledge their participation in it after it is over.

The double phenomenon of societal *Begeisterung* with the war and the subsequent almost total denial of involvement in it troubles Borchert's characters deeply. For those caught in the middle, those who know they have participated in a horrible event and yet find themselves unable to address it publicly, the contrast is too much and the adjustment too difficult to make. They must search for a reason in the madness, for an explanation of why exactly they were made to sacrifice so much to receive so little in return, before they can move on. Borchert's answer is that they were victims to a certain extent of the will of the society, but that they also had within them the power to refuse. In the atmosphere of the post-war society, it is almost impossible to find anyone who will admit to having been in favour of the Nazi regime, or to have willingly taken an active part in the war - in short, to find anyone who will face any kind of responsibility. Herman Glaser supports this argument: "Mit Kriegsende waren (fast) alle Nationalsozialistischen verschwunden. Fanatismus hatte man erwartet; Wölfe (Werwölfe); man trat auf Unschuldslämmer. Verwandelt schien dieses Volk; war es eine Wandlung? Konnte man sich auf die Mutation verlassen?" (54). With this question Glaser echoes Borchert's own doubts as to the sincerity of his fellow Germans. In a letter to Karl Ludwig Schneider in July 1947, Borchert writes, "Man muß heute wirklich unter unsrer Generation

sammeln u. [sic] suchen, wenn man handfeste Antifaschisten und Antimilitaristen finden will" (*Allein...* 215). For those who grew up in the fiercely fascist society of the Nazi regime, the post-war community's sudden denial of the past created an inner confusion and a fundamental insecurity which could only be resolved through self-examination and a restructuring of personal *Weltanschauung*.

vi. *Heimkehr*

a) **Problems Fitting In**

In "Generation ohne Abschied", Borchert encapsulates what he believes to be the experience of so many of his generation, and his description of those real soldiers also fits his own characters: "Wir sind die Generation ohne Bindung und ohne Tiefe. Unsere Tiefe ist Abgrund. Wir sind die Generation ohne Glück, ohne Heimat und ohne Abschied. Unsere Sonne ist schmal, unsere Liebe grausam und unsere Jugend ist ohne Jugend" (59). They are left with nothing, he says, because the war has taken it all away: they have no God, no home, no youth, no real appreciation of beauty, no capacity to love truly, and no ability to make a real connection with others. Part of the post-war state of denial in which the German society found itself is explained here as an automatic self-defense mechanism for the soldiers: were their grieving allowed to begin, its magnitude would become a destructive force:

Wollte unser Herz jeden Abschied, der uns geschieht,
durchbluten, innig, trauernd, tröstend, dann könnte es geschehen,
denn unsere Abschiede sind eine Legion gegen die euren, daß
der Schrei unserer empfindlichen Herzen so groß wird, daß ihr
nachts in euren Betten sitzt und um einen Gott für uns bittet. (60)

Here, Borchert describes the destruction caused by the war as more than just physical. True, the soldiers' homes have in a number of cases been flattened by bombs, burnt out, blown up, etc., but there is a psychological loss of *Heimat* as well. Even those fortunate enough to return to parents and homes find themselves in a changed world. The war has taken young men, fresh from school and full of hope, and destroyed their independence and their sense of purpose. Years of being led and ordered, of seeing one's friends as well as those barely known being killed outright or maimed, years of transient lifestyle and seeing the ultimate futility of their efforts and sacrifices leave them with an unwillingness or even an inability to form strong ties with anyone or to believe in anything. The depth of suffering which these men have experienced has left them empty inside.

Borchert himself, as he mentions in his letters, experienced some of the more horrible aspects of the war, and faced the same psychological demons as his characters, but he knows that there must be hope in order to survive, and the last part of "Generation ohne Abschied" is a message to that effect. We are the generation which has suffered immensely and lost so much, he says, but at the same time the future belongs to us, and it is up to us to make it better than the past. "Wir sind die Generation ohne Abschied, aber wir wissen, daß alle Ankunft uns gehört" (61). Borchert's characters reflect this philosophy - often they, like Beckmann, face the horrible reality of the war and are unable to come to terms with it, but usually there is a thread of hope which accompanies the despair. Borchert believes that the strength to overcome that despair can be found within the individual - his characters never succeed when they search for answers from outside sources. Only once they turn their attention inwards can they address the truth and begin the healing.

Beckmann's attempt to return home, both physically and emotionally, is an account of an effort to come to terms with reality; only once he has exhausted all outside sources and is left completely alone can that reconciliation be possible. Borchert leads the character through many possible avenues (each one representing an aspect of his former life) until they have all been frustrated and he stands alone, stripped of all comfort and belief, of all connection with the outside world. The fate of the individual is now up to himself to decide. The author leads him to the point where he must face the decision, but no further. The audience cannot participate in the ultimate catharsis which Beckmann must undergo. If the strength exists, it can only be found by Beckmann himself, so the audience, like Borchert himself, is left not knowing how the character will eventually face his despair.

b) Denial

The necessity of confrontation with personal accountability and guilt was Borchert's theory, however, and not reality. Generally people did not look inside, did not want to confront the truth: the less painful course was that of denial in its many forms. ("All events in which we Germans were guiltily implicated are thus denied or reinterpreted, with responsibility for them pushed onto others - or, at any rate, not associated in retrospect with Germany's own identity", Mitscherlich 16.) Borchert was well aware of this, and also of the difficulties which a practical application of his theory faced, especially for those soldiers left to their own devices after the war, who found themselves unable to cope. Many of his characters are caught in the same inability either to overcome the past or to address it.

Kurt Fickert discusses two types of denial in Borchert's literature: deception and self-deception, and betrayal and self-betrayal, as they relate to the stories set in the immediate post-war time (10). He uses the short story "Das Brot" as an example, as the two characters, a couple who have been married for thirty-nine years, are driven to lying to each other for the sake of a slice of rationed bread. Similarly, in "Stimmen sind da - in der Luft - in der Nacht", the two girls on the tram are ashamed to look at each other while others discuss the voices of the dead, because neither wants the other to know that she hears them too. Deception is necessary, in both cases, to maintain an outer semblance of normality. Unfortunately the lies, however small, contribute to the weakening of the social fabric. The husband and wife in "Das Brot" lose some of the trust they have shared for years, whereas the deception the girls practice prevents an assessment of their situation and prolongs their inner state of confusion and pain.

Many characters practice self-deception, especially those in *Draußen vor der Tür* who see Beckmann as an anachronism. The *Oberst*, for example, has convinced himself of the necessity of war as well as any deaths or wounds resulting from it. Borchert depicts him not as an unkind man, but rather as one who has consoled himself with the old Prussian ideals of valour and abstract heroism, who has successfully denied any guilt in order to start a new, "normal" life in the post-war society. As Gerhard Rupp states, the *Oberst* "hält die 'gute deutsche Wahrheit' des Generals Clausewitz hoch, d.h. er gehorcht dem preußischen Pflichtbegriff, der die individuelle Schuld tilgt" (90). He no longer relates to the war as a painful reality, and cannot communicate with Beckmann. As the stage directions indicate, "...er lacht zuerst verlegen, dann aber siegt sein gesundes Preußentum, und er lacht aus voller Kehle... Der Oberst will

Beckmann nicht verletzen, aber er ist so gesund und so sehr naiv und alter Soldat, daß er Beckmanns Traum nur als Witz begreift (*Draußen* 127). This type of deception and self-deception is what, according to Fickert, helped the Nazis come to power, enabled WWII, and prevented the society from addressing its past once the war was over (10). Borchert's main goal, especially in works like his play, is to remind the post-war society of the individual suffering and loss occasioned by the war, and still being felt by so many.

vii. Remembering

Borchert, like Böll, recognises that the experience of war is not confined to soldiers of one side - it affects all members of society, and of every nation which enters into battle. Although his compassion extends primarily to his fellow Germans, he recognises that suffering makes no distinction between race and nationality.

In "Die lange lange Straße lang", Fischer encounters a veteran *Obergefreiten*, proud to be able to outdo Fischer's fifty-seven deaths. He tells Fischer and an old lady about one night when his post killed eighty-seven Russians with one machine gun. Fischer equates his own suffering with that of the Russian mothers who lost their sons that night: "[der Obergefreite:] 86 Iwans. Mit einem MG, mein Lieber, mit einem einzigen MG in einer Nacht... Er zielt auf die eine alte Frau und er trifft 86 alte Frauen. Aber die wohnen in Rußland. Davon weiß er nichts. Es ist gut, daß er nicht weiß. Was sollte er sonst wohl machen?" (254-55). These women know the suffering and pain of those who have been left behind, without the ability to understand why or to

make any sense of their loss. The mothers in Russia grieve as much as their counterparts in Germany. Not even a physical distinction between the two groups is made: the one old German woman represents eighty-six old Russian women - they are joined through motherhood, through pain, and through loss.

However, although Fischer can relate to the mothers, the *Obergefreite* cannot. With this character Borchert criticises the numerous soldiers who believed uncritically in the *totalen Krieg*, in the ultimate enemy. This man does not see the dead Russians as human beings but as targets, and as such, trophies. This outlook does him no good according to Borchert's philosophy, since his objectification of the enemy allows him to maintain a psychological distance between "Us" and "Them". Only by acknowledging the suffering of others, namely of other nationalities (especially "the enemy"!), can the barriers of prejudice be overcome. In recognising the common suffering of human beings in war, regardless of race or creed, Fischer denies himself victim status, but begins a self-examination which leads him closer to an appreciation of universal misery. The *Obergefreite* has refused this option and is therefore stuck in his narrow stereotypical mentality.

Similarly to Fischer, Beckmann draws all the soldiers of the war together, regardless of nationality, as he recognises that their paths home are equally difficult, and that readjustment for any of them will take a great deal of effort. Just as he finds himself on the banks of the Elbe, overcome with despair and anger, unable to reconcile war with peace, he recognises that there are other men just like him all over the world, all shut out from their respective societies, all feeling the same pain: "Man steht draußen. Draußen vor der Tür. An der Elbe steht man, an der Seine, an der Wolga, am Mississippi. Man steht da, spinnt, friert, hungert und ist verdammt müde" (*Draußen* 146).

In his effort to speak out against war altogether, Borchert addresses himself not only to the German people, but to all those who would possibly be involved in battle again. In "Dann gibt es nur eins!" he directs his comments to all the mothers of the world. They are the ultimate controlling force, since without them no future society is possible:

Du. Mutter in der Normandie und Mutter in der Ukraine, du, Mutter in Frisko und London, du, am Hoangho und am Mississippi, du, Mutter in Neapel und Hamburg und Kairo und Oslo - Mütter in allen Erdteilen, Mütter in der Welt, wenn sie morgen befehlen, ihr sollt Kinder gebären, Krankenschwestern für Kriegslazarette und neue Soldaten für neue Schlachten, Mütter in der Welt, dann gibt es nur eins:
Sagt NEIN! Mütter, sagt NEIN! (320)

As in Beckmann's statement, Borchert uses rivers in this excerpt to represent nations: they are a strong image, not only of the eternal aspect of the conflict, but of the basic instinct common to all human beings, to gravitate to water. Also, rivers are not static like cities: they flow from one place to another, often traversing more than one country, and hence binding the nations with a primal link, much older than modern political borders and governments.

The geographical universality of the plea is strengthened by that of a common bond: everybody has a mother, and the ultimate denial comes when mothers refuse to bear children for the cause. Again, it is an image as old as civilisation, that mothers are the source of human life, that they pass on cultural traditions and values to their children, and that without them the race cannot continue. The primitive link between mother and child, often buried under years of societal influence, is never completely negated. Borchert frequently defines his characters at least in part in relation to their mothers (describing the anonymous enemy soldier in "Die Kegelbahn", Borchert adds to his universal

aspect with the simple statement: “[e]r hatte einen Mund, mit dem konnte er Brot essen und Inge sagen oder Mutter”, 169), and when faced with great suffering or death, very often they cry out to them. Borchert, in fact, sets the image of the mother, the female, peaceful element, against that of the war, the male, violent world, and the soldiers turn to the Mother ideal when the male world becomes too dominant. Beckmann tries to make his way home to his mother when it seems that everything else is lost to him: “Mein Gott! Nach Hause! Ja, ich will nach Hause. Ich will zu meiner Mutter! Ich will endlich zu meiner Mutter!!!” (*Draußen* 34). Similarly, Fischer, when the confusion between the world inside his head and that outside becomes too much, cries out: “MUTTER! schreit Leutnant Fischer auf der endlosen Straße” (“Die lange lange Straße lang” 259).

With the stress on such common physical and emotional experiences as hunger and exhaustion, loneliness and grief, Borchert draws all his characters together, and gives them a voice that will speak to anyone prepared to listen. These elements which prevail from time to time are common to all and therefore accessible to all.

Borchert’s literature, written in a journalistic, staccato style, captures the instability of post-war Germany better than any official reports. His voice speaks not only for himself, but for others like him, for those who found themselves out of place after the war, and needing to define their identity, place in society, and future:

Keiner hat diese Fähigkeit zur dichterischen Reportage (verdichteter Alltagswahrnehmung) ergreifender zur Geltung gebracht als Wolfgang Borchert. In der Sicht der linken Literaturkritik von heute gehört er zu den “scheinkonkreten” Autoren, da er mit seinem Aufschrei über die Bösartigkeit des Menschen, aber auch mit seinem Pathos die sozioökonomischen Bedingtheiten der Misere nicht beachtete. Dafür hat er die

Migrationskultur in Poesie transponiert und sublimiert; Zeugnis abgelegt für eine transitorische Generation, die aus dem Geworfensein heraus mit expressiver Gewaltanstrengung Hoffnung wagte. Im finstersten Deutschland war man nicht nur unterwegs, man hoffte auch auf Ankunft. (Glaser 52)

Borchert concerns himself with the type of soldier whose experience most closely resembles his own: still young, having grown up with the Nazi Regime and sacrificed his youth (or often his life or health) to the war, and facing a new, unfamiliar society upon returning home after defeat. This soldier confronts problems at every level of his existence, questioning his participation in the war, searching for meaning in combat and death. After the war he not only encounters his own confusion regarding the past, but also denial in all areas of society, including the personal (Frau Kramer, *Draußen*), the governmental (the Minister, "Die lange lange Straße lang"), the religious (the Pfarrer, "Die lange lange Straße lang"), and even the military (the Oberst, *Draußen*). Borchert's soldier does not succeed in solving his problems when he questions these various representative elements, instead becoming more confused and frustrated with every "answer" they give him. As long as he tries to live or adjust his life according to their rules and expectations, he flounders in a state of inner confusion. The soldier ultimately must face his own demons and define his own existence before he can regain equilibrium. However, since in Borchert's view everybody has the ability to do this, the final impression he leaves is one of hope for the future, as long as people realise and act upon the potential within themselves.

Für den Einzelnen jedoch hat es nie taktische Zeichen gegeben [...] Elf Gefallene: Männer und Brüder, Söhne, Väter und Gatten - die Geschichte geht achselzuckend darüber hinweg, Pilatus wäscht seine Hände in Unschuld. Ein Name in den Büchern. "Stalingrad" oder "Versorgungskrise" - Wörter, hinter denen die Einzelnen verschwinden. Sie ruhen nur im Gedächtnis des Dichters [...] (Böll, "Die Stimme Wolfgang Borcherts" 121)

5. Two Authors, Two Perspectives: One Message

Böll had a great respect for Borchert's work, to which his essay on the younger author attests. Borchert expressed ideas common to both authors, especially the importance of the human side of war, the individual whose identity quickly disappears through post-war tendencies to generalise the past. As Böll states in the above quotation, the very real danger of losing a personal perspective on the war, of forgetting the faces behind the guns (and on their receiving end), can only be prevented by those able to express the experiences of individual combatants, in order to preserve the humanity which historical reports erase. In short, it is up to the writer to remind the reader of the complexities of combat at the personal level, and to maintain a human face and voice for the lists of official numbers of soldiers and dry battle reports. Both Borchert and Böll achieve this goal, as the characters of their *Trümmerliteratur* speak with contemporary emotion, expressing pain, confusion, bitterness, and

hatred, but also happiness, anticipation, and sometimes joy. Instead of reducing them to types, the authors give them normal human emotions and reactions to events, making them less heroic and more realistic than traditional literary soldier figures. Because of this, their characters speak more clearly to a contemporary audience, as well as a modern readership, since the traits they possess are common to all.

Although Borchert and Böll resemble each other in their journalistic style as well as in their concern with the human condition and the role of war in society (and *vice versa*), they differ in some important areas, which will be discussed briefly before continuing. Because these two points, namely religion and the question of guilt or responsibility, are in this case closely related, they affect each author's work at almost every level, and account in great part for the sometimes contrasting tone between them.

Böll's Roman Catholicism, for example, leads him to a sometimes mystical view of death - although it does not reduce his horror at its being inflicted by men on their fellow-men - and a forgiving attitude towards his more negative characters. Borchert does not share Böll's religious views, although he does agree that war is a shameful and unnecessary waste of life. For both, the effects of a war on humanity are of paramount importance, but their views on religion and on personal responsibility give each a different perspective.

i. "Wo ist denn der alte Mann, der sich Gott nennt?"²³

The most noticeable difference between the two authors is their respective views on the existence of God, and the way that influences the atmosphere of their works. For Borchert, the traditional figure of God does not

²³ Borchert, *Draußen vor der Tür*, 165.

exist other than as a human construct. To emphasise his lack of confidence in God, Borchert always portrays Him as a weak entity, either old and frail, or anonymous and powerless, never able to help human beings in any way: "Sie hingen in einem Leben, hingehängt von einem Gott ohne Gesicht. Von einem Gott, der nicht gut und nicht böse war. Der nur war. Und nicht mehr. [...] Denn der Gott hatte ja kein Gesicht. Darum konnte er auch keine Ohren haben" ("Der Kaffee ist undefinierbar" 195). However, by denying the dogmatic, biblically defined deity, he does not rule out the possibility of divinity in human life. For him, all potential for godliness lies within the individual:

Und hinter allem? Hinter allem, was du Gott, Strom und Stern,
Nacht, Spiegel oder Kosmos und Hilde oder Evelyn nennst -
hinter allem stehst immer du selbst. Eisig einsam. Erbärmlich.
Groß. Dein Gelächter. Deine Not. Deine Frage. Deine Antwort.
Hinter allem, uniformiert, nackt oder sonstwie kostümiert,
schattenhaft verschwankt, in fremder fast scheuer ungeahnt
grandioser Dimension: Du selbst. Deine Liebe. Deine Angst.
Deine Hoffnung. (*Allein...* 311)

Borchert's characters reflect this philosophy: as long as they search for answers from the outside world, from traditional sources (including God the Father), they remain unsatisfied and confused. Only once they turn their questioning inward and trust their own judgement do they begin to recover. By the end of *Draußen vor der Tür*, for example, Beckmann has only just reached the crucial stage of self-questioning. He realises that all outside sources have failed him; Borchert has brought him to the point where he must begin examining his own conscience. Whether he does so or not remains unknown. However, in other characters, such as the *Frager* in "Gespräch über den Dächern" ("Sind wir uns selbst, uns selbst ausgeliefert?", 57), Borchert's philosophy of "positive nihilism", of the individual's having to create his own

world out of the chaos of war, is more apparent. Such characters realise that the answers to their questions lie within themselves, and once that realisation occurs, they experience a spiritual strengthening.

Despite his denial of "God", Borchert still adheres to the idea of religion. His beliefs concentrate on nature instead of on an absolute divinity. When asked why he hid his religious side, Borchert denied it, replying: "Natürlich bin ich ein religiöser Dichter. Ich verberge es nicht. Ich glaube an die Sonne, an den Walfisch, an meine Mutter und an das Gras. Genügt das nicht? Das Gras ist nämlich nicht nur das Gras" (*Allein...* 233). This view of nature (with its pantheistic undertones) combines with his belief in personal inner strength to produce a literature wherein the characters only achieve contentment with an understanding of their place in, and contribution to, the balance of all earthly aspects of life. For Borchert, the only life which counts is that of the here and now, and each person must come to terms with that before finding inner peace.

Questions concerning religion and God are not nearly as complicated for Böll. His Christian beliefs are apparent throughout his literature, and survive despite the horrors of war. Those soldier-characters who die and then begin their journey toward the afterlife always experience something positive, as do the two soldiers in "Wiedersehen mit Drüng", who are met and guided by an angel, signifying their removal from the physical hell of war to a spiritual paradise: "[...] wir wußten, daß wir nun lächeln durften, und nahmen ihre ausgestreckten Hände und folgten ihr..." (350). References to Christianity and Christian symbols are always positive for Böll: for example, when Ilona faces Commander Filskeit in the middle of the concentration camp, a horrible journey behind her and an almost certain death before her, singing the *Allerheiligenlitanei* comforts her and makes her smile despite herself (*Wo warst*

du...? 102). The presence of God, although it does nothing to deflect the suffering incurred in war, serves to comfort those caught up in it.

This philosophical difference between the two authors provides an insight into the fundamental dissimilarity of their literature when it comes to questions of guilt and responsibility, for instance, or of the individual's place in society. For Böll, the faith in God which he and some of his characters share allows them to be more passive in the face of random destruction. The war becomes a self-contained force, much like God Himself, although in contrast it has no control over itself and does not direct its actions. Because Borchert does not share the same religious views as Böll, his characters submit less readily to the anonymity of war. On the contrary, they are always searching for explanations behind it, and Borchert often goes beyond merely being affected by war to point (as in "Die Kegelbahn") to individual participation in the hostilities as having a direct influence on their existence.

For Borchert, responsibility, like divinity, is individual. He recognises that every participant in a war contributes to its emergence and continuation, even if only in a small way. At the same time, he also addresses the problem of post-war recognition of this at all levels of society, from government down to the individual. One of the main problems his characters face is how to define and deal with their own personal involvement in the war (Beckmann, for example, is haunted by soldiers who blame their deaths on him) and how to rationalise the deaths of others (the men of Fischer's Company haunt him, too, asking him to find out why they died). By concentrating on the individual as type, for example, in *Draußen vor der Tür* Borchert raises the particular experience to the universal:

“Ja! Ich bringe ihm die Verantwortung zurück. Ich gebe ihm die Toten zurück. Ihm! Ja, komm, wir wollen einen Mann besuchen, der wohnt in einem warmen Haus. In dieser Stadt, in jeder Stadt. Wir wollen einen Mann besuchen, wir wollen ihm etwas schenken - einem lieben guten braven Mann, der sein ganzes Leben nur seine Pflicht getan, und immer nur die Pflicht! Aber es war eine grausame Pflicht! Es war eine fürchterliche Pflicht! Eine verfluchte - fluchte - fluchte Pflicht!” (*Draußen* 118)

In this instance, Beckmann decides to go and visit the *Oberst*, to ask him to take back the responsibility for the men who died while under Beckmann's command. Beckmann describes the *Oberst* as just "einen Mann", a man who exists in every city, a typical man. Borchert criticises the type of soldier this man represents, the outwardly good, law-abiding citizen who performs his duty and nothing but his duty, because he easily ignores the effects of his own participation, blaming them instead on the circumstance of war and the demands of *Pflicht*. This man, and many other people like him, allow wars to begin and to continue through their acquiescence, which for Borchert is the ultimate danger for society. However, they also contribute to the post-war state of confusion and denial, as they easily explain away their participation in the war as duty. This and many other examinations of *Verantwortung* reappear throughout Borchert's works, indicating not only the author's need to explore the issue but also his inability to find a satisfactory resolution to it. The problem of defining personal and societal responsibility remains a central theme in all of his *Trümmerliteratur*.

Böll, on the other hand, does not address the question of responsibility nearly as extensively or explicitly. He focusses on the effects which war has on the individual, instead of *vice versa*, concentrating on the psychological changes which war engenders, looking for reasons why normal people turn into killers and sadists. Unfortunately, the answer is always the same: because of

circumstance. Böll's humanism and compassion make him non-judgemental, even of his negative characters. He forgives, or at least explains, their behaviour as a product of external forces and beyond personal control. References to responsibility are incidental, and included only when they indicate something about a character's mental or physical state, as when a drunken officer excuses himself from any decision-making: "Ich bin ja nicht mehr verantwortlich, das ist schön, wenn man nicht mehr verantwortlich ist" ("Die Verwundung" 127). Typically, Böll does not expand on this theme, leaving the officer happily sleeping, oblivious to the world around him. He prefers to examine the *streng* *Unteroffizier's* features, in an attempt to find the human being behind the rank. He succeeds in this, but only at the expense of the responsibility issue.

The concentration on finding the humanity inherent in every soldier leads Böll to set aside a deeper examination of personal accountability, because for him it simply is not important. As we have already seen in Chapter 3, he considers war an exceptional situation, which makes a retrospective application of post-war values impossible, and therefore a waste of time: "da wird [...] die Frage, ob der eine schuldiger war als die andere, uninteressant, ganz uninteressant" (*Eine deutsche Erinnerung* 13).

Böll and Borchert differ here not because one cares less than the other, but because they have focused on different aspects of the war. For Borchert, individual peace of mind can only be reached through an understanding and acceptance of personal involvement in the war, and society can only recover once it acknowledges and addresses the greater question of collective participation. Böll concentrates on the effects of war, without really searching for their cause. For him, the best thing to do is to get on with life, remembering

the real suffering caused by war without laying blame, and to try and ensure that it does not reoccur.

ii. The Uniting Force of Humanism

Although Böll and Borchert differ in these two major areas, the similarities between the content and style of their works outweigh the differences and draw them together. Both are concerned first and foremost with the fate of the individual in war and how society can influence it. The fundamental humanism common to both leads them to a continuous criticism of society and its role in defining the soldier, maintaining his heroic image throughout the war, and denying him recognition after defeat. The issue of post-war societal denial is important to both, and a particular cause of bitterness for two men who believe in the strength of the individual. For instance, both comment cynically on the post-war phenomenon of putting a price on human suffering and loss, using the same example of a one-legged man and the monetary value of his missing leg:

'Mein lieber Freund' legte er los, 'Ihr Bein ist ein verflucht teures Bein. Ich sehe, daß Sie neunundzwanzig Jahre sind, von Herzen gesund, überhaupt vollkommen gesund, bis auf das Bein. Sie werden siebzig Jahre alt. Rechnen Sie bitte aus, monatlich siebzig Mark, zwölfmal im Jahr, also einundvierzig mal zwölf mal siebzig [...]' (Böll, "Mein teures Bein" 226)

Kriegsversehrte die Hälfte. Ein Einbeiniger fährt im Leben 7862mal mit der Straßenbahn für die Hälfte. Er spart 786,20. Sein Bein, es ist bei Smolensk längst verfaut, war 786,20 wert. Immerhin. (Borchert, "Im Mai, im Mai..." 230)

The official reduction of personal sacrifice to a matter of Marks and Pfennigs, according to our authors, denies the veteran any kind of personal recognition or identity in the eyes of the people, as he becomes one in a very long list of numbers. At the same time, they warn, society cannot erase its responsibility towards veterans by paying them off. Public acknowledgement of individual loss must occur in order for those involved to recover from their experiences in war and to regain a healthy perspective on their place and role within society.

At the other extreme, governmental glorification of the dead reduces them to heroic types, and they lose any individuality in the face of national remembrance services. Böll particularly cried out against this, warning German society not to lose sight of individual suffering, not to forget that each soldier had a name, a family, and a history:

Die Toten gehören nicht mehr den Staaten, den Parteien. Ihr Schweigen läßt sich nicht zu Parolen ausdeuten. [...] Die Toten, deren wir heute gedenken, sie gehören nicht den Armeen, nicht den Staaten, nicht den Parteien, diese haben nicht das Recht, um sie zu trauern, wie Väter und Mütter um ihre Söhne [...] Für Schmerzen gibt es keine staatspolitische Kategorie, für Trauer keinen Paragraphen in der Dienstordnung einer Armee, in den Statuten einer Partei. Verwechseln wir nicht das amtliche Pathos, das sich so leicht zum Kleingeld der Propaganda stanzen läßt, mit dem Schmerz der Hinterbliebenen. ("Heldengedenktag" 220-22)

Borchert did not protest these ceremonies as vigorously, presumably because by the time of his death in 1947 they had not really begun to take place. However, he saw the beginnings of societal denial of events, and warned against losing sight of the reality of war. As Beckmann says, when discussing the official number of dead, "...die Zahlen bedeuten... Tote, Halbtote, Granatentote, Splittertote, Hungertote, Bombentote, Eissturmtote, Ozeantote,

Verzweiflungstote, Verlorene, Verlaufene, Verschollene" (*Draußen* 144).

Society must recognise that each number represents an individual, each is a human life that has been terminated. The effort must be made to remember the people who became the numbers; otherwise it could all happen again.

Society often disappoints the soldier-characters of these two authors, frequently misunderstanding their emotions (either purposefully or accidentally) and usually failing to listen at all. A lack of communication between the individual and society characterises their relationship, often based on philosophical differences, often a result of society's unwillingness to face the pain which the soldier represents. Böll and Borchert both see this lack of communication as dangerous. It divides the population, and can easily lead to a renewal of war if the majority continues denying the past.

Through the figure of the soldier, Borchert and Böll emphasise the importance of individual contribution to suffering during the war. They remind the reader that behind official reports and numbers of survivors, wounded, or dead are men and women with personalities, emotions, philosophies; in short, the numbers represent human beings. The authors also use "typical" (*i.e.* anonymous) soldier-characters from time to time to convey what they saw as the universality of human suffering during war, stressing common emotions and physical sensations as uniting elements. Finally, the soldier is used to represent society's view towards war itself. As the ultimate embodiment of political and social upheaval, the soldier epitomises conflict, and the society's treatment of him reflects its attitude towards the state of war, its own participation in it, and that of the soldier. Borchert and Böll both treat their subject with compassion (although Borchert moves beyond a purely forgiving attitude to begin to ask questions concerning personal choice); their literature, which

differs in several ways, is brought together by the strength of their humanism.

iii. Contributions to Post-War Society

Borchert and Böll accomplished several things by writing their war stories. They not only explored their own emotions and philosophies, but they also provided important interpretations of the effects of war for their contemporaries and for generations to come. They contributed their own ideas in an attempt to influence post-war societal development, and they also left a testament to the human cost of any war. Instead of having to rely only on historical facts and figures, which make a war impersonal and abstract, today's reader has access to a more subjective view of events with this literature. Borchert realised the importance of such contributions at the time. When discussing some selections of *KZ-Literatur* (literature from authors who had survived the concentration camps), he stresses its importance as a reminder of the horror of the Nazi Regime: "Notwendig aber ist, daß die Menschen, die die ungeheure Gesetzlosigkeit des vergangenen Regimes erdulden mußten, diese Kapitel aus der dunkelsten Zeit unserer Geschichte aufschreiben, zur Warnung und Mahnung, für die Toten und die Lebenden" ("Kartoffelpuffer..." 273). Even though our two authors wrote fictional accounts of life during war, their creations are as valid as the memoirs of these concentration camp victims, as well as the personal accounts of other soldiers and civilians. Both genres address the same issue of the personal impact of a war which takes over society at every level, and both concentrate on the individual in relation to society, whether it be the pre-war, wartime, or post-war community.

The effects of a war, especially one of such magnitude as WWII, never end when the fighting does. One does not stop being a soldier simply because one has removed the uniform. The implications of having been an active participant in a very long and very bloody battle cannot be quickly resolved, and the further complications of having been ruled by a Fascist dictatorship for years beforehand make readjustment to a democratic lifestyle even more difficult. Add to that the problems which arise from losing a war and finding that yesterday's enemies are today's occupiers and rulers, and the situation in which many Germans found themselves in the months and years after the final battles becomes to a certain extent more understandable and less easily dismissed. This was not a simple case of "get over it and get on with it", as many Germans had to try and adjust to the reality of what Hitler had been, to the magnitude of the war, and to the loss. Adjustment for Borchert and Böll took the form of writing. Their literature helped themselves and helped others to put into perspective their own involvement in the war, as well as the swift changes taking place in society immediately after it ended.

Today, over fifty years after the end of the Second World War, *Trümmerliteratur* such as that of Borchert and Böll still has a relevance in our society. War remains a factor throughout the world, and most first-world countries find themselves directly involved, whether as active participants in battle or as peacekeepers. Questions raised during the two World Wars have indeed led to an increased social awareness of such issues as the rights of the individual, both civilian and soldier. In armies, more concern is given to the physical and mental health of soldiers, during and after a war. At the same time, those soldiers have come under closer public scrutiny than ever before, being

held individually and collectively accountable for misbehaviour in the field.²⁴

The current UN war crimes tribunal in Bosnia is reminiscent of the Nuremberg trials, in that an attempt is being made to determine levels of individual guilt and responsibility of participants in the recent civil war. However, like its WWII predecessor, it appears unable to judge satisfactorily the extent of blame that can be laid on the "common soldier", showing that it is just as difficult to apply peace-time laws to war-time events today as it was fifty years ago.

Questions about the Second World War remain unanswered today, and it continues to be a popular subject for researchers, economists, philanthropists, historians, novelists, etc. Newly unearthed information about it appears every few years, and studies of the Nazi Party and its many effects both outside and inside Germany are ongoing. With the great number of publications on the subject, both fiction and non-fiction, which have appeared in the past few years, it is important to keep returning to contemporary reactions to, and descriptions of, the war in order to gain an impression of its immediate effects on the world. The *Trümmerliteratur* of Böll and Borchert provides a valid description of the impact of war, as much through its content as through its unfinished nature and abrupt style. Its harsh, often depressing realism, combined with the frustration of its authors, reflects the position of the post-war society, providing a more accurate account of it than can often be found in history books written years after the fact.

Wolfgang Borchert and Heinrich Böll, in writing their prose, poetry, and drama, have given the German soldier a human voice. Because of them and authors like them, he has not been relegated to the heroic anonymity of national

²⁴ The recent Canadian enquiry into soldiers' behaviour while in Somalia bears witness to this trend, and has also served to "humanise" the Canadian army to a certain extent - the public has been reminded of the soldiers' fallibility, whereas it previously held a stereotypical view of the Canadian soldier as an incorruptibly just and peaceful person.

grieving; he has not been reduced to a stereotype. They have preserved his individuality, both in remembrance and as a warning to future generations. The soldier-*character* created by these two soldier-*authors* serves to remind us of the human side of combat and of the very real, very heavy cost of any war, and asks us to pause and consider the implications of sacrificing human beings to politically self-serving and destructive abstract ideals.

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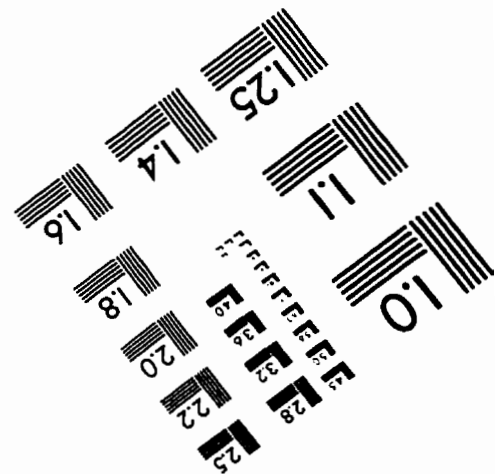
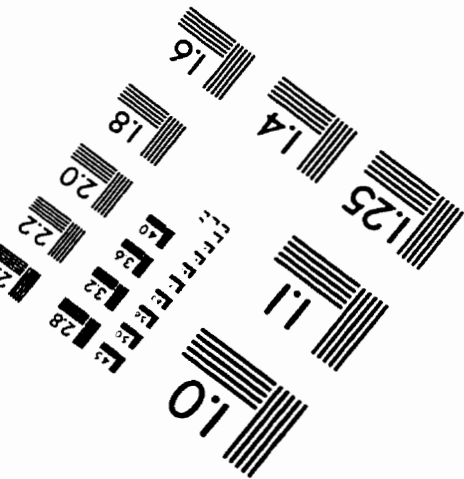
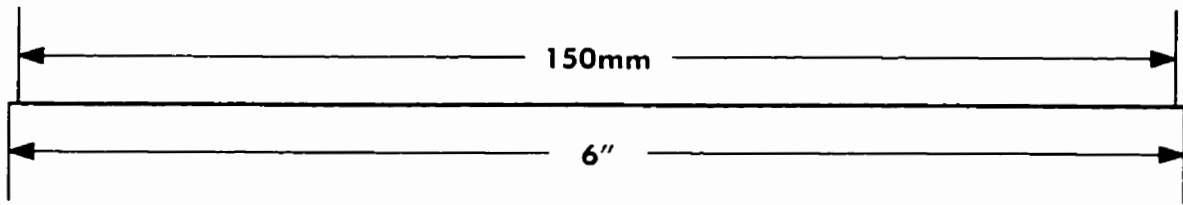
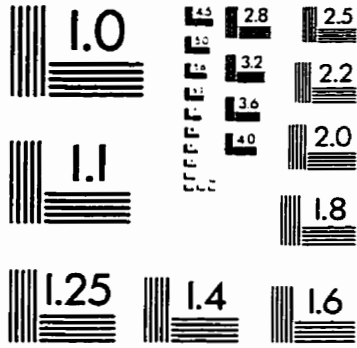
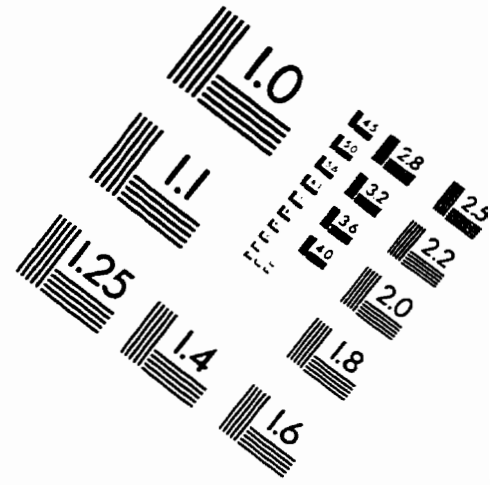
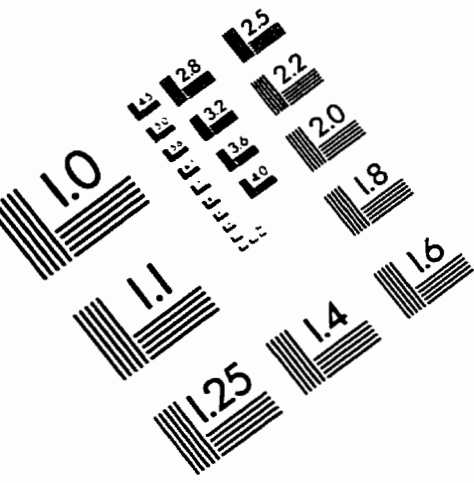
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