



UND SAGTE KEIN  
EINZIGES WORT  
Heinrich Böll

Twentieth  
Century  
Texts



UND SAGTE KEIN EINZIGES  
WORT

# TWENTIETH CENTURY GERMAN TEXTS

ANSICHTEN EINES CLOWNS by Heinrich Böll  
*Edited by William Hanson*

DER AUFHALTSAME AUFSTIEG DES ARTURO UI  
by Bertolt Brecht  
*Edited by D.G. and S.M. Matthews*

DER CUTE MENSCH YON SEZU AN by Bertolt Brecht  
*Edited by Bruce Thompson*

DER KAUKASISCHE KREIDEKREIS by Bertolt Brecht  
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TWENTIETH CENTURY TEXTS

Heinrich Böll

UND SAGTE KEIN  
EINZIGES WORT

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Routledge

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# CHRONOLOGY

- 1917 21 December: Born in Cologne.
- 1937 Abitur. Apprenticeship to a bookseller in Bonn. Began writing.
- 1939 University of Cologne as student of German and Classical Philology (summer term). Called up for service in the 'Wehrmacht' on completion of only one term at the university.
- 1939–45 Served—reluctantly—in the infantry on the Eastern and Western fronts where he was wounded four times. He never got beyond the rank of lance corporal.
- 1943 Marriage to Annemarie Çech, a teacher and translator of English.
- 1945 Death at birth of Christoph, first son of the marriage. Returned to Cologne.
- 1947 Published his first short stories (*Die Botschaft* and *Kumpel mil dem langen Haar*). Birth of son Raimund.
- 1948 Birth of son René.
- 1949 Published *Der Zug war pünktlich*.
- 1950 Birth of son Vincent. Published *Wanderer kommst du nach Spa...* (a collection of 25 short stories).

- 1951 First attended and received the prize of the 'Gruppe 47' for his short story *Die schwarzen Schafe*. Published his first novel, *Wo wirst du, Adam?*
- 1953 *Und sagte kern einziges Wort*. Elected to membership of the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Literature.
- 1954 First visit to Ireland. Published *Haus ohne Hüter*.
- 1955 *Das Brot der frühen Jahre*.
- 1956 *Unberechenbare Gäste*, a collection of satirical stories.
- 1957 *Irishes Tagebuch; Im Tal der donnernden Hufe*.
- 1958 *Dr. Murkes gesammeltes Schweigen*, a collection of satirical stories.
- 1959 *Billard urn halbzehn*. Received Kunstpreis des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen. Elected member of the Bavarian Academy of Arts.
- 1960 Founder and Editor of *Labyrinth*, a journal committed to Christian and Socialist principles. Received Prix Charles-Veillon (Lausanne).
- 1961 *Ein Schluck Erde* (play). First collection of works (*Erzählungen, Hörspiele, Aufsätze*). Received Literaturpreis der Stadt Köln. *Brief an einen jungen Katholiken*.
- 1962 First visit to Russia. *Als der Krieg ausbrach/Als der Krieg zu Ende war*. Translated, with Annemarie Böll, J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (many other translated works, before and after).
- 1963 *Ansichten eines Clowns. Hierzulande* (essays).
- 1964 *Entfernung von der Truppe*. Visiting lecturer at Frankfurt University.

- 1966 *Ende einer Dienstfahrt; Frankfurter Vorlesungen.*
- 1967 Georg-Büchner-Preis.
- 1968 August: visit to Prague coincides with the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia.
- 1969 Visit to Israel.
- 1970–2 President of the West German section of the PEN Club (International Association of Poets, Playwrights, Editors, Essayists and Novelists).
- 1971–4 President of the International PEN Club.
- 1971 *Gruppenbild mit Dame.* First visit to U.S.A.
- 1972 Published the controversial essay ‘Will Ulrike Meinhof Gnade oder freies Geleit?’. Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.
- 1973 Awarded Honorary Doctorates at the universities of Aston, Brunel, and Dublin. Second visit to USA.
- 1974 Awarded the Carl von Ossietzky Medal of the International League of Human Rights. Honorary Membership of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Received Russian Nobel Prize winner Alexander Solzhenitsyn at his home in Cologne. *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Slum*, his most successful work. (Made into a film by Volker Schlöndorff in 1975).
- 1975 Autumn: conversations with René Wintzen in Paris (published 1978 as *Une mémoire allemande*, translated 1981 as *Eine deutsche Erinnerung*).
- 1977 First volume of Collected Works (*Werke. Romane und Erzählungen 1947–1977*).
- 1978 *Werke. Essayistische Schriften und Reden. Hörspiele, Theaterstücke, Drehbücher, Gedichte I. Interviews I. 1952–1978.*

- 1979 *Fürsorgliche Belagerung* (translated in 1981 as *The Safety Net*).
- 1981 *Was soil aus dem Jungen bloß werden?*, an autobiographical sketch of his childhood and youth under the Nazi dictatorship.
- 1982 *Vermintes Gelände. Essayistische Schriften, 1977–1981*. Death of son Raimund. Freedom of the city of Cologne.
- 1982–5 Reader and adviser to the Lamuv publishing house founded by his son René.
- 1985 16 July: Died in Bornheim-Merten, near Cologne. Posthumous publication of *Frauen vor Flußlandschaft*.

## INTRODUCTION

Heinrich Böll was the most famous writer of his generation. Only Günter Grass has achieved anything like the same international acclaim and exposure, but it was Böll who became the first West German writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1972. Characteristically he is said to have been taken aback when told that the award had gone to him and not to his friend Grass.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it is a measure of his achievement and quality that he was the obvious choice once the decision had been made to honour a West German writer. His ability was recognized at a very early stage in his career when he first joined the Group 47 whose acclaimed literary prize he received in 1951. His writing career spanned over forty years—he did produce some stories before the war, but these have not survived—and his range of novels, short stories, radio plays and essays is wide. No attempt can be made in a brief introductory note of this kind to discuss his life and work comprehensively. (The studies by J.H.Reid and R.C.Conard are the fullest accounts to have appeared so far in English. See Bibliography.) Certain areas of Böll's biography and interests can be singled out specifically, however, when preparing to study the work of the 1950s, with particular reference to *Und sagte kein einziges Wort*.

A belief in the importance of family life is reflected throughout Böll's work and clearly stems from his own personal experiences. He was born in Cologne on 21 December 1917 into a lower middle-class family, his father being a carpenter and wood-carver. Not, then, the proud and

patriarchal world of the 'Bürger' that so dominates the work of a writer like Thomas Mann, but the world of the 'Kleinbürger' forms the background for many of Böll's stories, that of the ordinary, conscientious citizen who often is seen as a victim rather than as an aggressor. The Böll family were independent Rhinelanders, deeply religious Roman Catholics and formed a close and a happy unit. Böll spoke of their solidarity—'Es war ein richtiger Clan' (quoted in K.Schröter, p. 29).<sup>2</sup> He was particularly devoted to his mother who was to die in 1944 from a heart attack following an air-raid on Cologne. He married Annemarie Čech in 1943 and they too established a close-knit family unit with their three sons. Even after he became established as a freelance novelist Böll continued to collaborate with his wife, a professional translator. They were inseparable. One of the last photographs to be widely circulated before his death was of the obviously sick writer, with characteristic dark beret, sitting with his wife in a field in Mutlangen demonstrating against the siting of nuclear weapons in the Federal Republic. The sons, too, remained close to their father with whom they collaborated on numerous projects concerning human rights and the Peace Movement. In the 1970s and 1980s Böll was able to keep in touch with the views of the younger generation through them. The novel *Fürsorgliche Belagerung* (1979) is dedicated to them—'Meinen Söhnen Raimund, René and Vincent—in Dankbarkeit'. Throughout Böll's work, from *Haus ohne Hüter* (1954), dealing with the problems of families whose father has been killed in the war, to *Was soilaus dem Jungen bloß werden* (1981), his most personal account of his own youth, there is a sense that Böll is chronicling aspects of contemporary family life.

Above all else, perhaps, it is the rise of National Socialism under Hitler, the Second World War, and its aftermath in Germany that proved the most formative experiences of Böll's life and furnish the background to much of his work. The fear of fascism and an awareness of the dangers of authoritarianism coloured his outlook throughout his life and made of him a liberal, committed to those ideals of 'Humanität' and tolerance that were such fundamental values in the period of the German

Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. Böll's experience of war and the rise of fascism and its outcome was a direct and personal one. After 1933 he was deeply affected by the growing influence of National Socialism on day-to-day life and he came to hate the brown uniform of the hordes marching the streets of Cologne (see *Eine deutsche Erinnerung*, p. 115f.). He did not join the Hitler Youth but had to carry out the 'Arbeitsdienst' (the next stage up from the Hitler Youth). His university study was cut short after only one term when he was drafted into the army where he served throughout the war on both the Eastern and Western fronts and was wounded on four occasions. In 1945 he returned, like so many, to a devastated city. The hatred of war and of National Socialism stayed with him. He constantly reflects in short stories and in novels the paradox of Germany's involvement in total war, the tragedy that a nation renowned as 'ein Volk der Dichter und Denker' and the home of civilized, enlightened ideals could also be responsible for the Holocaust. He tries to relate the enormity of that responsibility to the life of ordinary and fundamentally decent citizens. Böll never believed in what he considered to be the facile public recognition of guilt which became popular in the 1960s—at a time when many former Nazis were still in public office. The term 'die Bewältigung der Vergangenheit', which became popular then, was to him meaningless. The past could not be 'Overcome'; it had to be lived with.

The position of the Roman Catholic Church during the Nazi period was a precarious one and a source of considerable concern for Böll whose involvement with the Church was life-long and complex. That Böll was a man of deep religious conviction is beyond question. He is indeed a religious writer, specifically (though he disliked the term) a Catholic writer, in his critical approach not unlike Graham Greene. Böll's view of the Church as an institution and its political involvement led to feelings of substantial ambivalence. Born into a family of Catholic Rhinelanders, he inevitably felt he belonged to the Catholic Church; his career is marked by a whole series of works that are critical of the Catholic Church, or, more accurately, critical of a specific kind of conservative Catholicism

that he felt was prevalent immediately following the war. In the 1960s he was critical too of a so-called 'progressive' Catholicism that in his view had missed its spiritual purpose. In the 1970s he officially left the Church when he ceased to pay his 'Kirchensteuer' and he did not return to official membership of the institution. He died a Roman Catholic nevertheless, receiving an orthodox burial. Böll was not able to forget the Concordat of July 1933 between the Vatican and the Nazis, signed by Papal Nuncio Eugenic Pacelli, who later became Pope Pius XII. He saw a fundamental clash between the institutional and spiritual roles of the Church and never tired of saying so in essays and novels. And yet his work is full of religious feeling, despite fundamental doubts about the difficulties and uncertainties of faith. Often he depicts the conflicting needs of human beings, who are both flesh and spirit, who live in a real and harsh world and are told by their priests—and have an instinct too—that there is a spiritual world. This conflict is nowhere more clearly depicted than in *Und sagte keineinziges Wort*.

Böll was always quick to maintain that his real interest as a writer was not in reflecting the German past or religious or political problems, but simply in words and in language. 'Wichtig ist die Sprache und ob man das, was man ausdrücken will, ausdrücken kann' (*Eine deutsche Erinnerung* p. 36). This at first sight might seem strange from a writer who has been hailed as the chief exponent in the German language of 'littérature engagée'. Certainly his work is more obviously characterized by its commitment to humane ideals and its growing social critical tendency than a self-absorbed aestheticism. He made his name in works such as *Der Zugwar pünktlich* (1949), *Wanderer kommst du nach Spa...* (1950) and *Wo wirst du, Adam?* (1951) through his ability to render vividly the horror of war and the deprivations of post-war society. They are characterized by the close and sympathetic observation of individuals who are made wholly credible. Through the 1950s he continued to write about representative figures in the newly emerging materialistic world of the 'Wirtschaftswunder'. *Das Brot der frühen Jahre* is a critique of that world. Böll saw the Currency Reform of 1948

as 'a clear reinstatement of total capitalism', as he put it in the last major interview he gave before he died (*Heinrich Böll. On his death* p. 23) and the deficiencies of capitalist enterprise become recurrent concerns in his work. *Billard umhalbzehn* (1959), though technically innovative, is again not an aesthetic exercise in stylistic intricacy but an ambitious attempt to re-live the German past through the memories of three generations of one family. Throughout the 1960s—though there were long periods when on account of illness or depression he did not write—he continued to depict and criticize the development of a materialistic society. *Ansichten eines Clowns* is a withering attack on the mores of the new coffee and cream-cake society and on residual National Socialism in the high places of that society. *Gruppenbild mit Dame* (1971), though technically probably Böll's most self-conscious work, is a large-scale attempt to tackle political and historical events in Germany from 1922 to 1970 through the experiences of one woman, Leni Gruyten-Pfeiffer. It is an intricate composite portrait produced by the many people around her during that time. In the 1970s Böll took up more specific social issues in works like *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum* (1974), (the press and the police) and *Fürsorgliche Belagerung* (1979), (terrorism and police protection). The work he left on his desk when he died, now published as *Frauen vor Flußlandschaft*, again has very specific political connotations and, whilst it is not intended as a 'roman à clef', it certainly reflects—often humorously and satirically—some of the political figures in the present-day Bonn-Bad Godesberg complex. More important, however, it is Böll's final plea for involvement, despite the nastiness of political life.

In all, then, Böll is a writer in a clearly German context concerned to depict society realistically and critically. Any assessment of his work must rest on an evaluation of the nature of his commitment and the objects of his social criticism. He never seems to be interested in the literary avantgarde—to which he never belonged—nor to be obsessed, as so many past and present German writers have been, with the 'task' of the writer, or the so-called 'malheur d'être poète'. And yet he maintains that his real interest as a writer is in words and in

language. As he says in the essay *Über michselbst* it is through language that he comes to understand the complexity of issues and the difficulty of establishing truth. It is through words, he maintains, that people learn tolerance. Böll was a political animal; his constitution led him to support the (liberal) Left, never the far-Left since he detested all forms of extremism. He was too a religious man. But in the end he remains a writer, a teller of tales whose aim is to create people and places the reader is made to believe in implicitly. The reader of a Böll story is never passive. Böll provokes. By general consensus, however, he is the most readable, the most accessible of writers, and that is no mean achievement.

Not long after Heinrich Böll's death on 16 July 1985 at his house in Bornheim-Merten, the following poem appeared in a Sunday newspaper,<sup>3</sup> written by Dorothee Sölle, a prominent theologian and writer, and sometime collaborator with Böll:

*Als Heinrich Böll starb*

Wer schützt mich jetzt  
 vor den projektile der polizei  
 die in die unbewaffnete  
 menge schießt  
 wer schützt meine augen  
 vor dem tränengas  
 wer schützt unsere stimmen  
 vor dem knebel des schweigens  
 wer beschützt uns den verstand  
 vor bild boenisch & co  
 und wer unser herz  
 vor verzweiflung  
 wer unsere verzweiflung  
 vor kälte

Wer erinnert uns jetzt  
 an das brot der frühen jahre  
 und den geschmack der schuld  
 und den geruch feuchter

klamotten  
 in einer engen wohnung  
 und das sakrament  
 der geteilten zigarette  
 wer erinnert uns jetzt  
 an diese art feindesliebe  
 die du höflichkeit nanntest

Wer beschützt uns jetzt  
 vor uns selber  
 wer tröstet mich  
 mit untröstlichkeit  
 wer verspricht uns  
 nicht sieg unter einem himmel  
 der immer schöner  
 schimmernden kampfflugzeuge  
 aber wenigstens tränen  
 wer stärkt uns  
 mit waffenlosigkeit  
 wer bittet für uns

This impressive epitaph takes due account of Böll's tireless activities on behalf of the Peace Movement and his sustained concern for the institutions of democracy in the Federal Republic, not least the Press. From *Dr. Murkes gesammeltes Schweigen* (1958) to *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum* (1974) there is a recurrent preoccupation in his work with newspapers and the function of the media in a democratic society. In his last years he was deeply disturbed that Peter Boenisch, a reporter for the most popular and most notoriously biased 'Boulevardzeitung' in the country, should have become Press spokesman for the government of Chancellor Kohl. Dorothee Sölle's poem moves from these public activities to Böll's literary work, particularly the early work—*Das Brot der frühen Jahre* of 1955 is mentioned—to suggest its representative quality and its humanity. The theme of the poem is that, now that Böll is dead, West Germans have lost a man who was their

spokesman. Though Böll, a modest man, disliked the idea, it is clear, not only from this poem but also from many of the obituary notices that appeared after his death, that he ‘spoke for a generation’. A critical re-appraisal of Böll’s work is already under way. Indeed in many obituary notices<sup>4</sup> and newspaper articles several questions were raised about the precise nature of his achievement. The questions, however, relate wholly to his technical achievement, particularly in the more ambitious longer works, namely *Billard um halbzehn* (1959), *Gruppenbild mit Dame* (1971) and *Fürsorgliche Belagerung* (1979). No doubts at all have been raised—even in those newspapers that do not share Böll’s political views—concerning the quality of his humanity and the sincerity of his moral and political commitment. It is difficult to see at this moment what overall picture of Böll as a writer will emerge in the coming years. The present indications (mainly in journalistic assessments)<sup>5</sup> seem to be that commentators are singling out his satirical short stories, his radio plays, his literary and political essays which for Böll became increasingly important and the earlier phase of his work from *Der Zug war pünktlich* (1949) to *Ansichten eines Clowns* (1963) where he most clearly developed a sure and wholly characteristic voice, where, as Sölle observes in her poem, a ‘shared cigarette’ takes on the quality of a sacrament.

UND SAGTE KEIN EINZIGES WORT:  
SOME APPROACHES TO THE NOVEL

*The title*

‘They crucified my Lord,  
an’ He never said a mumbalin’ word.  
Not a word, not a word, not a word.’<sup>6</sup>

Though perhaps not *strictly* accurate either theologically or as a quotation, the words of the negro spiritual that Käte Bogner first hears in [Chapter 4](#) of the novel suggest that when Christ was dying on the Cross He did not complain. Suffering, though

inexplicable, is an accepted and central part of the Christian faith. Käte's situation in the novel is a critical one and her faith is sorely tested. In [Chapter 4](#) we see her struggling with the dust in her flat, remembering her dead children and the uncaring world around her. She feels anger at the way she is having to suffer. She hears sounds down the hall, presumably from the radio, of Church services and pious lectures and her anger becomes hatred. But then she hears the words of the spiritual as a reminder of the true Christian message of consolation. The severity of the test Käte undergoes is further underlined later (in [Chapter 12](#)) when she returns to the flat, after the night spent with Fred, to be met by Frau Franke, ironically on her way to Mass, yet finding time nevertheless to suggest cruelly to Käte that it looks as though Fred has finally left her for good. But now Käte expresses no hatred or anger. She longs only for the voice of the negro. Again the words of the spiritual are introduced, as a coda at this point in the narrative, a reminder that the difficulties and horrors of life can be resolved through patience and ungrudging acceptance of all that life—here in the form of the uncharitable Frau Franke—imposes.

It is in relation to the words of the spiritual that the mentally retarded boy Bernhard and his family become intelligible. Bernhard's family and the situation in the 'Bude' function as a model of true Christianity. We first meet the girl with Bernhard taking Communion with the so-called 'Dreiminuspriester' in [Chapter 3](#). Fred is immediately struck by the girl's 'sehr sanftes Profil' and her 'einfache Innigkeit' (p. 59). He is as if mesmerized by her natural dignity as she holds on to her brother's hand 'mit einer stetigen und festen Geduld' (p. 60). Later he sees her as somehow childlike and innocent as she goes about lighting the stove and preparing the breakfast in the 'Bude'. He senses a piety verging on saintliness. She does not complain; she shows spontaneous charity to both Fred and Käte who, like the 'Dreiminuspriester' are instinctively drawn to her. Like Fred, Käte too is entranced by the girl and her brother. When she meets them after her Confession (p. 116) 'Ihr Lächeln fiel wie ein Zauber über inich'. Yet the family has

suffered greatly. The girl must struggle to make ends meet; her brother is mentally retarded; her mother has been killed in an air raid; her father is a wounded war veteran. Yet she exemplifies the Christian virtues implied in the words of the spiritual. Her brother is both an image of war-ruined Germany—he was blown from his mother's arms when she was killed—and one of Christ-like acceptance. The words of the spiritual are directly related to him at one point: 'kein einziges Wort kann er sprechen, nur dsu-dsa-dse' (p. 118). But he is not isolated, the voices of his family get through to him, as do the shrill sounds of everyday life—the trams and, most significantly, the organ and the Divine Office of the monks in the nearby church. Bernhard's family is a model of suffering but also one of genuine charity and humanity. That is clear from the way Fred and Käte are attracted to and received by the people in the 'Bude'.

The title of the novel is an indication of its course and its outcome. It points to the difficult moral that the story embodies. Moreover, in his depiction of the group in the 'Bude', Böll writes with deep sentiment whilst wholly avoiding mawkish sentimentality.

#### *The social issues*

Through what is at first sight a very intimate story Böll manages skilfully in *Undsagte kein einziges Wort* to give a broad picture of the state of West German society in the early 1950s. It must be stressed that Böll uses throughout the technical device of the double perspective (see p. 26). Consequently the social attitudes in the story are those subjectively held by the involved narrators, Fred and Käte and not those of an author objectively stating a case. Nevertheless, Böll's view is fundamentally critical and constitutes an indictment at several levels. At this early stage in his career Böll is concerned to show how social forces and institutionalized morality are working against the well-being of decent people.

Though this is not a war story as such the war from 1939 to 1945 is a formative influence on the lives of the two main

protagonists. The effect of the crude advertising gimmick of the 'Drogistenverband' whereby the sounds of an air-raid are used to alert people to the effectiveness of their products is simply too terrifying for Fred and Käte; they remember the realities of an air-raid all too vividly. The novel shows the impact of war, its effect on the lives of ordinary people. The scale of the devastation in Germany in 1945 is nowadays not easy to visualize if one visits the thriving cities of the Federal Republic. The damage to property following Allied bombing raids was immense. It has been calculated that of all the buildings standing in Cologne before the outbreak of the war two-thirds had been razed to the ground by the end. Little wonder that 1945 became known as 'das Jahr Null'. Böll speaks in his *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* (1966) of the wider psychological implications of the total loss of 'Eigentum' as a loss of identity. Fred Bogner had served on the Eastern Front and Käte still has vivid memories of his returning to the ruins, a man without possessions, a man basically alienated (and yet paradoxically and significantly for the outcome of the novel the moment also accentuates their closeness):

und ich sehe Fred noch vor mir, wie er dort stand: die Hände in den Taschen seiner grauen Uniformhose, auf den Trümmerhaufen blickend... Fred schien nichts zu begreifen, nichts zu fühlen...er sah mich an mit dem Blick eines Mannes, der niemals wirklich etwas besessen hat. Er nahm die brennende Zigarette aus dem Mund, steckte sie in meinen, ich zog daran und stieß mit dem Rauch des ersten Zuges ein heftiges Lachen aus mir hinaus. (p. 132)

The passage here demonstrates how the background of war is used not only to give the novel its authenticity, but also to reveal the relationship of the characters. The memory here is of the period around 1945, but the ruins still form the background to their story in 1953. There are many references to bomb-damage all around as Fred wanders the streets of Cologne looking for a hotel; everything is 'ausgeflickt', patched-up. The

poverty of the Bogners' room and the meagre 'Bude' of Bernhard and his family find their correspondence outside in the destroyed city.

The novel is not simply a picture of the aftermath of the war. It is too a critique of poverty. The story takes place eight years after the end of the war, but both Fred and Käte are aware that they are still poor and that their children, Clemens aged 13, Carla aged 11, and the baby are 'für die Tretröhle bestimmt' (p. 88). Fred believes their poverty is the main source of his despair—'die Armut hat mich krank gemacht' (p. 140). Böll uses the Bogners' room to illustrate that poverty. In [Chapter 2](#) it is a special treat for the Bogners' children to be able to play in the hallway whilst the Franks are away at a meeting of the Catholic Women's League. Following the recommendation provided by the Church, the Franks have been allocated four rooms in the house, whilst the Bogners have to live in one dust-filled room divided off to form a plywood box room to accommodate the baby. The walls are paper-thin; they hear everything from the Hopfs next door and have to be careful not to disturb the Selbsteins below. It all becomes too much for Fred to bear and precipitates the crisis that the story depicts. Käte too is aware of their poverty and it affects her deeply. This is shown as she goes to visit Frau Franke following the latter's annual superficial act of generosity at Christmas: 'Wir gingen in die Tiefe eines Spiegels hinein und ich sah uns: Wir sahen arm aus' (p. 52). Their poverty is underlined by the relative comfort and security of others. Already by the early 1950s Böll sees German society divided into the haves and the have-nots—and the Bogners are clearly in the latter category.

Through the Bogners' situation Böll is demonstrating and criticizing two fundamental aspects of society that developed in the immediate post-war period, namely the re-emergence of a vigorous form of capitalism and secondly the consequent growth of the commercial spirit. The novel suggests that both tendencies have not been equally beneficial to all members of the community. The plight of the Bogners is set not only against a backdrop of war damage but also against the

advertising activities associated with the conference of the ‘Drogistenverband’, together with the pomp and ceremony of the so-called St Jerome Procession. As the meagre hotel-room is made ready for Fred and Käte, banners are raised displaying the latest contraceptive products, whilst the bishop preaches in splendour surrounded by gilt lanterns and choirboys in scarlet. The photogenic bishop had, moreover, been an army officer, and his walk reminds Fred of the goose-step. The bishop’s cousin is on the board of the ‘Drogistenverband’ and so the Church is reluctant to act to stop the tasteless advertising associated with their conference. In [Chapter 11](#) they are advertising the ironically named ‘Doulorin’ as a relief for a hangover at the very moment when Käte is recovering from a bout of morning sickness. Böll thereby contrasts the trivial and empty commercial world with the real existential suffering of Käte which is reminiscent of the ‘Seven Dolours of Mary’. (See note on p. 198.) The most telling and grotesque image that the pharmacists use is the display of storks with broken necks and Fred’s horror and distaste is clear from his description of it: ‘... grausig hingen ihre schlaffen Köpfe nach unten’ (p. 155). This reflects both Fred’s constitutional inability to accept the notion of contraception, and the anti-materialistic spirit of the whole novel.

Böll expresses some grave doubts about the nature of capitalism itself in this story. As was mentioned above (p. 5) he was unhappy about the terms of the Currency Reform of 1948. Questions related to both property and capital are central to the novel. The basic problem for the Bogners stems from the uneven distribution of property—a problem made worse in this case by being caused by the Church. All Fred’s bitterness at this is caught in his near-hysterical response (p. 146) to the vast house of the Dante specialist that is being looked after by Fred’s friends the Blocks who have offered him a temporary refuge there. The fact that the repellent bishop regularly makes use of the spacious Dante library only further infuriates him. It is not without significance that the opening paragraph of each of the first two important introductory chapters raises the issue of money, the staple of all capitalist enterprise. In [Chapter 1](#) Fred’s