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Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit through the Medium of Myth in Heinrich Böll's Short Stories Der Mann mit den Messern and Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit

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VERGANGENHEITSBEWÄLTIGUNG THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF MYTH

IN HEINRICH BÖLL'S SHORT STORIES

DER MANN MIT DEN MESSERN AND

NICHT NUR ZUR WEIHNACHTSZEIT

by

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Thesis

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Vergangenheitsbewältigung through the Medium of Myth in Heinrich Böll's Short Stories *Der Mann mit den Messern* and *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit*

Chairperson: Marton Marko

German history of the 20th century was marked with unimaginable horrors and hardship. Both the First and Second World Wars left an indelible mark on the German psyche. Most specifically, the consequences of the Second World War were a turning point in German notions of cultural identity. The objective of this thesis is to analyze the various manners by which Heinrich Böll deals with the emerging cultural crisis in the post-war period of the late 1940's and early 1950's. I have chosen two of his short stories, *Der Mann mit den Messern* (1948) and *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* (1951), for the purpose of providing a structuralist discussion of Böll's observations of the rise of Germany's National Socialism and the Second World War. The structuralist activity emphasizes the use of myth as a social tool for dealing with baneful experiences (i.e. especially in terms of war). Through an examination of these two texts, I call attention to Böll's use of symbolic meanings, by which he provides the means for understanding how language, individuals, and society can be manipulated in order to correspond to authoritarian aspirations. For Böll, these three elements can create spectacle on the order of mythic connotations. I highlight Böll's concern with spectacle as an abstract entity that accommodates the development of purposeful ignorance, especially in light of the roles certain individuals played in the rise of German Fascism. I posit that Böll uses myth in its most ancient sense – a medium of dissemination through which cultural identity and knowledge can be passed on for posterity's sake. As a writer, this is the position in which Böll saw himself, for writing functions as myth once had in that it provides a glimpse at the awful realities of war for contemporary and future societies. The lessons, both good and bad, learned in social upheaval can provide future generations with the means to lessen the blow of traumatic experiences, so long as those lessons are passed on.

Preface

Throughout Heinrich Böll's long literary career, he firmly placed himself in the role of the *citoyen engagé*. He left a legacy in post-war German literature by which the humorist and author became united into one. Böll ushered castigations against society as a whole. However, he realized that his role as a member of his society required him to take part in daily activities of social interaction. He saw his role as a writer was not to chastise from the safe distance of an ivory tower, but to write about his experiences in dealing with people in their daily lives. He viewed himself as a member of society amongst which he felt the need to actively participate. Böll's experience in the post-First World War era, the Nazi years, and post-Second World War period helped to form his perceptions of society and his sense that individuals need to be actively involved in society.

One may call this a moral obligation or an ethical duty, which are valid points in consideration of Böll and his literary works. But aside from such noble philosophical pursuits, there is an altogether simpler consideration: Böll cared for people. And the chaos and disruption to society caused by the Second World War was a great concern for him. Elements which deal either directly or indirectly with the war can be found throughout most of his writings. Even in his later literary works, one is able to clearly see the indelible impression the war and the Nazi years left on his psyche. Böll sought to commit those experiences into writing in order that future generations may have some notion of the war, its aftermath, and the means by which it came into being, for his writings deal largely with symptoms which gave rise to the Second World War and its effects years after the war's end.

This thesis focuses on the symbolic forms of Böll's two disparate, yet similar short stories *Der Mann mit den Messern* (1948) and *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* (1951). I offer an analysis of their structures which I feel best suits their meanings. Images, symbols, and signs play an important part within the parameters of the thesis. These "systems" of communication change from generation to

generation, yet they constitute a language that holds the meanings to the time in which they were used, and thus are transcendental by their nature. For instance, in *Der Mann mit den Messern* the main figure Jupp comments on the need to make his knife-throwing act like “im römischen Zirkus –, sie wollen wenigstens wissen, daß Blut fließen *könnte* [...]”¹ The image of the Roman Coliseum still evokes notions of bloodlust and violence for the purpose of entertainment. Symbols are languages with compounded meanings, but they still hold an original meaning-value, even if perceptions and tastes of later generations have changed.

Symbols and signs send messages, but how that message is interpreted simply depends on the changes of a particular time, culture, or society. New interpretations are institutionalized, while old meanings are displaced or forgotten in favor of new ones. Throughout the thesis, I argue that Böll was aware of such a process and purposefully played with symbols in order to extract meanings that can be understood for generations to come. Most poignant is Böll’s use of original meanings of a symbol and their manipulation by individuals and machines alike. Capitalism’s mechanized ability to change the meaning of signs represents for Böll a serious inhibitor in terms of dealing with the war. This can be seen in *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* where the symbol of the Christmas tree has become infused with notions of capitalism by which the war years are topically covered over, as the narrator states: “Wir hätten früher auf die Idee kommen können, es stimme etwas nicht.”²

Böll demonstrates how easily it can be to overlook the significance of a symbol’s meaning. It is for this reason that I have chosen to highlight and provide an analysis of the symbols I feel best demonstrates Böll’s purpose in having written both short stories. This approach to elucidate a text’s structure through the significance of its symbols is structural in manner and may be considered

¹ Böll, Heinrich. “Mann mit den Messern.” Herausgegeben von Viktor Böll. *Das Heinrich Böll Lesebuch*. Originalausgabe. Deutscher Taschenbuch. München: 5. Auflage, 1987. 11-20. (Subsequent references indicated throughout the thesis as MM).

² ---. “Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit.” *Das Heinrich Böll Lesebuch*. Originalausgabe. Deutscher Taschenbuch. München: 5. Auflage, 1987. 65-88. (Subsequent references indicated throughout the thesis as NW).

impressionistic, and thus lacking a critical eye. The argument that art without a critical approach reduces the overall value of the artistic piece is a fine one, but the critic is also bound by the impressions of what it means to be a critic. There is, indeed, a check-and-balance within the function of the critic vis-à-vis the author. However, an important point of writing is that the author does not bear in mind his critics' notion of literature while writing, but writes with the purpose of situating issues and social phenomena of the day as they occur in their own time and place. Böll best illustrates this concept:

Leser, Kritiker, Germanisten neigen dazu, diese Chronologie nur innerhalb der verschiedenen literarischen Kategorien zu suchen (dann auch zu finden), was bedeutet: eine Chronologie der Romane, Essays, Horspiele als getrennte Kategorien; das sogenannte "erzählerische Werk" vom jeweils anderen getrennt zu sehen, und auch nur innerhalb dieser Kategorien, jenen Prozeß festzustellen, den man möglicherweise "Entwicklung" nennen kann. Ich halte nichts von dieser Trennung, denke, daß sie in die Irre führen kann. Ein kleiner Aufsatz, eine Rezension, ein Interview kann für den nächsten Roman entscheidender sein als der vorangegangene Roman – ganz zu schweigen von den Anregungen, die in nicht publizierten Vorstellungen, Gesprächen, Überlegungen lagen und für immer verborgen bleiben, auch dem Autor nie bewußt werden, innere Vorgänge, die nie geäußert werden. Was im weitesten Sinn des Wortes geäußert worden ist [...]³

The aim of this thesis is to interpret both short stories with an understanding that the symbolic forms Böll used held meaning in their place and time, and that they still function within our own era. Böll's writings reflect his concerns for Western, and especially German, society. The Second World War was an event too horrific to let fade from memory and his writings illustrate occurrences from daily life which deal with the problem of coming to terms with Germany's role in the war. Through symbolic forms, Böll attempted to describe the moments that eventually led to war and what was being done (or not done) to prevent a recurrence. The instances he describes seem harmless at first, but they reflect a process that occurred on a national level. He used symbols as means by which to make his writings transcendental in order that future generations may be able to look to his writings and identify with situations that occur in their own time. Most importantly, Böll's writings serve as a means to truncate a

³ Böll, Heinrich. Vorwort. *Das Heinrich Böll Lesebuch*. Herausgegeben von Viktor Böll. Originalausgabe. Deutscher Taschenbuch. München: 5. Auflage, 1987.

reoccurrence of an event as devastating as the Second World War. They serve as a warning which echoes across time and culture.

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Introduction

Writing in Order to Remember

The belief that both the mythic and historic narrative can heal the wounds of traumatic experience holds true in Heinrich Böll's short stories *Der Mann mit den Messern* (1948) and *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* (1951). The healing process that takes place through writing of personal and collective experience in relation to historical events, however, is rarely brought to a successful conclusion. As with so many things in life, healing is an art that can only be improved upon, but never perfected. This analogy extends to writing, as well, for it is a medium through which a catharsis can take place. Böll states in his short essay *Keine so schlechte Quelle: über Konrad Adenauer, "Erinnerungen 1945-1953"*: "sich zu erinnern ist eine Kunst, Schreiben eine andere."⁴ These two disparate forms of art, writing and remembering, are inextricably linked: "beide Künste treffen in einem Autor aufeinander."⁵ In post-war German literature, through the role of the author, Böll deals with his experiences of the war through the use of daily language, myth, and spectacle in order to prevent a cultural silence and bring about a healing process to Germany's war wounds.

The process of denying memories can result in a mythic perception of one's experiences. The staggering loss in human life, meaning of language, and cultural identity that occurred as a result of the rise of Nazism and the Second World War was on a mythic scale. For those individuals who experienced the war first hand, many of the memories lingered a lifetime and were left un-dealt with. Böll sought to use writing as a means by which he could clearly relate his experiences to others (and himself) in order to deal with the role of Germany in the Second World War. For many of those who did attempt to come to terms with their involvement, the memories of the horrors of war continued to ravage their souls

⁴ Böll Heinrich. *Heimat und Keine: Schriften und Reden (1964-1968)*. [Originally from *Heinrich Böll: Werke Essayistische Schriften und Reden 2*] Ed. Bernd Balzer. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1985, 173. Print.

⁵ *Ibid.*

until the end. By putting his experiences down in writing, Böll attempts to come to terms with Germany's collective experience with fascism and the lack of active participation in stamping out the residual embers of Nazism. His aim is to prevent a re-occurrence. Böll thus keeps his experiences from being lost to the vagaries of memory, as his protagonist in *Der Mann mit den Messern* states: "an jene düsteren Stunden der Vergangenheit [...]" (MM 11).

Böll elucidates the element of forgetting the past in *Heimat und keine* (1964-1968) when he mentions that writing is a "Suche nach der verlorenen Zeit" (173). Böll sees that through writing an examination can be undertaken by which the notion of coming to terms with the past can be achieved. Through the act of writing, those lost moments can be saved. And in doing so, Böll creates an awareness of the past for future generations, for he bears witness to his experiences from this timeframe. Böll effectively demonstrates his and others' experience in its daily forms, by which he hopes to provide for a metaphorical release of social tension and to prevent another social upheaval like the war. Arguably Böll sees the loss of those experiences as something which affords the potential for recurrence. Thus, he writes with the purpose to make future generations aware of the past in order to lessen the blow of traumatic events.

The notion of writing as a search for a lost time is a concept as old as writing.⁶ In his *Histories*, Herodotus of Halicarnassus substantiates the importance of committing events to the written word, "so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time."⁷ The historical narrative disallows for the forgetting of experiences by placing them firmly in a cultural heritage. This makes it possible for the experiences of past generations to become part of a culture's identity. Böll underscores this idea with his character Jupp in *Der Mann mit den Messern*: "Vielleicht wird einer, ein einziger nach Hause gehen und mich nicht vergessen" (MM 13). Not only is it through writing that a means to validate one's

⁶ Often called the "Father of History," Herodotus, circa the 5th Century B.C, is often credited as the first to have created the genre of historical narrative with his *The Histories*.

⁷ Herodotus, *Histories*. Trans. Aubrey de Sélincour t. London: Penguin Books, 2003. Print.

experience is created, but it also identifies the risks that can lead to committing the same mistakes. The impetus of Böll's writing is to critically reduce the likelihood of making the same blunders *ad absurdum*, while at the same time he uses writing for the purpose of supplanting societal wrongs with *write ones*. To this end, Böll's narrator in *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* says of dealing with social phenomena from the perspective of the future: "Es ist einfach, rückwirkend den Herd einer beunruhigenden Entwicklung auszumachen" (NW 67). The written text provides the future with an account of social events that is by its very nature retrospective.

A search for lost moments without a written account can lead to a distortion of reality that can result in a grotesque misrepresentation of experiences (i.e. myth). This last statement needs to be qualified, especially when dealing with Böll's writings. The objective of this thesis is to deal with the notion of myth these short stories: *Der Mann mit den Messern* (1948) and *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* (1951). Myth and writing often deal with social issues in terms of clichés, set patterns, and stereotypes, which can lead to a misrepresentation or misunderstanding of personal experience. Yet, these two literary endeavors have been important elements to societies' formation of identity since the earliest writings first began to appear. In a sense, myth and writing both act as a device for remembering a personal or collective experience through exaggerated and grotesque forms. This process is formally known as *mythopoeia*⁸ – i.e., the myth making process of human experiences. For example, the Trojan War was an event that became relegated to myth, since its pain, suffering, and experiences were important to its participants as cultural facets that needed to be passed on for posterity's sake.

Böll explicitly engages the notion of myth as a tool for cultural and historical issues in *Mann mit den Messern* when he has his narrator state that Jupp appeared "[...] wie auf manchen antiken Bildern Ikarus abgebildet ist" (MM 15). This reference alludes to a Greek myth that pertained to notions of

⁸ For a further look at the use of this term, see Philip Wheelwright's "Notes on Mythopoeia." *The Seewanee Review*, Vol. 59, No. 4, Autumn, 1951. *JSTOR*. Web. 23 July 2011.

unearned gifts. The result was a tragic demise for the unwise Icarus. Specifically, Böll uses myth to relate his understanding and concerns of Nazi leaders who misused Germany's economic capabilities for their own purposes. Myth need not be seen as only a representation of the negative qualities of humanity. In fact, myth is a social tool by which cultural and personal understanding of unsavory experiences can be achieved (which can also be said of writing). In as much as myth proliferates the horrors and seamier sides of life, it overtly creates a medium through which personal, collective, and cultural understanding, as well as healing, can be accomplished.

Myth and writing, united in the form of the mythic narrative, can and do help people deal with disquieting memories by providing a distance from which personal and cultural identity are not destroyed. Myth's functionality as a cultural tool for dealing with unpleasant experiences concurs with Böll's notion of the writer's task, which is to undertake a reworking of the past – *Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*.⁹ This can be done through two modes: the first is via the historical writing process, wherein the central focus of historical writing is the "objective" view of an historical event, since this type of writing is most often undertaken by a secondary or after-the-fact source. As Lévi-Strauss posits in *Myth and Meaning*, "it is extremely important to find out if there is a difference and, if there is, what kind of difference between traditions collected from the outside from those collected on the inside, though as if they were collected from the outside."¹⁰

The second mode of an *Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit* is through the mythic narrative. Those who experience a social or natural phenomenon, as it unfolds, tend to deal with their experience in traditional terms of symbolic meaning and figures. This is a perspective from the inside. The use of myth as a cultural accoutrement for dealing with the past experiences provides a necessary distance for its user by a symbolic reworking of the past episode. This manner of treatment often occurs throughout

⁹ Literally translated, this becomes "reworking of the past."

¹⁰ Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Myth and Meaning*. University of Toronto Press, 1979. Print.

myth, where symbolic meanings help maintain a hold on the memories of experience without being overwhelmingly painful; and mythic narrative maintains identity by a slow acculturation of unsavory experiences. For instance, Böll's narrator describes the knife Jupp throws high into the air as "ein goldener Fisch" (MM 11). Even though the knife is a deadly instrument, the narrator adjusts his description of the deadly object to fit his perception of his experience of watching Jupp play with a deadly device. This instance of symbolic representation figures well with Böll's treatment of Germany's past encounter with Nazism, and the lack of steps in coming to terms with such an experience in the immediate post-war era.

The aim of this thesis is to understand the many concepts, aspects, and symbols at play within Heinrich Böll's two short stories from the perspective of myth. An implicit concept here is the analysis of various symbols and their forms as they relate to the whole structure of the individual stories. A clear definition of terms used throughout this thesis should be given. First, it is important to understand Böll's different uses of *humor* and *irony*. These concepts can be broken down into two separate notions by their unique characteristics. Irony is understood as an utterance, either in written or verbal form, that is expressive. Irony intends "to transmit a message, communicate an idea, or express a thought or sentiment."¹¹ The explicit purpose of irony is to place its user outside the framework on which it comments. Irony tends to give an impression that the one using it is infallible.

Humor, on the other hand, pertains to an utterance in terms of language's daily usage, and tends not to place its user outside of the situation. A relevant distinction between Böll's use of irony and humor is that his irony tends to adhere to language's daily use, rather than in a stilted or stylized form of language. This difference in usage can be seen when Böll's figure Jupp in *Der Mann mit den Messern* portrays his inner-most desires of being recognized as a knife-throwing performer: "[...] >Der mit dem

¹¹ Lang, Candace. *Irony/Humor: Critical Paradigms*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989. Print.

Messer, verdammt<, wird er (his audience) vielleicht sagen, denn sie haben schwere Angst. Sie schleppen die Angst hinter sich wie einen schweren Schatten, und ich freu mich, wenn sie's vergessen und ein bißchen lachen. Ist das kein Grund zum Lächeln?" (MM 13). Böll uses irony in terms of language's daily use to illustrate the hypocrisy of the braggadocio Jupp. In this case, Jupp's desire to cause people to forget their fears is simply false, for his entire knife-throwing act depends on causing his audience to be in a constant state of anxiety. Otherwise, there would be a serious lack of tension and his entire act would be received as boring.

A second essential concept in the thesis focuses on Böll's use of *myth*. Myth refers to the cultural stories of a society. From the modern point of view, the short story can be seen to function in the same fashion, for it has replaced the orally transmitted tradition of myth. In the same way that the ancients used myth to transmit cultural heritage, short stories serve a similar function by which society passes on a collective and cultural experience at a conscious and unconscious level.¹² A culture's stories (i.e. myths) link the unconscious elements of past peoples with those of the present in order to prevent a loss of cultural identity and past lessons. In the case of Böll's writings, he filters the senselessness and absurdity of the post-war era of the late 1940s and early 1950s through the mythic narrative. He depicts daily life in its mundane and mythical form, by which he is able to illustrate the difficulties in perceiving cultural phenomena. In this way, he asks much from his reader, for he suggests that the world, as something which the individual believes to recognize, is an artifice, a stage for the absurd moments of society's mundane, unconscious transmissions of itself as retold through its stories. The opening paragraph in *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* helps to validate this point:

In unserer Verwandtschaft machen sich Verfallserscheinungen bemerkbar, die man eine Zeitlang stillschweigend zu übergehen sich bemühte, deren Gefahr ins Auge zu blicken man nun aber entschlossen ist. Noch wage ich nicht, das Wort Zusammenbruch

¹² The *collective unconscious*, here, is taken to be that in the Jungian sense of the meaning, i.e., besides all the information individuals collect in their day-to-day life, there may also exist "archaic residues," such that impressions and symbols are kept in myth-like forms.

anzuwenden, aber die beunruhigenden Tatsachen häufen sich derart, daß sie eine Gefahr bedeuten und mich zwingen, von Dingen zu berichten, die den Ohren der Zeitgenossen zwar befremdlich klingen werden, deren Realität aber niemand bestreiten kann (NW 65).

The third element of this thesis deals with *spectacle*. Böll's two short stories effectively illustrate the deceptive qualities of spectacle in its everyday form. This is similar to the notions of life, society, and social interactions as taking place within a *theater-in-the-round*. Often, the dynamic moments of daily life are used on the stage of a theater in order to highlight the moments when cultural or personal experience take place. This is when something "big" happens that breaks the tedium of the daily routine, as Böll has his figure Jupp state: "Ich bin von der einleuchtenden Voraussetzung ausgegangen, daß die Leute, wenn sie an der Kasse ihr Geld bezahlt haben, am liebsten solche Nummern sehen, wo Gesundheit oder Leben auf dem Spiel stehen [...]"(MM 13).

For Böll, the concept of monotony in daily routine is where the "action" takes place.¹³ The small things are the dynamic things. These "small" moments interact with people as spectators in their daily life, like the narrator's analogy to "fungus" as a *Verfallserscheinung* in *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit*: "Schimmelpilze der Zersetzung haben sich unter der ebenso dicken wie harten Kruste der Anständigkeit eingenistet, Kolonien tödlicher Schmarotzer, die das Ende der Unbescholtenheit einer ganzen Sippe ankündigen" (NW 65). Individuals of any society are not merely passive while witnessing spectacle: they are actively engaged, whether they want to be or not. The small instances, like the spores of fungus, though barely noticed, are the genesis of change. However, whereas a spatial distance is provided for by a scientist's microscope or the stage of a theater, no such distance exists between individuals of a society and spectacle. People in a societal setting are both acting and directing the movements of culture. This is a key concept in both texts, for there is a duality of purpose (i.e. people both act upon and are acted upon by spectacle) by the very fact that humans live in a social setting. Catherine G. Bellver comments further on this notion of life as a spectacle:

¹³ This concept ties closely in with Adalbert Stifter's notion. For a further reading, see his introduction to *Bunte Steine*.

Many of the complexities of human existence are encapsulated in the series of dualities underpinning the metaphor of life as a play: enactment and reenactment, action and reflection, physical movement and visual observation, spectacle and spectator, actor and audience, imaginary sphere and the realm of experience.¹⁴

The fourth thematic element of this thesis emphasizes the essentiality of symbolic function in relations to their signs. Symbolic meaning and its function are understood as a natural process by which humans communicate with each other. This pertains to the concept that every manifestation which occurs within society posits a language. To simplify this idea, Roland Barthes often uses the term “code” to mean the “language” of objects and behaviors. Symbols function in a similar fashion, in that they produce a meaning that may or may not be culturally bound. Northrop Frye gives an elucidating explanation of what a symbol may stand for in relation to the individual interpreter: “[...] (a symbol) means any literary structure that can be isolated for critical attention. A word, a phrase, or an image used with some kind of special reference (which is what a symbol is usually taken to mean) are all symbols when they are distinguishable elements in critical analysis.”¹⁵

In this context, symbols and signs can be understood to be different types of languages. An important point within this system of communication is that this type of language is learned through culture, though not explicitly, which renders interpretations of an individual’s cultural signs. In turn, the interpretative value of each symbol is left largely up to the individual, but is ultimately guided by one’s cultural input as how to read signs. This is where the function of structuralism comes into play. In Roland Barthes seminal 1972 work *Critical Essays*, he posits the validity of a literary critique via structuralism thus:

The goal of all structuralist activity, whether reflexive or poetic, is to reconstruct an “object” in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning (the “functions”) of this object. Structure is therefore

¹⁴ Bellever, Cathrine G. “Spectators and Spectacle: The Theatrical Dimension in the Works of Cristina Fernez Cubas.” *Hispania* 90, no. 1: 52-61. *JSTOR*. Web. March, 2007. pp 52.

¹⁵ Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990. Print.

actually a *simulacrum* of the object, but a directed, *interested* simulacrum, since the imitated object makes something appear which remained invisible, or if one prefers, unintelligible in the natural object.¹⁶

The final element of this thesis deals with the concept of *simulacrum*. Simulacrum is defined by Jean Baudrillard in *Simulations* (1983) as a reference to the real, “which is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models – and with these it can be reproduced an infinite number of times.”¹⁷ Böll was aware of this reproductive process in late 1940s and early 1950s through capitalism’s mass-producing capabilities. Böll sees such a capability as merely a means which provides topical-solution to dealing with unpleasant aspects of the past, especially in terms of the war. These reproductive mechanisms were supplanting the imperfections of the real by producing perfected simulations. For example, in *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* the Christmas tree can be seen as a traditional symbol of familial unity. A family would traditionally hike into the woods to cut one down. However, the story’s one-dimensional protagonist, Tante Milla, who suffers a particular psychosis that requires Christmas be celebrated every day without cessation, needs a fresh tree every few days. The human limitations of trekking into the woods for a tree are remedied by mass-production of Christmas trees. As the narrator comments, it was his

[...] findiger Vetter Johannes, der zu allen Kreisen der Geschäftswelt die besten Beziehungen unterhält, spürte den Tannenbaum-Frischdienst der Firma Söderbaum auf, [...] Nach einem halben Jahr schon wandelte die Firma Söderbaum die Lieferung des Baumes in ein wesentlich verbilligtes Abonnement um und erklärte sich bereit, die Lieferfrist von ihrem Nadelbaumspezialisten, Dr. Alfast, genauestens festlegen lassen, so daß schon drei Tage, bevor der alte Baum indiskutabel wird, der neue anlangt und mit Muße geschmückt werden kann (NW 77).

Within a relatively short time-span, from 1939-1945, the perfection of machines altered the world of signs, symbols, and the way in which individuals and societies interacted with one another and, most importantly, waged war. Cultural meaning had previously been created by human involvement, but by the end of 1945, that level of involvement was no longer existent: machines were able to

¹⁶ Barthes, Roland. *Critical Essays*. Trans. Richard Howard. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972. [Originally published in French under the title *Essais critiques*. Editions du Seuil, 1964]. Print.

¹⁷ Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations*. Trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchmann. New York City: Columbia University, 1983. Print.

produce machines. This in turn produced new meaning for the human process of creating social and cultural symbols by which a meaning of an object can be understood. Böll's narrator says that due to the production quality of the family's holiday that "[...] die abendlichen Feiern im Hause meines Onkels [haben] eine fast professionelle Starre angenommen: man versammelt sich unter dem Baum oder um den Baum herum" (NW 78). Böll uses the Christmas tree to represent the symbolic function of capitalism's productive power as having subjugated the family under its "appendages" (i.e. capitalism's overarching branches), which ultimately has given new meaning to a very old tradition. There is no adjustment time for a new meaning before a new product and thus meaning is created. The signs that make up the world had become a jumble of perfection. Böll uses the simulacrum of capitalism to expose the myth that everything has returned to normal in the post-war era. For Böll, such an erroneous belief posed unimaginable difficulty for Germany to come to terms with its role in the war.

Böll's *Der Mann mit den Messern* and *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* both illustrate the use of myth, spectacle, and a lack of German recognition for the causes of the war. One of Böll's greatest concerns was the substitution of new cultural meanings for old social and cultural meanings without properly understanding what the old meanings represented. Böll poses a personal question to his reader: how far will each individual allow the distractions of spectacle, identity, and cultural symbols to be replaced without inquiring as to what they represent or why they are changed. In the case of the narrator's family in *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit*, the family goes so far as to have substitutes in the form of actors and waxen-dolls, since "(sie) sehen doch recht natürlich aus" (87) Böll illustrates the extent to which people will go in order to ensure that responsibility for the past is placed on substitutes (effigies or avatars) in order to avoid acknowledgment of personal responsibility in contemporary issues.

Böll deliberately calls into question the use of past traditions as filtered through spectacle and the hyper-real of capitalism's simulacrum as a means to retain an identity which had drastically changed.

The war rearranged all aspects of German society, including Germanic traditions (i.e. Christmas). In as much as the Nazis had manipulated the use of traditional signs and symbols, so too was the new era of modern marvels manipulating those very same elements of cultural language (i.e. signs and symbols). The old ways and their cultural meanings had become destabilized though the individuals largely responsible for having brought the war about who adamantly refused to acknowledge that anything had changed, which is a point the narrator in *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* ironically comments on: “Die einzig Zuverlässigen sind meine Tante und der Prälat. Sie plaudern miteinander über die gute alte Zeit [...]” (88)

The old notions of tradition and identity die hard, even though they are surrounded by a panoply of new signifiers of tradition and cultural understanding. Böll describes in uncanny accuracy the manner by which substitution of signs and symbols are ascribed new connotations and meanings, as well as the methods by which spectacle provides hindrances for a closer examination of new and old meanings. In both of these short stories, the thematic element Böll stresses is the need for a reevaluation of old and new cultural meanings without destroying social identity. In the end, Böll highlights the need of individuals to become actively involved within society to bring about the desired changes of social harmony and good governance, for humanity cannot, like “Vetter Franz,” retreat behind the closed doors of the cloister in order to avoid the responsibility of instituting change. All individuals, in whatever society, are “mit dem Leben bestraft” (88) and must take responsibility both individually as well as collectively to bring about a necessary understanding of cultural identity in the hopes of creating a better society for future generations.

Chapter I

Language, Mythopoeia, and Spectacle: Introduction to *Mann mit den Messern*

While the beginning of the Second World War can be dated to a precise place and time (September 1, 1939), its aftermath continued in its psychological and physical wounds long after the Nazi capitulation on May 8, 1945. The memories run so deep that even the simplest of gestures sparks off associations. In *Der Mann mit den Messern* Böll broaches the topic of memories of war almost immediately, for his narrator comments that Jupp's knife throwing trick "[...] – erinnert mich an jene düsteren Stunden der Vergangenheit, wo er sein Taschenmesser die Bunkerpfosten hatte hinauf- und hinunterklettern lassen" (MM 11). The experience of the war caused all its participants painful and long-lasting memories. In terms of suffering, nationality matters little, for "all people who suffered directly or indirectly from the war are its victims."¹⁸

In the wake of such a social upheaval, it can be inferred that that through writing Heinrich Böll attempted to deal with the horrors of his experience in the war. However, the difficulty lay not only in writing about those experiences, but in dealing with the way those experiences came into existence, and the processes that brought about the rise of the Nazis. Böll uses writing to come to terms with both his and his nation's involvement in the war and individual Germans who enabled the Nazis. In the case with the Nazis' use of language, Böll understands that language is an untrustworthy bedfellow.

Böll's *Der Mann mit den Messern* deals with the manipulative power of language. The story focuses on two characters: a narrator and his war comrade Jupp, who appears to be the titular character. Jupp is a knife-thrower and entertainer. The story unfolds from the point of view of the narrator, whose character development remains largely flaccid. Initially the narrator describes Jupp's

¹⁸ Conrad, Robert C. *Understanding Heinrich Böll: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. New York: Free Press. A Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1979. Print.

knife-throwing talents as a source of wonderment, and through the non-descript figure of the narrator, the story follows Jupp through his daily routine. During the course of events, the narrator becomes so distracted by the knife-throwing spectacle that he fails to stop himself from being slowly and deliberately manipulated by Jupp into a dangerous position. The narrator, desperate for work, reluctantly, though enabling, allows Jupp to throw knives around the figure of his body.

The story focuses on language and the power of suggestion, for it is this power behind simple expressions that Böll effectively demonstrates as a means of manipulation. He even goes so far as to highlight certain social phenomena and devices that were used by the Nazis to gain control. However, just as important as Böll's illustration of Nazi manipulation is, so is the manipulation that can occur in any society where there is economic ruin. Böll's short story brings to life the then current social phenomenon of millions of people without work. Their existence bordered on the brink of starvation. It is through such a plight that the use of language interwoven with elements of spectacle can have devastating consequences for those not aware of the potential for manipulation. Böll wants to force the scandalous behavior of those who provide a reprieve from the tedium of daily life by creating moments of sensationalism. He does this by reconstructing the moments where simple language merges with small amounts of dynamic elements. Böll attempts to break down the process of spectacle, its use of language, and its manipulative potential into their various components for analysis on a personal and intimate level.

In *Der Mann mit den Messern*, Böll specifically deals with the concept of spectacle as an "entity" that still functions in its original mode of language (i.e. through sending messages based on signs and symbols). Spectacle takes place in daily language and situations. Böll illustrates these moments in their simple, mundane forms in order to elucidate the causes or impetus of people's choices. As when the narrator exclaims after the second of Jupp's knife-throwing acts: "das ist doch ganz toll [...]" (MM 12). It

is through these dynamic moments of the mundane that choices are made which can lead to dynamic consequences in spectacular form. Böll tries to bring about an awareness in regards to the spectacle's use of language, while illustrating its *raison d'être*. He thus uses everyday language in his works to reflect "idiomatic dialogue, a style that is economical to the point of understatement, first-person narrative, war experience – and the characteristic ironic twist showing the underdog in mild rebellion against 'the system.'"¹⁹

In *Der Mann mit den Messern* Böll illustrates the complexity within human interaction at the basic level of communication: language's unreliability. He does not attempt to fashion a complex rhetoric of philosophical paradigms. Rather, the short story takes place in a world shattered by the war as a result of improper use of language (e.g. the Nazi's use of *Endlösung* to signify the extermination of European Jews). Böll focuses on those who suffered most by language's manipulation: common people. He presents a snapshot of a social situation following the war and the potential therein for social unrest caused by economic crisis and boredom. It is here at the level of the mundane that symbolic forms take on their most alluring forms, especially in moments of societal privation. Böll's symbolic images thus reflect an "Ästhetik des Humanen"²⁰ and are understood to mean an illustration of life, for the reality of life is the mundane. Individuals and society tend to function by the use of simplistic forms of communication. However, for Böll, the moments when certain individuals use artifices of language in order to create an illusion of dynamic instances need to be held in abeyance. Böll is no foolhardy idealist, for he understands that it is impossible to stanch the tide of those who use language in a cagey manner to suit their own desires. In *Der Mann mit den Messern* Böll endeavors to make people aware of

¹⁹ Ziolkowski, T. "Heinrich Böll: Conscience and Craft." *Books Abroad*. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma. No. 3 (Summer 1960): 213-222. *JSTOR*. Web. 25 July 2011.

²⁰ Böll, Heinrich. *Heimat und Keine: Schriften and Reden 1964-68*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985 30. [Originally from *Heinrich Böll: Werke Essayistische Schriften und Reden 2*. Ed. Bernd Balzer]

situations in which language can be misused by individuals who would sacrifice others for their own personal gain.

Section I.

Spectacle and the Roman Circus as Symbols of Myth and Manipulation

As is so often the case in Heinrich Böll's works, *Der Mann mit den Messern* begins *in medias res* – from Latin to mean “in the midst of things or affairs.” This trope best reflects the natural progression and manner of social phenomena as they unfold from the perspective of people who experience them. The reader, without being supplied with a background or even a warning, witnesses Jupp holding “das Messer vorne an der Spitze der Schneide und ließ es lässig wippen [...] Mit einem plötzlichen Ruck warf er das Messer hoch [...] (the knife) verlor seine Schwingung und sauste scharf und gerade auf Jupps Kopf hinunter; Jupp hatte blitzschnell einen Holzklotz auf seinen Kopf gelegt; das Messer pflanzte sich mit einem Ratsch fest und blieb dann schwankend haften” (MM 11).

Böll's use of the word *Klotz* illustrates a humorous duality within language, for the German word describes both the shield-like quality of the wooden plank, but also infers the dunce-like quality of a *chump*. Few people would consider standing under falling knives a good use of time or, as in Jupp's case, a plausible job. However, the bizarreness and risk element of the act attracts attention, which then arouses curiosity. This in turn causes a desire among the audience members (or reader) to see more. Upon the discovery that the daring act is nothing more than a trick to garner laudation from the audience members there is often the sensations of relief and repugnance. Jupp even comments on this realization: “Zum Kotzen [...]” (11). These two different emotions are essential to Böll's notion of spectacle. On one hand, relief from an intense moment caused by the entertainment and risk value of spectacle is expressed through the physical manifestations of a sigh or a verbal interpellation. On the

other hand, the repugnance that comes from the audience's realization that the dangerous qualities of spectacle are simply a trick to attract attention, for who wants to see an act labeled as being dangerous (i.e. knife-throwing), unless it truly adheres to the dangerous qualities it purports to engender.

Language's instability is further illustrated by Jupp's expression: "zum Kotzen" – which Böll uses as *une expression à double entente* – an ambiguity by which at least two different or various meanings are resolved into one. Jupp recognizes that the perilous nature of knife-throwing is what draws a crowd: "[...] ich bin von der einleuchtenden Voraussetzung ausgegangen, daß die Leute, wenn sie an der Kasse ihr Geld bezahlt haben, am liebsten solche Nummern sehen, wo Gesundheit oder Leben auf dem Spiel stehen—wie im römischen Zirkus" (11). Even though Jupp's utterance can be seen as an acknowledgment of the act's falsehood, he is actually upset about the lack of the act's real potential for danger. This *lack* of tension is repulsive, for it quickly allows the audience to become acculturated to the act and the results is that the act becomes blasé from the viewpoint of the audience.

Jupp's statement reflects an attitude towards monetary gain at the risk of damning-the-consequences. The risk factor is what people desire and is still an element of entertainment much like it had been in the Roman gladiatorial games. The allure of the games could always attract a crowd, as well as potential votes.²¹ Jupp highlights this ancient custom when he makes reference to the Roman circus, by which he signifies the locus of spectacle. Dina Sherzer in "*Circus*": *An Exercise in Semiotics* identifies the circus as the place "where one can observe an heterogeneous spectacle composed of wild animals and their tamers, tightrope walkers, horse-back riders, trapeze artists, and clowns; all appearing on

²¹ According to Rupert Matthews, aspiring Roman politicians could win votes through staging such gladiatorial combats. He states: "Free food and free entertainments were always vote winners. Patricians would vie with each other to provide better and more impressive shows for the citizens. It was this desire to please the public that led to the growth of the games. [...] As a political weapon, a good show and a sumptuous meal were impossible to beat. And the stakes were high. It was worth spending a fortune to gain public office." Matthews, Rupert. *The Age of the Gladiators: Savagery and Spectacle in Ancient Rome*: Chartwell Books, Inc. Arcturus Publishing Limited, China, 2005. Print.

stage with fast tempo, exhibiting stunt, virtuosity, and prowess.”²² The Roman games took place in the Circus Maximus or the Colosseum, each of which served as a platform where death and pleasure were played out to the delight of the insatiable roar of the crowd. Nearly all of the acts Sherzer mentions above involve an element of risk. The element of risk is also exhibited in Jupp’s knife-throwing performance, by which Böll draws a parallel between the modern and ancient concepts of spectacle’s entertainment value as something which has not changed for millennia.

The fact that these spectacles (i.e. the Roman gladiatorial matches and Jupp’s knife-throwing act) both occur through a medium of violence, which is applauded, does more than demonstrate a form of entertainment: it reflects a social ideal. This notion is understood to be that of the social “good.”²³ This notion of a society’s ideal can be seen as a collective consciousness by which a society sets as a standard to measure a worthwhile life. In the case of the Roman gladiators, they were the pinnacle of Roman idealism: self-reliance and bringers of victory through death. In Jupp’s case, his dare-do acts reflect an ideal in the modern sense of spectacle: it is entertainment that simulates reality. There are no substitutes in death and this makes the entertainment value of knife-throwing act appear to have a life-like quality.

Böll extends the parallel between Jupp and a Roman gladiator by providing an instance in which Jupp imitates a gladiator’s signal of submission²⁴ to the ruling elite (or emperor) before a combative match: Jupp express the wish to tickle the “Herrschaften” (MM 11). His utterance reinforces his dual characteristic of a shield and a chump, for like a gladiator Jupp is in a position that may not be

²² Scherzer Dina, “Circus’: An Exercise in Semiotics.” *Substance* 6/7, no. 17 (Autumn, 1977): 37-45. *JSTOR*. Web. 9 June 2011.

²³ The social good is a term described by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger to mean: “[...] the enduring, as distinct from the harmless meaning suitable for aunties: a good man, i.e. respectable, but without insight and power.”²³

²⁴ The gladiator’s signal of submission was to extend the right hand out (similar to a *Sieg Heil*). Böll specifically plays with this image to demonstrate the transcendent value of cultural heritage, especially in light of the Nazis’ use of the term *das Reich* and imperial takeover of other countries. More specifically, Böll illustrates that human tendencies have changed little since the days when customs and traditions were first recorded by human hands.

necessarily a result of his choice.²⁵ However, his role is akin to that of a shield in that he uses his own body to risk life and limb in order to entertain his audience: “Ich will alles tun [...] um den Herrschaften einen Kitzel zu verschaffen”(11). Nonetheless, he remains a chump, for he believes his role as a shield (entertainer) is the only means of expressing his artistic talent. He is not concerned whether his particular antics will be well received for their artistic qualities, but rather whether or not his spectacle will be judged in terms of the level of risk and violence.

The most striking element of Jupp’s constitution is that he believes to be in control of the violence within his act. But the spectacle has no inherent controllability, for the demands spectacle places on the use of violence are highly lucrative, although highly precarious. Jupp even claims he is willing to go so far as to have his ears removed during every performance. The only thing that prevents him from committing himself wholly, or in this case partially, to such a sanguine and profitable tactic is that he is incapable of finding a doctor proficient enough to sew his ears back on after the performance: “Ich will mir die Ohren abschneiden, aber es findet sich leider keiner, der sie mir wieder ankleben könnte” (11). His avowal illustrates his blind commitment to spectacle. The lengths he would go to achieve success substantiate the fact that he is not in control. His contemplation of self-mutilation reinforces a lack of respect for the power inherent in spectacle.

Shortly after Jupp’s first demonstration with the knives, he is already in need of improving the risk value of the act. Böll illustrates this point in the short timeframe in which Jupp already “ups the ante” on the risk elements. He leads the narrator to more open ground and comments: “die Sache wirkt natürlich besser, je höher das Messer fliegt” (MM 11). By placing the act in an even less-controlled environment the potential of injury is quickly multiplied. The only way Jupp believes to make spectacle a towering success is to keep making it bigger and more dangerous. The narrator mentions that the two of

²⁵ Often times gladiators were either prisoners of war (from which the gladiatorial tradition originated), captured runaway slaves, or condemned criminals.

them pass through a *verkommenes* bathroom, which Böll uses to symbolize the need to flush the refuse of rationale. The spectacle cannot appear timid: it must be bold, dynamic, and above all risky. Any hesitation due to rational thought must be flushed down the drain.

As disturbing as Jupp's behavior may appear, the narrator's imperceptive compliance with spectacle's increased risk-value is even more unsettling. Böll's narrator mentions that the "Eisenträgergerüst eines verfallenen Balkons in die Luft ragte" (12). The "rusted iron frame" functions as a representation of the ethical confines and structure supporting Jupp's use of spectacle. The narrator then comments that Jupp throws the knife so high that the blunt force of impact alone would cause considerable pain, but he walks away without any apparent pain. This nonchalant attitude, which is combined with a seemingly high tolerance for pain, leaves the narrator, as a spectator, clamoring for more. As soon as the knife collides with the wooden plank, the narrator exclaims: "das ist doch prachtvoll, Mensch [...] das ist doch eine Nummer!" (12).

Böll is able to effectively illustrate the vexing dynamic of spectacle's use of violence as power. When harnessed to a form of pleasure, violence becomes a desirable aspect of entertainment, and an accepted part of life. The fallacy lies in the belief that violence is an object which can be controlled, for often the initiator of a violent act believes to be the recognized controlling agent. However, violence demonstrates the unknown characteristics of its users. As such, violence's initiator believes to establish governance over the violent act, but, contrary to this supposition, the provocateur of the violent act is, in fact, the actual recipient of violence, though not directly in physical form. Böll shows that Jupp is duped into believing in his own ability to control spectacle's use of violence, though controllability is largely a matter of chance.²⁶ Böll places emphasis here on the need for a recognition in so far as *who* or *what* is actually in control. As Wilson Carey McWilliams claims in *On Violence and Legitimacy*: "Violence

²⁶ The controllability of violence as a matter of chance refers here to the fact that a series of unpredictable elements are inherent within the act (i.e. that the board could break when the knife makes impact or Jupp could misjudge the rate of the knife as it falls and pull the board over his head too late).

cannot change my values and desires; it can only use them (sometimes, admittedly, by knowing them better than I do myself).”²⁷

Böll next evinces another central characteristic of spectacle’s use for manipulation: sex. The application of sex-appeal further enhances the distractive qualities of spectacle. If any ethical considerations arise due to the implicit violence within Jupp’s knife-throwing act, then by providing for a further device to draw attention away from the dangerous qualities, Jupp hopes to secure spectacle’s use of manipulation that much more. Böll demonstrates the natural tendency of spectacle to augment and secure itself, as when Jupp states: “ich müßte ein halbnacktes Weib haben” (MM 12). By coupling the spectacle with the allure of sex, the spectacle is able to create an even greater attractiveness, for Jupp’s statement reaffirms the well known social phenomenon that sex helps sell. This is done by the fact that sex reproduces a code that is *la mise en scène*, which breaks the social distance between individuals, and creates an illusion of intimacy where none actually exists. In his *Spectacle de la pornographie*, Patrick Baudry states:

Dans les pratiques sexuelles de huis-clos, le tête-à-tête et le corps-à-corps ne relèvent pas que de fantaisies spontanées. [...] Chaque rapport sexuel, qui s’éprouve dans son unicité, serait ainsi le décalque répété d’un arrangement type, propre à des cultures globales ou à des groupes particuliers. Et le poids de la culture se mesurerait à cette imprégnation typique dont les corps enlacés perpétuent dès la première fois de l’engrammation technique. Ici encore deux visions se distinguent. Celle d’après laquelle le vite consiste surtout en une répétition-reproduction d’un code incorporé, et celle qui voit de potentialités: non pas le copie fidèlement gesticulée d’un récit, mais la mise en scène, inhérente de la relation de l’un avec l’autre.²⁸

However, the inherently dangerous qualities of the violent act reduce any chances of finding someone willing or desperate enough to perform the act. Jupp laments the improbability of finding someone: “aber such solch ein Weib!” (12). Böll uses Jupp’s statement to indicate that the provocateur of the violent act is only too aware of its perilous nature and demonstrates the inconsistency of Jupp’s

²⁷ McWilliams, Wilson Carey. “On Violence and Legitimacy.” *The Yale Law Journal*. Vol. 79, No. 4. Mar., 1979: 623-646. *JSTOR*. Web. 1 June 2011.

²⁸ Baudry, Patrick. “Spectacle de la pornographie.” *Ethnologie française*. nouvelle serie, T.26e. No. 2e, (Avril-Juin 1996): 302-308. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 May 2011. 302-308.

thinking. Jupp adjusts his concept of the act's violence away from himself and projects the possibility of danger onto another person, in this case, "a half naked woman." Whatever potential for harm to Jupp's person would be drastically lessened by the fact that he no longer risks throwing knives at himself. Even in an instance where Jupp could most benefit from the use of an attractive, half-clothed woman, the true nature of his plan is to protect himself from harm. Böll thus criticizes those who are too craven themselves to undergo the perils of their own risky endeavours, but profit from the use of others willing to act in their place.

Böll uses the irony of the situation to promote an understanding in terms of *who* most benefits from spectacle's use of violence. If Jupp were able to find such a woman – or anyone for that matter – then he faces no consequences in the event that he fails (i.e. injuring himself with a knife). Without risk to himself, he is able to establish his much promoted attitude of *laissez-faire*. Such a casual position is easy to maintain when no risk is involved for him. Jupp is able to convince himself that he is relieved of any responsibility. In the event that Jupp were unable to "find such a woman," at the very least, if he were to injure himself, Jupp would have the satisfaction that it was by his own hand that harm came to him. In this way, he is able to still maintain the appearance of controlling his fate, an extremely attractive character quality. Jupp's confidence aids to distract attention away from the perilous nature of the act. In turn, this adumbrates spectacle's use of danger, for such a risk-value would normally be seen in a negative light (i.e. there are few people willing to throw knives into the air and stand under them with a board). But in Jupp's case, this dare-devil stunt is made to yield a positive reaction which results in an overwhelmingly attractive allure that serves to draw out the narrator's trust.

Böll then highlights the phase of trust-giving between the two men when the narrator pulls a piece of bread out of his pocket and asks Jupp, "Darf ich dich einladen?" (12). It is through this instance of breaking bread that Böll symbolizes the narrator giving his trust to Jupp. The exchange of food as a

symbol of trust has existed throughout time and culture, for food has stood as symbolic of a ritualized bonding.²⁹ The sharing of food (or sustenance) closes the proximate distance between individuals in a social order, and has been one of the ways people have bonded for centuries. In taking part in this exchange, individuals at a group level establish a give-and-take relationship on the basis of trust. This dynamic is explicitly illustrated when Jupp offers to accommodate the narrator's bread with coffee: "O gern, aber ich will Kaffee kochen." (MM 12). Both men enter into a potlatch of sorts, in which wares and items are exchanged in the form of ritualized bonding. Abraham Rosman and Paula G. Rubel in *The Potlatch: A Structural Analysis* elucidate this concept further:

The central characteristic of the potlatch, for us, is that it represents the most formal and most elaborate of exchange processes in the societies in which it is found. Like all types of exchanges, it defines relationships both within and between groups. Exchanges define the boundaries of groups while at the same time they serve to create and sustain alliances. As one examines the links which become manifest through the process of exchange, what one is uncovering are the lines of social structure.³⁰

Now that an established exchange of bonding has been formed, Jupp makes his ploy for the narrator's acquiescence, which serves to bring him into Jupp's line with his reasoning. Jupp intimates that his act may be in doubt of success, "Es ist zum Zweifeln [...] ich glaubte, ich sehe zu ernst aus, vielleicht noch ein bißchen nach Feldwebel, was?" (MM 12). This question, intended to appear as an innocuous remark is actually intended to send a meta-message – information which is intended to be at a level where the recipient is consciously aware of the message, but at the same time does not fully recognize the message for what it is.³¹

Jupp's innocent question of appearing too much like a lieutenant is a means of imposing upon the narrator the impression of a commanding officer. By subversive means, he is able to gain the respect of the narrator, even if the narrator does not consciously recognize that he does so: "Unsinn, du bist ja

³⁰ Rosman, Abraham, and Rubel, Paula G., "The Potlatch: A Structural Analysis." *American Anthropologist*, New Series 74, no. 3 (June, 1972): 658-671. *JSTOR*. Web. 1 July 2011.

³¹ Tannen, Deborah. *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc., Quill, 2001. Print.

nie ein Feldweibel gewesen" (MM 12). Whether or not Jupp was a lieutenant does not matter, for the message has been sent that he is the narrator's superior. The potlatch-like exchange of "coffee and bread" opened the door for Jupp to send a meta-message that projects an image of equality, while at the same time he uses the ritualized form of bonding as a mechanism to bring the narrator into his line of reasoning. Given the time period in which the story takes place, Böll directly brings to the reader's attention the fact that in the post-war era there were still numerous Nazis in positions of official social standing who used their authority to suit their own means.

The notions of trust and the meta-message are used in conjunction with the most important element of persuasion: coupling of emotional responses with fear. The specific arousal of fear often increases reaction toward a social issue. This particular use of fear is used explicitly by Jupp to entice the narrator into accepting the act as something which is controllable. When people are frightened, they tend to react more quickly and without hesitation. John R. Stuteville suggests that "fear might be highly effective as a motivator if the person subjected to it had a weak tie to the behavior being propagandized against, or if the person could extinguish the source of danger in a single act so that it would not upset entrenched or treasured habits."³²

In *Der Mann mit den Messern*, the narrator's perspective is from the position of spectator, he may fear that harm could occur to Jupp through his knife-throwing act, though the narrator, for the time being, is in no danger. Böll illustrates the process by which the slow manipulation of others takes place. The first instance in which the narrator is manipulated is in when he remains complacent to the violence of Jupp's act and even applauds the act for its exciting qualities. But Jupp slowly uses the indirect route of fear as source of leverage over the narrator. The fear-arousing parameters of the act are downplayed by Jupp to the point that he appears to have control over the violence. This illusion of control is

³² Stuteville John R. "Psychic Defenses against High Fear Appeals: A Key Marketing Variable." *The Journal of Marketing* 34, no. 2 (April, 1970): 39-45. JSTOR. Web. 29 June 2011.

intensified by the high probability that Jupp may be struck by a knife. The inherent risk of the knife-throwing act appears to espouse reality. In turn, this projects an image that correlates into the narrator's belief that Jupp does not intend to deceive his audience.

Jupp surreptitiously injects fear into his spectators and then reroutes the pensive mood of the knife-throwing act in order to suit his own personal motives. He conspicuously attempts to mask the dangerous qualities by proclaiming that the reason for the act is to help people forget their fears through the use of laughter:

Der mit dem Messer, verdammt, der hatte keine Angst, und ich hab immer Angst, verdammt, wird er vielleicht sagen, denn sie haben alle immer Angst. Sie schleppen die Angst hinter sich wie einen schweren Schatten, und ich freu mich, wenn sie's vergessen und ein bißchen lachen. Ist das kein Grund zum Lächeln? (MM 13).

Jupp recognizes that fear is a device which prohibits his audience from forgetting about him. If, however, "[the] fear message contradicts reality, rejection is the probable outcome."³³ Thus, Jupp uses fear to create a memorable moment, to which he openly admits, while at the same time he projects an attitude of concern for the well-being of his audience. These statements suit his purpose, but go unnoticed by the narrator who continues to passively accept Jupp's assertions as truth.

Section II.

Use of Masks, Leader Figures, and Nostalgia

The aforementioned notion of Jupp masking his true intentions is further elucidated by the fact that he uses a mask-of-laughter: "wenn sie's vergessen und ein bißchen lachen" (13). The role of the mask plays an important concept within societies around the world. The Swiss psychiatrist C. G. Jung, who founded Analytical Psychology, demonstrates the importance of the use of masks in societies:

The symbolic function of the mask is the same as that of the original animal disguise. Individual human expression is submerged, but in its place the wearer assumes the dignity and the beauty

³³ Stuteville, *Ibid.* 41.

(and also the horrifying expression) of an animal demon. In psychological terms, the mask transforms its wearer into an archetypal image.³⁴

In Jupp's case, he uses the mask-of-laughter to project an image of someone who is relaxed, in control, and simply wishes to bring joy to the hearts of his audience in order that they forget their daily worries: "Ist das kein Grund zum Lächeln" (MM 12). A blithe personal character is highly seductive and produces an image of confidence without an overbearing attitude of a belligerent individual. This is seen in Jupp's reference to a *Feldweibel*, whose image of a stern and violent figure still lingers from the war. Jupp correlates this image with his purported purpose to make his audience laugh. Jupp assumes the mask of a confident, fear-inspiring leader, but one who is also like his fellow citizen, and wants to forget the war.

Böll uses these contradistinctive images to illustrate how they go hand in hand when controlling other people. The war left deep and bitter wounds on the German psyche. The ability to laugh is a sign of healing, but Böll warns his reader of the danger in laughing for the wrong purposes. Jupp's desire to help people overcome the memories of war through the use of laughter is to suit his own purpose. Böll shows the desecrative qualities of Jupp's true intentions in relation to his purported merriment when the narrator says that he would not be able to smile in a cemetery and Jupp responds: "Das ist ein großer Fehler, gerade auf 'nem Friedhof muß man lächeln" (12).

Böll uses these moments to demonstrate a slow process of manipulation through trust, which eventually leads to Jupp casually asking the narrator what line of work he does: "Was machst du eigentlich?" (13). It is through this question that Jupp attempts to discover a specific knowledge for his own purpose. Böll's narrator responds through a figurative language that emphasizes his menial state, for the narrator's "job" is to search for a hundred stones to hammer "für das Brot" (13). This is something akin to working for peanuts. The narrator's statement illustrates a lack of decent paying jobs

³⁴ Jung, Carl G. *Man and his Symbols*. Dell Publishing, as a division of Random House, Inc. London: Aldus Books, Limited, 1964. Print.

in the immediate post-war period. This knowledge is something Jupp uses to his own benefit, for he is about to incorporate a new mask into his retinue: the image of a bread-giver.

Jupp is able to turn the image of a “healer” into the even more powerful image of a leader figure, who is capable of providing opportunity for employment: the ultimate signifier of war’s wounds being healed. This exchange of information occurs in daily life and appears harmless, but Böll provides a close look at the language and situations people use to manipulate others into doing their bidding. The notion of a bread-giver (i.e. “employment-provider”) subtly hints at one of the many masks used by Hitler as the figure of *der Führer*.³⁵ Böll does not essentially mean this to stand as Hitler per se, but rather any political figure that embodies a similar image. This can be understood as an expression of a cultural symbol:

We are not only confronted with the symbol itself, but we are brought up against the wholeness of the symbol-producing individual. This includes a study of his cultural background, and in the process one fills in many gaps in one’s own education. [...]Cultural symbols [...] are those that have been used to express “eternal truths,” and that are still used in many religions. They have gone through many transformations and even a long process of more or less conscious development, and have thus become collective images accepted by civilized societies.³⁶

In Böll’s *Der Mann mit den Messern*, Jupp, in much the same way as the Nazis, seizes on the left-over symbolic “spell” of the leader figure. These individuals are seen by Böll as posing a serious threat to the stability of any society, but especially in the post-war years. This time frame was a period of intense rebuilding for Germany, but the potential for danger is summarized by Böll in one word:

“Gelegenheitsarbeiter” (MM 13). The immediate post-Second World War era was in fact very similar to that of the post-war period of 1919, though the physical destruction and loss of life were not as severe

³⁵ In this context, the role of a leader figure has a special cultural image for Germans. The long-time existence of the Kaiser in German culture can be seen as a leader figure or *Führer*. This particular image stood as a cultural symbol since the crowing of Charlemagne on Christmas Day, 800 A.D., and was only brought to conclusion in 1919 after the First World War, when the *Kaisertum* was forced into abdication by the Triple Entente. The dilapidated state of the economy in the late 1920’s provided ample opportunity for the exploitation of such cultural symbols. Nazi rhetoric had been extremely persuasive and made use of the symbolic leader-figure in Hitler.

³⁶ Jung, *Ibid.* 81-83.

as that of 1945 there was still the potential for social unrest and seizure of power similar to that which had been orchestrated by the Nazis.

The economic potential Germany provided Hitler with a powerful mechanism to induce an apparent turnaround in the economy. To this end, Böll has Jupp ask the narrator what line of work he has, already knowing that his job prospects at best are minimal. In addition to the fact of a shortage of jobs in post-Second World War Germany, the narrator has a physical injury, which reduces his already scarce chances for finding employment: “Was machst du eigentlich? [...] Nichts...ich schlage mich durch. [...] Ein schwerer Beruf. [...] Ja – für das Brot habe ich hundert Steine suchen und klopfen müssen. Gelegenheitsarbeiter” (13). Böll uses his unnamed, and up to this point, undefined narrator to illustrate the plight of many Germans following the war. Through the use of his one-dimensional narrator, Böll fashions a figure with which many people in Germany would have been able to identify. He unabashedly draws attention to the potential danger such a period presents in terms of societal manipulation, for in such times people tend to look for a leader-figure who can act as a savior.

Often the concept of a leader-figure is developed on a mythic scale, for the artificial use of language can leave a lasting impression on those who readily adhere to the message. These qualities can be spellbinding in that fear of hunger helps to eliminate the reservoirs of rationality:

Reading Hitler’s speeches today, many people find it difficult to understand their effect on his audiences. But his listeners were people in despair, feeling victimized and haunted by inner demons, starved for good news and stimulation, and indifferent to rational programs and logical arguments. The Führer demanded from them faith and devotion, promising in return certainty and the security of a new, protective and apparently meaningful community [...]³⁷

Jupp demonstrates similar means of manipulation. He uses spectacle and its magical, mythical qualities to create the appearance of safety and control, which he continues to prove as espousing reality by augmenting the risk element of his act. After giving his second and even more daring

³⁷ Schulze, Hagen. *Germany: A New History*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press, 1998. Print.

performance under the “Eisenträgergerüst eines verfallenen Balkons,” Jupp turns to the narrator and asks him: “hast du Lust, noch eins meiner Kunststücke zu sehen” (MM 15). When it seems that the spellbinding can get no bigger, the real wizardry is unveiled. Jupp pulls a “seltsames Etui” from of a secret door, which the narrator failed noticed: “Bei näherem Zusehen sah ich, daß er auf eine geschickt getarnte Tür gezeichnet war. Ich beobachtete gespannt, wie Jupp nun unter seiner Kümmerlichen Liegestatt einen hübschen braunen Koffer hervorzog, den er auf den Tisch stellte” (13). The narrator mentions it in passing, as something which is always there, yet goes unnoticed. In Jungian terms, the secret door functions like an object of potential or an untapped energy which is waiting to be used. It needs only to be accessed.

The contents of the etui are thirteen knives, which the narrator comments were from the days when “our mothers used to dance the *Walz* and were called *Jagdbesteck*” (MM 14). These two words indicate an interesting socio-linguistic reference. Often, in order to tap into this reservoir of “potential energy,” a leader-figure will create an illusion of nostalgia. Here, the definition of nostalgia is understood to be what Fred Davis in *Yearning for Yesterday* describes as:

[...] from the Greek *nostos*, to return home, and *algia*, a painful condition – thus, a painful yearning to return home. [...] In short, *home* is no longer where the hearth is. This, of course, is not to say that for moderns the body of sentiments and images the term conveys no longer exists or is incapable of being experienced. [...] Because, then, home as such can for so many no longer evoke the remembrance of things past” it once did, it has fallen to other words, “nostalgia” among them, to comprehend the sometimes pedestrian, sometimes disjunctive, and sometimes eerie sense we care of our own past and of its meaning for present and future.³⁸

This description provides a firm understanding of the power cultural images can create, especially in terms of *Kaiser* and *Reich*. The reference to the “days of our mothers” illustrates the notion of a lack in

³⁸ Davis, Fred. *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. New York: Free Press, A Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1979.

terms of a *Kaisertum*, which was brought to an end after the First World War and subsequently created a rift in German cultural identity. This opened the door for a longing of a past identity based on the cultural concept of a Kaiser at the helm, governing his people.

The function of nostalgia as a tool for manipulation can be seen by Böll's use of the words *Jagdbesteck* and *Walz* that carry the inherent cultural signifier of Wilhelmine Germany. The structure of the word *Jagdbesteck* indicates two very disparate meanings, which once formed into a compound create a new meaning. Böll uses this loss of a cultural identity to demonstrate a key component within German identity, which results in a nostalgic longing. To continue with Davis' description of nostalgia from above:

To conceive of nostalgic experience as encompassing some necessary inner dialogue between past and present is not to suggest that the two sides in the dialogues are of equal strength, independence, or resonance or that there is even any serious doubt over which way the conversation is destined to go. While both speakers must be present and engaged, as it were, for nostalgia's mise-en-scène to fall into place, [...] it is *always* the adoration of the past that triumphs over lamentations for the present.³⁹

The instance where Jupp references the knives as from the "days of our mothers" stresses a temporal connection to the bygone era of Wilhelmine – i.e., an era in which German society was ostensibly vibrant and diverse, but also is indicative of a Germany still under the leadership of a *Kaiser*. In contradistinction, the post-war period of the late 1940s, in which *Der Mann mit den Messern* unfolds would have had an appearance of something otherworldly in comparison to that of the Wilhelmine era. The lack of a clear social identity creates a situation that is ripe for manipulation. Any former recognition of a past identity, not only psychologically but physically, was made almost impossible. The topographical features of Germany's former cosmopolitan cities were shattered. The destruction was so complete that there seemed little hope of ever being able to return Germany to its previously sophisticated state of a cultural capital. This is clearly demonstrated by David Rodnick's description of Germany immediately following the war: "Other countries in Europe have had some of their cities

³⁹ Davis, *Ibid.* 1-6.

destroyed, but all of Germany's principal industrial cities have been severely damaged in varying degrees."⁴⁰

Before the war, under the leadership of the Nazis, Germany still held a semblance of its former cultural identity, even though the Nazis ardently sought to undo any vestiges of an immediate culture identity as quickly as possible. They went about the eradication of unwanted cultural symbols in the same brutal fashion as they had done when they eliminated their political enemies at the inchoate stages of their seizure of power. Any remnants of a previously cosmopolitan German culture were annihilated with the same efficiency as that of an enemy of the state: "cultural life was also 'politically coordinated' – i.e., delivered up to National Socialism. No matter whether traditional or contemporary, anything that did not fit in with the 'national' conception of literature and art was obliterated."⁴¹

Böll uses the narrator's reference to "the days of our mothers" in order to emphasize two distinct cultural elements of Wilhelmine Germany. On one hand this was an era when duty and propriety were sacrosanct (at least through the lens of nostalgia). On the other hand, the rise of the Nazis forced the cultural vestiges of Wilhelmine Germany to take on new cultural meaning: Wilhelminian propriety was confronted with the violent nature of the Nazis. As Ernst Johann and Jörg Junker state in *Deutsche Kulturgeschichte der letzten hundert Jahre (1860-1960)*: "Hitler signified a challenge to everything that had hitherto distinguished the German character."⁴² As this new identity emerged for Germany, there was a need for these two disparate cultural identities to unite, which Böll emphasizes in the use of the word *Jagdbesteck*. The term carries the symbolic, but split notions of *Jagd* or "the hunt" (i.e. a primitive and violent act) and *Besteck* or "tableware" (i.e. a connotation of

⁴⁰ Rodnick, David. *Postwar Germans: An Anthropologist's Account*. New Haven Yale University Press, 1948. Print.

⁴¹ Johann, Ernst, and Jörg Junker. *Deutsche Kulturgeschichte Der Letzten Hundert Jahre (1860-1960)*. Munich, 1970. In conjunction with INTER NATIONES. Bonn. Text 1961-1980: Hans Dollinger. Munich Nymphenburger Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1983. Print.

⁴² Johann Ernst, and Jörg Junker, *Ibid.* 158.

propriety). Böll's use of the word signifies the barbaric imagery of Nazism in relation to the notions of Wilhelmine concepts of a well-mannered society.

Jagd emphasizes the ancient and uncivilized elements of primitive societies, whereas the use of tableware creates a concept of unity through images of partaking of food.⁴³ The implicit notion here is the split identity between these two symbolic references. The Wilhelmine era espoused the ideal of propriety and good-manners and was a time when "turn-of-the-century Germans took pride in another old virtue historically synonymous with their name: good order."⁴⁴ *A comme il faut* was ubiquitous during this period. In turn, this image creates a notion of the banquet: a place in which "good order" was the only manner by which to behave. The image of banquet holds two forms: the official banquet form that reaffirmed the social order and the popular-festive form. It was the latter form, which the Russian literary critic and semiotics theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, in his *Rablais and His World*, describes as has having had:

[...] the power of liberating the word from the shackles of piousness and fear of God. Everything became open to play and merriment. [...] This tendency contained in the popular-festive images encounters and is ambiguously interwoven with individual and class gluttony and cupidity.⁴⁵

Bakhtin's reference to class gluttony and cupidity is especially important in context to Böll's use of the word *Jagdbesteck*, for it highlights the opposing qualities within Wilhelmine Germany. Underneath the outward spectacle of decorum was a superficiality of mass consumerism and human suffering. The official image of propriety and decorum helped posit a secure sense of complacency in the world, which was interwoven with the unprecedented consumerism to create an image of a social body split between two extremes. Böll portrays the "good old days" as not actually having been that great.

⁴³ Please see above section on the importance of breaking of bread, specifically Abraham Rosman and Paula G. Rubel's "The Potlatch: A Structural Analysis" (*Ibid.*).

⁴⁴ Ozment, Steven. *A Mighty Fortress: A New History of the German People*. New York: HarperCollins. First Perennial Edition Published 2005. Print.

⁴⁵ Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rablais and His World*. Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1968. Print.

The old notions of Wilhelmine Germany were coupled with a “booming German economy (that) was fueling increasing personal consumption and thereby creating new forms of cultural expression and new anxieties about their possible meaning.”⁴⁶

The social-cultural split of the Wilhelmine era was further subjugated to more strain after the Nazis seized power in 1933. Their ideals of the ancient Germanic traditions were infused with notions of Wilhelmine order, propriety, and the grotesque of mass consumerism. Germany identity needed to come to terms with its new identity before being able moving forward, but was given no opportunity under the Nazis to do so.⁴⁷ This led to a pandemonium of cultural identity, since no time to adjust to the new cultural identity was allowed by the Nazis. Only those cultural symbols which re-enforced the Nazis’ identity were granted. The result was a serious strain on the meaning of cultural signs and social identity, which created an identity that appeared to be oxymoronic, like the word *Jagdbesteck*.

An important element which Böll makes use of is the fact that cultural identity is created by generational heritage. This is done largely through rituals that perpetuate traditions, which in turn provide an instance by which the younger members of society can evaluate the purported meanings of their progenitor’s culture. Böll describes this concept of generational heritage when Jupp gives an anecdotal account of how he came into possession of the etui: “[...] ist das einzige, was ich vom Besitz meiner Eltern gerettet habe” (MM 14). The etui proves to be a totem of sorts and provides a portal to a world that was wiped out, first by the Nazis and then later by the war, as Jupp says: “alles verbrannt, verschüttet, und der Rest gestohlen” (14). Böll’s placement of the etui as a cultural object, with its inherently split identity, reflects on the position of German identity split into various parts: Wilhelmine, Nazi, and post-Nazi identity.

⁴⁶ Hamlin, David. “Romanticism, Spectacle, and a Critique of Wilhelmine Consumer Capitalism.” *Central European History* 38, no. 2. (2005): 250-268. *JSTOR*. Web. 19 July 2011.

⁴⁷ Here I specifically mean “new identity” in terms of no longer having a government based on the notion of a *Kaiser* as the pinnacle of social order.

Böll uses the manner in which Jupp attained the etui to illustrate social identity as something passed on by generations, but he also demonstrates the Nazis' and the subsequent war's destruction of this cultural "passing on." The woman who gave Jupp the etui, which was all he had left of his familial heritage, was "wenige Tage (später), [...] von den Bomben getötet" (15). This can be seen as a reference to the specifically destructive nature the war had on German identity. By the war's end, so little was left of what it meant to be German that whatever remained had an important social value. To this end, however, Jupp sardonically comments: "Wir wissen ja, daß die Leute, wenn sie die Angst des Untergangs ergriffen hat, die merkwürdigsten Dinge zu retten versuchen" (15). Böll expresses the notion that the leftover cultural artifacts of Germany's cultural past need to be preserved, but that cultural identity of Nazism, which was still held in place by the rise of the post-war economic boom and individuals who aided the Nazis come to power, needed to be reckoned with first, before a coming to terms could take place. Jupp ironically scorns the relatively scant evidence of a German cultural identity, when he states that people never save "das Notwendige" (15).

Böll uses the symbolism of generational heritage as a means to signify the passing of a metaphorical torch in terms of economic prosperity. In a larger socio-economic context, the analogy of a totem object as a cultural item to support itself extended to both Germany's cultural heritage and economic power. The etui and knives of Jupp's mother became a source of income for him. The natural progression of culture objects, if understood as a metaphor for cultural identity or fiscal capability, from the past to the present, are a totem object in their own right. As Lévi-Strauss explains in *Totemism*, "the term totemism covers relations, posed ideologically, between two series, one natural, the other cultural."⁴⁸ Böll uses the etui, a source of revenue for Jupp, to signify the totem-like quality of the German economy, which still held a semblance of its bygone might, even though the economy may initially have appeared to be in a state of ruins on account of the massive bombing raids. The important

⁴⁸ Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Totemism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1963. Print.

point Böll highlights is the phoenix-like quality for recovery in terms of culture and economy. Böll uses the apparently disqualified totem object (i.e. the etui) to reaffirm that German cultural identity can regain its cultural position of prominence without having to signify Nazism. The misuse of past identity and the economy by the Nazis, however, must first be dealt with before any progress can be achieved in terms of understanding what cultural heritage and identity signify for a post-war Germany.

Section III.

Memories of War, the Messianic Trickster, and the Modern Grotesque

In *Der Mann mit den Messern*, Böll grounds the memories of Germany's cultural past through the experience of the Second World War, as when Jupp states:

Als ich elend und zerlumpt aus der Gefangenschaft kam, besaß ich nichts – bis eines Tages eine vornehme alte Dame, Bekannte meiner Mutter, mich ausfindig gemacht hatte und mir dieses hübsche kleine Köfferschen überbrachte. Wenige Tage, bevor sie von den Bomben getötet wurde, hatte meine Mutter dieses kleine Ding bei ihr sichergestellt, und es war gerettet worden. Seltsam. Nicht wahr? (MM 14).

This endeavor to relate experiences, especially those of war, is the myth-making process in its original function, and is largely formulated through the use of symbolic images. Böll extends the use of myth as a device for dealing with war experiences even further, when the narrator describes Jupp's third knife-throwing trick in which he throws all twelve knives "blitzschnell [...] gegen den schattenhaften Mann an der Tür, der jenen grauenhaften schwankenden Gestalt ähnelte, die uns gegen Ende des Krieges als Vorboten des Untergangs von allen Plakatsäulen, aus allen möglichen ecken entgegen schaukelten" (MM 14). Böll uses the symbolic image of "downfall" to illustrate Jupp's dismay with Germany's demise in the war, for the thirteenth knife "stak wie ein tödlicher Pfeil dort, wo das Herz des Mannes hätte sein müssen" (15). The ambiguous figure on the door, which serves as a symbol of Germany's loss in the war, serves as target practice for Jupp's knife trick. Böll demonstrates the hypocrisy of people like Jupp, who

make a living in the post-war period at the expense of others: “Fehlt nur der Mann, besser noch das Weib. Ach” (14).

In Jupp’s case, he uses time-telling to project such an illusion: “komm [...] wir müssen gehen. [...] es ist ein paar Minuten vor acht, um halb neun ist mein Auftritt.”⁴⁹ Jupp begins to emerge as a Faustian sorcerer of sorts, who is ascribed to have “progressed from the word, to the thought, then to the notion of power, and ended with the deed.”⁵⁰ A similar pattern becomes evident when Jupp responds to the narrator’s question as to how he can tell time without a clock, “aus dem Gefühl – das gehört mit zu meinem Training” (15). The narrator can only stare back *verständnislos*, which is the reaction Jupp has sought to create. However, as awe-inspiring as the effects of magical attitude can have on others, it is inherently ironic, because the hypnotic powers of the sorcerer are actually more effective on himself than on other people: “The sorcerer is not in the least conscious of fraud.”⁵¹

Böll’s depiction of his figure Jupp, in many respects, illustrates an individual ignorant of his own fraud. The fact that Jupp is aware of his scandalous behavior, but fails to recognize his fraudulent acts is indicative of the trickster figure. This figure plays an important role in myth, for the trickster often appears in situations of reality *à l’envers* (i.e. reality upside-down), which is a common occurrence in myth. The reality within Böll’s *Der Mann mit den Messern* is that of post-war Germany: a time that would have seemed like the inverted reality of myth. However, this inversion of reality was real. Böll uses the figure of Jupp, as trickster, to show the surreal qualities of the post-war period, for in myth reality *à l’envers* is the moment the trickster flourishes. It is here in this inverted time frame that the greatest advantage for taking advantage of others exists. Ayana Smith defines the characteristic of a

⁴⁹ Böll, *Ibid.* 15.

⁵⁰ Tambia S. J. “The Magical Power of Words.” *Man*, New Series 3, no. 2 (June, 1968): 175-208. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 July 2011.

⁵¹ Hogbin H. Ian. “Sorcery and Administration.” *Oceania* 6, no. 1 (September, 1935): 1-32. *JSTOR*. 27 June 2011.

trickster as “one who flouts the norms of society, uses cunning, humor and deceit to obtain personal gain.”⁵²

In this upside-down world, Jupp is able to profit from the situation and create a third and even more powerful cultural symbol: the messianic figure. His creation evinces itself when the narrator mentions his bodily ailments as Jupp helps him into his jacket: “Meine Schulter ist ein wenig gelähmt, und über einen beschränkten Radius kann ich die Arme nicht bewegen, es genügt gerade zum Steineklopfen” (MM 15). This can be seen much like a supplicant before Christ or a saintly icon. Böll portrays Jupp as having created an aura of divine purpose (i.e. giving comfort to the sick, destitute, and lame), which can be seen to symbolize the ego-driven concept Hitler had of himself. This is easily recognizable from his March 13, 1938 speech made in Vienna and reported by *The New York Times*: “I believe it was God’s will to send this Austrian boy to the Reich and to permit him to return as a mature man to reunite the two great sections of the German people. [...] Everything that has happened must have been preordained by Divine Will.”⁵³

Böll sees the post-war years, the defeat of Germany, and individuals like Jupp who portray themselves as healers/leaders as a potential for future problems. The humiliation and responsibility of the war left indelible marks on its participants, as is the case of the narrator’s physical invalidity which inhibits him from being able to perform work tasks other than “Steineklopfen.” A deep sense of alienation was felt by the German population, most especially by the soldiers who returned. This is most poignantly expressed by Wolfgang Borchert in his 1947 play *Draussen vor der Tür*: “Ein Mann kommt nach Deutschland. Und da erlebt er einen ganz tollen Film. Er muß sich während der Vorstellung mehrmals in den Arm kneifen, denn er weiß nicht, ob er wacht order träumt. Aber dann sieht er, daß es

⁵² Smith Ayana. “Blues, Criticism, and the Signifying Trickster.” *Popular Music* 24, no. 2 (May, 2005): 179-191. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 July 2011.

⁵³ Yourman, Julius. “Propaganda Techniques Within Nazi Germany.” *Journal of Educational Sociology* 13, no. 3 (November, 1939): 178-168. *JSTOR*. Web. 28 May 2011.

rechts und links neben ihm noch mehr Leute gibt, die alle dasselbe erleben. Und er denkt, daß es dann doch wohl die Wahrheit sein muß.“⁵⁴

Böll's narrator can be seen as a similar representation in terms of alienation. His is a figure that illustrates a grotesque figure of humiliation, and one which is essential to the modern concept of the grotesque, wherein modern man is “not alienated man but humiliated man.”⁵⁵ The humiliation, alienation, and the wounds of the war, whether physical or emotional, most often both, were seared into the German psyche after the war. The physical defeat of Germany was merely outward and superficial in form, whereas the emotional and ideological concepts (i.e. of Nazism and its defeat) were still deeply entrenched in the German soul. Böll thus portrays Jupp as an illusion of a messianic figure who plays on these old notions and irritates the festering wounds. For many Germans the propaganda of those years and its lingering influence were undeniable, as “they would, for example, instinctively refer to the Allied bombing raids as ‘Terrorangriffe’ (Goebbels’s phrase) and not use the ordinary term of ‘Luftangriffe’ or air attacks.”⁵⁶

If seen in connection to the First World War and the harsh conditions of the Versailles Treaty placed on Germany in 1919, then the image of a messianic figure becomes more easily understood. These same kinds of physical and psychological wounds were found in the veterans of the First World War and their plight in the post-First World War era provided fertile ground for the seeds of the mythic notion of *Dolchstoß* – “the ‘stab in the back’ legend – that a cowardly homeland, permeated by pacifism, had stabbed the back of the troops fighting so bravely at the front.”⁵⁷ The belief in a messianic/savior figure became necessary. As Harry C. Meserve explains the character of the savior figure is one who

⁵⁴ Brochert, Wolfgang. *Draussen vor der Tür*. Modern German Drama. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1966. Pub. by Edgar Lohner and Hunter G. Hannum. Print.

⁵⁵ Mc Elroy, Bernard. *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque*. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1989.

⁵⁶ Beevor, Antony. *Berlin: The Downfall 1945*. England: Clays Ltd. St Ives plc, Penguin Books, 2004. Print.

⁵⁷ Johann, Ernst and Junker Jörg, *Ibid*. 128.

“teaches, performs miracles, heals the sick, communicates the secret of salvation to a band of followers, and to a smaller group of especially close disciples.”⁵⁸

Section IV.

Unearned Abilities and Gifts via Myth

Jupp correlates the messianic/savior figure with magical attitude in order to solidify his hold over the narrator, when he purports to have understood the ways of the cosmos: “Es ist so [...] ich habe mich bemüht, gewissen kosmischen Gestezen auf die Spur zu kommen” (MM 15). His illusion is persuasive for the narrator, because Jupp plays on the mythic concepts of history. This is shown when the narrator connects Jupp’s savior status to the mythic figure of Icarus as Jupp stretches out his arms, the narrator comments: “wie auf manchen antiken Bildern Ikarus abgebildet ist. [...] Auf seinem nüchternen Gesicht (Jupp’s) erschien etwas seltsam Kühl-Träumerisches, etwas halb Besessenes und halb Kaltes, Magisches, das mich maßlos erschreckte” (15). This connection with Jupp to Icarus by the narrator is a process described by Lévi-Strauss as one in which “the open character of history is secured by the innumerable ways according to which mythical cells, or explanatory cells were originally mythical, can be arranged and rearranged.”⁵⁹

Böll uses the ancient notion of myth to create a modern day version, for the myth of Icarus draws a parallel between the figure of Jupp and Germany’s history with Nazism. In both instances, the leading figures obtained gifts which they had not earned. In the ancient Greek myth of Icarus, he (Icarus) is given the gift of knowledge of flight by his father. In Jupp’s case, he received the etui with the knives from his mother, which are seen to represent a means for earning a living. In the same sense, the Nazis

⁵⁸ Meserve Harry C. “Editorial: How to Be a Savior.” *Journal of Religion and Health* 19, no. 2 (Summer, 1980): 79-82. *JSTOR*. Web. 14 June 2011.

⁵⁹ Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Myth and Meaning*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978. [First published by Schocken Books, 1979] Print.

had received the gift and knowledge of Germany's economic ability. Germany's economy had been formed through decades of careful building – in the days of *their* (emphasis mine) mothers –and a “passing on” of that knowledge to posterity. After the Nazis seized power, they inherited an “ability/knowledge” which they had not earned. In both cases, Icarus and the Nazis used their gifts inappropriately, and thus brought ruin down upon their own heads. Icarus pays no heed to his father's warnings not to fly too high, for the heat of the sun would melt the wax used to bind the feathers of his wings. Böll uses the myth of Icarus in *Der Mann mit den Messern* in order to explain a tendency for individuals to assume that a gift given to them is representative of something they earned. In other words, they feel that they are entitled to use the gift however they please. Böll attempts to ground this tendency in myth as a means by which future generations may learn the lesson of the past and understand the perverted use of Germany's economic power by the Nazis.

The time frame in which the narrator and Jupp find themselves represents a moment that is rife with economic instability and the humiliation of defeat. Böll draws a parallel with the post-First World War era and that of the post-Second World War. After the First World War, the Nazis were able to reign in the fears of the economic crisis, which they filtered through the age-old Germanic myths of a savior figure in the form *der Führer*. They were able to create moments of pure nationalistic fervor and emotional up-swelling that culminated in a loss of rationale. The figure of Jupp not only represents, in caricature form, a figure of Hitler, but also the type of rhetorical language that feeds into such demagoguery:

The National-Socialists seemed to have made the age-old dream of the Germans come true: a strong state in which only one man's will prevailed – that of the Führer, in which only one political ideology was authoritative – that of the National-Socialist Party [...] But the dream of a strong state remained a figment of the imagination. The Third Reich was not a totalitarian state;

it was a caricature of one – a caricature reflecting all the dreams, hopes and ideas of the early Nazi leaders as they constructed their authoritarian state.⁶⁰

Just as Hitler and the Nazis pandered to the hopes and dreams of people by creating a myth of a well-ordered government and prosperous society in terms of economic prosperity, Jupp also projects this same image. Perhaps not with the same intensity as Hitler, but without doubt, Böll adumbrates the same process by which these figures manipulate society and people. This becomes apparent when Jupp draws an analogy between himself and what symbolizes the manner by which the Nazis and Hitler seized power:

Ich greife einfach hinein in die Atmosphäre, und ich spüre, wie meine Hände länger und länger werden und wie sie hinaufgreifen in einen Raum, in dem andere Gesetze gültig sind, sie stoßen durch eine Decke, und dort oben liegen seltsame, bezaubernde Spannungen, die ich greife, einfach greife...und dann zerre ich ihre Gesetze, packe sie, halb räuberisch, halb wollüstig und nehme sie mit! (MM 15-16)

Masked behind the illusion of control, the promise of a panacea tends to cause people to follow without question. A tendency Böll illustrates when Jupp says to the narrator, “Komm” (16) and the narrator “folgte ihm benommen...,” (16) though the narrator does not say where Jupp is leading him, nonetheless he follows. The two men arrive at the *Sieben Mühlen* – the “Seven Mills,” which the narrator describes as the endpoint of reality *à l’envers*, for beyond the threshold only truth can be found: “[...] das Portal zum Verité war leer” (16). Böll depicts the world of spectacle as the place where truth now emerges as the signifier of reality. In essence, the “portal to truth” is uninhabited and suggests that no dalliances are made or questions raised by the narrator in terms of the appropriateness of crossing this threshold. Spectacle and illusion situate the world as it truly is in the post-war era: upside-down.

The narrator comments that the show has already begun, yet aware of the illusion, he crosses the boundary of reason into the world of phantasmagoria: “Jupp zeigte lachend auf ein Foto in den

⁶⁰ Höhne, Heinz. *THE ORDER of THE DEATH’S HEAD: THE STORY of HITLER’S SS*. Trans. Richard Barry. London: Stand. Penguin Books Ltd, 2000. Print.

Aushängekästen, wo er in einem Cowboyskostüm zwischen zwei süß lächelnden Tänzerinnen hing, deren Brüste mit schillerndem Flitter bespannt waren” (16). It is here that spectacle begins to gain an irresistible momentum, making the impossibility of return ever more difficult. The narrator feels unable to resist: “komm, sagte Jupp wieder, und ehe ich mich besonnen hatte, war ich in einen schlecht erkennbaren schmalen Eingang gezerrt” (16). He is drawn farther and farther down the rabbit hole of myth, illusion and spectacle, and suggests that spectacle is calling him onward: “durch schäbigrote Portieren hindurch erreichte uns der summende Lärm der Menge” (16).

Section V.

Past and Present Spectacles as an Inhibitor of Reflection

Böll reiterates spectacle’s use of sex as a device to distract. His narrator mentions a photo of Jupp in a cowboy costume with two dancers whose outfits are adorned with tassels dangling off their breasts. The image seems out of place. However, this irregularity is quickly clarified if the timeframe of the narration is considered: immediate post-war Germany. The two protagonists are in the Western Zone of Occupation, which is probably the American Sector (given the reference to “cowboy costume”). Böll uses this barely noticeable reference in order to draw an ironic analogy to Germany’s position as a divided nation between its conquerors, which in turn are also divided (i.e. Soviet Communism and Western Capitalism stand toe to toe with Germany as a potential battlefield). The German people are caught in the middle of a dangerous situation with nowhere to turn. Böll reflects on the situation when the narrator comments that after following Jupp past the “portal to truth,” he finds himself in an impossible situation: stuck in a narrow corridor. The narrator is in a position that can be seen to represent Germany as firmly closed in on all sides. Böll uses this imagery to draw awareness to the road Germany may be led down, if spectacle in post-war Germany is allowed to guide the way.

Once the narrator enters the narrow hallway, he can only follow Jupp: “Komm, sagte Jupp wieder, und ehe ich mich besonnen hatte, war ich in einen schlecht erkennbaren schmalen Eingang gezerrt” (16). Jupp recognizes the narrator’s apprehensiveness. Perhaps detecting the initial stages of retreat, Jupp readdresses the narrator’s faltering commitment by asking him about his level of courage: “Er packte mich an den Schultern [...] und fragte mich leise: ‘Hast du Mut?’” (16). In this case, Jupp uses litotes – an emphasis by not emphasizing what is meant – to call the narrator’s bravery into question. The narrator comments that while the question was expected, the suddenness of it still grips him with fear: “Ich hatte diese Frage schon lange erwartet, daß mich ihre Plötzlichkeit nun erschreckte” (16). In an ironic fashion, the narrator recognizes that he has plenty of courage, but only “der Mut der Verzweiflung” (16). His only recourse of action is to remain silent. It is through his use of *silentium altum* – a deep silence – that the narrator is able to create a language of resistance, while he also uses it to establish some kind of control over the situation he finds himself in. In *The Language of Silence*, Ernestine Schlant notes that in Böll’s *Across the Bridge* a “lowly employee can cloak himself in silence until he is all but invisible, but he is still – and the ‘turmoil’ in himself tells him so – an ever so faint collaborator,” which she adds is a result of the fact that “they were afraid of shedding their passivity and ended by creating a complicity of silence.”⁶¹

The fragility of the silent moment and faint resistance is shattered by the uproarious laughter of the crowd. A wave of positive emotion washes over the narrator like “ein heftiger Strom [...], so stark, daß ich erschrak und mich unwillkürlich fröstelnd schüttelte” (17). The outburst of laughter acts like a battering-ram to the narrator’s delicate resistance. It is ironic, for at the beginning of the story Böll uses laughter to illustrate the purported desire of Jupp in terms of making people forget the war. Laughter provides the narrator with the opportunity to resist Jupp, who functions as a figure of those who led

⁶¹ Schlant, Ernestine. *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust*. New York: Routledge, 1999. Print.

Germany to war. Laughter could have been used to establish the truth of Jupp's purpose, but the narrator does not take advantage of the moment. Laughter as a means to a discovery of the truth of a situation is situated by Bakhtin as having such a purpose:

[...] it [laughter] is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man; it is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps no more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint. Therefore, laughter is just as admissible in great literature, posing universal problems, as seriousness. Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter.⁶²

However, in *Mann mit den Messern*, laughter as a truth-telling device has no validity. The narrator crossed through the portal where *la verité* is demonstrated in a reverse fashion: spectacle as truth. The only emotion the narrator is able to sense is his own fear: "Ich habe Angst" (MM 17). Jupp replies that he too is afraid, but then places the narrator into a precarious situation, "hast du kein Vertrauen zu mir?" (17). If the narrator says no, he contradicts his actions up to this point, but if he says yes, then he is unreasonably afraid. Once again, Jupp is able to undermine the last vestiges of resistance, for all the narrator can do is stammer and stutter an incoherent stream of babble, "doch, gewiß...aber...komm" (17). His utterances are akin to the sounds of a fly desperately trying to free itself from the silken fibers of a web, which signals an "animalism and corporeal degradation [...] to direct our

While the two men are waiting behind stage, the narrator is able to spy the figure of a clown through a slit in the coulisse: "und durch einen Spalt zwischen kümmerlich aussehenden Kulissen sah ich auf der Bühne einen Clown, der sein Riesenmaul aufsperrte [...]" (17). He is confronted with the image of his own existence in the near future: it is for the pleasure of the audience. The clown's masked form is noted by David Wiles to display "[...] not the inner essence of the character but the way the character interacted with the external world."⁶³ The archetypal figure of the clown is one where "irreverence and absurdity are substituted for majesty [...] laughter for awe, defeat for glory. He is, as it were, the other

⁶² Bakhtin, *Ibid.* 66.

⁶³ Wiles, David. *The Masks of Menander: Sign and meaning in Greek and Roman Performance*. Cambridge University Press. Published by Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, Great Britain (1991). Print.

side of the coin of kingship, its walking parody.”⁶⁴ But before the narrator can focus his attention on the absurdity of the moment, Jupp distracts him, “[er] zog mich in eine Tür und schloß hinter uns ab” (MM 17). Thus, isolating the narrator, Jupp shuts off all access to any manifestation of resistance. The narrator can only note the accoutrements of the room: “Die Kabine war sehr eng und fast kahl. Ein Spiegel hing an der Wand, an einem einsamen Nagel war Jupps Cowboykostüm aufgehängt [...]” (17).

Jupp’s control becomes tighter still as the narrator mentions: “Jupp war von einer nervösen Hast” (17). Jupp uses his nervousness as an outwardly projected form of his physical state in order to provide the narrator with an identifiable trait, for this evinces a feeling of camaraderie between the two men. It is doubtful that these emotions are genuine, but rather are an ostentatious gesture designed to beget the narrator’s trust. The extent to which Jupp will go in order to manipulate others should not be underestimated, for Jupp has a flair for the dramatic. The use of dramatic events allows for an illusory correlation, by which the belief arises that Jupp is able to establish control over the situation. However, chance plays the central role in Jupp’s knife throwing act, and is illustrated when the narrator mentions that there is a mirror directly across from him, under which lay “ein altes Kartenspiel” (17). The crashing cymbals of the symbolic meaning are unrealized by the narrator, who fails to reflect upon moment via his reflection in the mirror and the “old card game” situated below the mirror.

Through the use of the looking-glass, Böll illustrates that the real danger is not in Jupp’s manipulation, but in the narrator’s unwillingness to reflect on the part he plays in enabling Jupp. If he were to remove himself from the situation, he would deny Jupp his ability to manipulate. However, in order to make such a decision, there needs to be an alternative opportunity for the narrator to support himself in order to deny figures like Jupp their ability to manipulate. Without the assurance of stability, the narrator sees no reason to bring about an end to his passivity. Thus the narrator espouses an

⁶⁴ Chevalier, Jean and Alain Gheerbrant. *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*. Trans. John Buchanan-Brown. England: Great Britain, Blackwell Publishers, 1994. Clays Ltd. St. Ives plc, Penguin Books, 1996. Print.

attitude of indifference in order to establish control over his fate, “Mir war alles gleichgültig. Sollten sie mich lebendig aufspießen; ich hatte eine lahme Schulter, hatte eine dünne Zigarette geraucht, morgen sollte ich für fünfundsiebzig Steine dreiviertel Brot bekommen” (17). With nothing to lose, he might as well go on with the show. The narrator’s “oh, what the hell” attitude enables him to have a sense that he has at least had some say in the matter of choosing his fate. His situation is absurd, and though he refuses to gaze at himself in the looking-glass, he recognizes that he will inhabit the same position of the clown whether or not by his own accord: “Und dann packte mich plötzlich der Mann mit der Glatze, schleifte mich auf die Bühne, begrüßte Jupp mit einem feierlichen Armschwenken und sagte mit einer erkünstelten Polizistenstimme [...]” (18).

Ever the performer, Jupp, walks boldly with “defining steps and briefcase in hand” to center stage. However, as Jupp warms his crowd with the same knife throwing act the narrator had seen only a few hours before, the narrator remarks that it has since become blasé: “[...] das Manöver mit dem großen Brotmesser und dem Holzklotz, und durch alle Gleichgültigkeit hindurch spürte ich, daß die Sache wirklich ein bißchen mager war” (18). Böll provides a moment of recognition that highlights a central characteristic of spectacle: its need to become more creative. The tendency for perpetual creativeness can be used for purposes that have a positive outcome for society in general. However, this same tendency can also be used for purposes which can have terrible consequences. In the end, the control rests squarely with spectacle rather than the one who believes to be controlling spectacle.

Society’s desire for spectacle only empowers spectacle. Any attempt to rid society of it can never be fulfilled. The desire for entertainment will be met by those willing to meet the demands for dynamic moments of distraction. Böll illustrates such individuals through the figure of Jupp, who meets the demands of the audience with an act of danger and risk. In this way, the theater of the *Sieben Mühlen*, in which Jupp performs, symbolizes a microcosm of society. It represents the point of

intersection between the individual (the narrator), the perceived controller (Jupp), and real controller (the audience's demands for spectacle). The theater is where irrationality is played out to the jeers of the crowd ("wie im römischen Zirkus"). In and of itself, spectacle presents no danger, but the *potential* for danger lay in the fact that through manipulation spectacle can take on mythic qualities which are larger-than-life. There is a sense that nothing can be done to stop or alter the direction spectacle chooses, so it becomes easier to simply swim with the current.

This is demonstrated when the narrator's gaze falls on the awesome power of spectacle: "Ich warf einen Blick in den Zuschauerraum, und von diesem Augenblick an, vor diesem flimmernden, lüsternen, vieltausendköpfigen, gespannten Ungeheuer, das im Finstern wie zum Sprung dasaß, schaltete ich einfach ab" (18). On one side is the audience, which is subconsciously aware to be in control of spectacle, while on the other side is Jupp, the one who is perceived to be in control. The narrator's awareness of the situation is evident by his critical statement of Jupp: "[...] ich fand seine Stimme ausgesprochen lächerlich, kümmerlich künstlich, wie Papierblumen und billigste Schminke" (18). Yet, the narrator fails to realize that only through his direct participation can the absurdity of his position continue. The narrator's comment of "paperflowers and the cheapest of makeup" portray Jupp as spectacle's whore. In the presence of the audience the narrator is powerless against the authoritative pimp-like power of spectacle: "Mir war alles scheißegal, das grille Licht der Scheinwerfer blendete mich, und in meinem schäbigen Anzug mit den elenden Schuhen mag ich wohl recht nach Pferdedieb ausgesehen haben" (18).

Spectacle has made an unwilling participant out of the narrator, though he alludes to the fact that he receives his just desserts: "[...] mag ich wohl recht nach Pferdedieb ausgesehen haben" (18). He is corralled into an existence of automaton motions, for he must lie there in silence while spectacle violates him. He reverts back to his tried and true tactic to gain control over his situation: "mir war alles

scheißegal" (18). Clearly, not giving a *shit* is a rarefaction, by which he attempts to establish a modicum of control over a situation that has spun out control. He can still halt the whole process, but the mere presence of others makes it difficult to discontinue. The narrator continues to attempt to regain control through lassitude: "Ich fühlte etwas wie einen Rausch der Gleichgültigkeit" (18). In the end, he is overpowered by the presence of the audience, and spectacle takes hold of him completely: "Rechts von mir hörte ich das unheimliche, wimmelnde Geräusch des gespannten Publikums, und ich spürte, daß Jupp recht gehabt hatte, wenn er von seiner Blutgier sprach" (19). Reality *à l'envers* crosses the threshold into the surreal, the point where reality, as a clearly defined exchange between the imaginary and the real, is no longer clear. The narrator is no longer in control of his actions, but is directed by the power of spectacle.

The danger to the narrator is of no consequential value. All that matters is the consummation between Jupp's performance and the pleasure for the audience. The narrator is trapped between two worlds and he convinces himself that he is trapped. Thus, he accepts his fate as a choice he has espoused. But Böll illustrates the real facts of the narrator's situation: he is the sacrificial victim. This role becomes apparent when he mentions that he is held in place like an image of Christ crucified: "[...] Ich blickte starr geradeaus und ließ mich schlaff nach unten sacken, da mich die feste Schnürung des Strickes wirklich hielt" (19). This metaphor of a sacrificial figure is emphasized when Jupp pulls out a shoelace and cuts it into "zwölf Stücke zerschnitt; jedes Messer streckte er ins Etui zurück" (19). Böll uses this moment to illustrate exactly who will make the true sacrifices: the common individual. This is no act of legerdemain. The knives are real and the sacrifice will be made by those who have no other alternative and are bound in this *Tragikomödie*.

It is only now that the narrator recognizes Jupp as the sorcerer figure. He can see the manner in which Jupp "ließ seine Hände ausschweben wie leise schwirrende Vögel, in sein Gesicht kam jener

Ausdruck magischer Sammlung [...] gleichzeitig schien er mit dieser Zauberergeste auch die Zuschauer zu beschwören" (19). This recognition and loss of confidence in Jupp indicates his growing awareness of the situation, yet he continues to act out the part of his role. The narrator gazes into "die unendliche Ferne" (19) and only comes back to reality when Jupp gazes back at him. His existence depends on verification through Jupp's eyes, "unsere Augen lagen in einer Linie" (19). In the next instance, Jupp grabs for the etui, which is understood as another *Zeichen* by the narrator and precipitates a breaking off of the gaze: "Ich stand still, ganz still, und schloß die Augen..." (19). The result is a freeing from the constraints imposed by spectacle, but it also creates an image of burying one's head in the sand. As he shuts his eyes, this realization of not having to deal with the plight of his situation becomes enthralling: "Es war ein herrliches Gefühl" (19). Böll thus levels an attack at those who would rather not face the consequences of their actions.

Finally Jupp performs the long-awaited act. The adulation of the audience proves too much, and even though he could be harmed by the violent act, the narrator says that a "stürmischer Beifall riß mich vollends hoch" (19). Allowed no time to reflect, Jupp grabs the narrator's hand and leads him to the forefront of the stage, where each of them take turns *ke-touing* to their master: spectacle. The roar of the audience grows steadily more intense drowning out whatever sense of doubt. Spectacle has provided the narrator with recognition of his existence. The narrator transfers the acclamation of the audience to the belief that he now shares control: "und wir verbeugten uns zusammen lächelnd vor dem Publikum" (19).

However, one is reminded of the real controller: spectacle. Jupp projects himself to be in control, but he is unaware of spectacle's power over him, and now the narrator has fallen under the same spell. This analogy extends to society as a whole, which Böll equates to its leader figures and the abundance of potential candidates whose willingness to manipulate is often a result of their need for

recognition. Böll attempts to open a dialogue to the unsettling silence that has taken hold of his country and also toward his compatriots' readiness to sacrifice themselves for those who already required so much sacrifice (i.e. Nazis who are still in positions of control). The cultural silence is noted when Jupp and the narrator are in the dressing room, and both, "sprachen [...] kein Wort" (19). Silence pervades the moments of daily life, but no coming to terms with the roles individuals play in firmly keeping silence and spectacle in place is sought out. This is often achieved through the last of spectacle's use of manipulation: money. The narrator opens the door after he finishes dressing, and "der kleine Mann stürzte mit der Glatze entgegen und rief: 'Gage erhöht auf vierzig Mark!'" (19). The narrator comes to an unsaid understanding: "Jupp war nun mein Chef, und ich lächelte, und auch er blickte mich an und lächelte" (19).

Both men remain silent, while the money does the talking. Loyalty, in this instance, is cheap. Through the interplay of silence, which expresses that which cannot be said but ought to be, the two participants come to an understanding of what Schlant calls "commanders and victims." Through their common experience and monetary gain, the narrator and Jupp are linked. Jupp is the narrator's boss, and thus the one calling the shots which relieves the narrator of his responsibility. Money solidifies their bond. Although a threshold has been crossed that may not have been easily re-forded. The circumstances of the present dictate the actions of future, for as the narrator and Jupp reach the portal, Jupp says: "Jetzt kaufen wir Zigaretten und Brot [...]" (19).

Böll's narrator is aware of the dynamics of the situation, while at the same time, not altogether cognizant of their implications. His immediate focus is on the momentary substantiation of his existence: food. He must eat. The here and now of existence often dictates the actions of the future. If his immediate needs are met, then he can extrapolate on the reasons for his existence. As he says: "Ich aber begriff erst eine Stunde später, daß ich nun einen richtigen Beruf hatte, einen Beruf, wo ich mich

nur hinzustellen brauchte und ein bißchen zu träumen" (19). While his *Beruf* exposes him to a high level of risk, it still provides the means to an end: a full stomach and the ability to "dream" again. It signifies the completion of his immediate needs being met. The narrator does not care how the pangs of hunger are staved off, but only that they are excluded from his daily existence. The greatest danger is spectacle's use of economic instability to manipulate society. Jupp is the archetypal figure of individuals who believe to control spectacle, yet are themselves exploited. Although he did not cause the present social conditions, Jupp represents those who utilize the spectacle's insatiable appetite for personal gain. Whereas the narrator, even though capable of distinguishing the elements and patterns of persuasion, is left holding the bill: "Ich war der Mensch, auf den man mit Messern wirft..." (19).

Section VI.

Summing Up Böll's *Der Mann mit den Messern*

This piece may be seen as apologetic for the situation which arose out of Nazi Germany and also allows for what Schlant calls an "overwhelming emphasis on the victims and their inability to escape their 'fate.'" However, it should be remembered that the comfortable position of the critic is nowhere near the cold, hungry, and humiliated state of the narrator in *Der Mann mit den Messern*. It is important to bear in mind that few Germans believed they had enough courage or thought they could demonstrate redress of grievances from the Nazi government. For the few who did attempt any form of active resistance, many were either killed outright or sent to concentration camps: "[...] Here they were tortured, maimed, or done to death after the cruel treatment."⁶⁵

The fear engendered by such hideous circumstances can be used as a powerful deterrent to prevent people from taking a stand against those in control. A message that purports violence is a difficult one to ignore, even if it is a mere threat. In such cases, the tendency is not to ask how high to

⁶⁵ Johann, Ernst and Jörg Junker, *Ibid.* 166.

jump, but rather to simply start jumping. Böll recognizes this fact and endeavors to set forth a tale that would be easily recognizable by those who experienced many of the same ploys for their compliance, much like the narrator in *Der Mann mit den Messern*. If Böll were to espouse a condemning or critical tone, then he would fail to reach as many people as possible. Instead, he offers an analysis of German culture in the pre-/post-war eras that reflects common situations with which people can identify. In this way, he adheres to the use of myth as a device which provides a comfortable distance, yet still allows for recognition of individual mistakes, especially in terms of those who complied with the Nazis. This creates an opportunity for change on a personal level, which for Böll, would culminate in the necessary changes throughout society. For Böll, this is the greatest purpose of writing.

Chapter 2

Rise and Fall of Economy, Tradition, and New Meanings: Introduction to *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit*

Heinrich Böll's short story *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* specifically deals with the issues of capitalism, rejection of Germanic traditions and identity, and non-recognition of the role that the bourgeoisie played in the rise of Nazism and the post-war era. Böll sees these issues as the kernels of decay which over time, slowly proliferate and erode the stability of society. Böll likens these unanswered tendencies to fungi: "Schimmelpilze der Zersetzung haben sich unter der ebenso dicken wie harten Kruste der Anständigkeit eingenistet, Kolonien tödlicher Schmarozter, die das Ende der Unbescholtenheit einer ganzen Sippe ankündigen" (NW 65). Throughout this short story, Böll references various other social issues of the day that he feels were the underlying causes of Germany's inability to come to terms with the war. But overall, Böll's greatest concern are the hindrances to social recovery created by capitalism's ability to obviate the real meaning of traditions by providing elements of spectacle within those traditions.

For Böll, traditions are an important social function to understanding cultural identity, but they also were manipulated first by the Nazis' use of spectacle, which had terrible consequences for Germany, and then again in the post-war period by those whose roles during the war are questionable. For example, the narrator alludes to this concept of ambiguous roles in relation to his Onkel Franz, who: "[...] selbst, dieser herzensgute Mensch, soll geäußert haben, er sei lebensmüde, er, der in der gesamten Verwandtschaft als ein Muster an Vitalität galt und als ein Vorbild dessen, was man uns einen christlichen Kaufmann zu nennen gelehrt hat" (66). Of course, Böll frames his narrator in an ironic light, for the narrator's naivety toward his uncle's role in the war allows him to uphold his uncle as the paradigmatic expression of a traditionally good German businessman. As the story develops, the narrator's naïveté is slowly exposed as being erroneous, however, he refuses to let go of his

conventional impression of his shady uncle. As emblematic of social progress a booming economy can be, it is the flux and flow of capitalism, as manipulated by individuals such as the narrator's uncle, which Böll highlights as one of the greatest elements of social destabilization and metaphorical "blockage" to coming to terms with the reality of the war. Böll does not wish to "throw the baby out with the bath water," but rather he seeks reconciliation in the form of recognition of roles and the meanings of age-old traditions between the post-war generation and war generation (i.e. especially in terms of those who helped bring about the rise of the Nazis and the Second World War.)

Böll's sense of weariness toward a prosperous economy stems largely from his personal experience with the "boom and bust" cycles of the Roaring '20s. Born in 1917 Heinrich Böll grew up in a period of intense prosperity in the immediate post-First World War period. This, however, was soon followed by a short, but intense destabilization of Germany's economy. By 1923 the war reparations to the nations of the Triple Entente had caused the economy to seriously falter, and Germany was gripped by the one of the worst outbreaks of inflation in history. As a result of some adept maneuvering by Germany's leading economists, the economy eventually stabilized, but in October of 1929 when the American stock market crashed, a worldwide economic crisis destroyed any of the gains made. This economic crisis hit Germans especially hard, for most of the sources for Germany's recovery had been secured through loans from the U.S. banking industries.

The rivers of easy money and affluence of the Roaring Twenties that aided Germany in becoming one of the most open and revered cosmopolitan nations in the world suddenly dried up. As a member of the *bourgeoisie*, Böll was only too cognizant of the crisis' effects, for this cyclical pattern of rise and fall in capitalistic ventures played havoc with the German middle class, which suffered considerably at the whims of the economy. The interwar period played a significant role in Böll's perception towards capitalistic ventures. He saw his parents' earnings and life savings wiped out, and

“realized that a hardworking, conscientious man, through no fault of his own, could be reduced to penury.”⁶⁶

Böll not only sees economic crises as a social event that can result in an overwhelming paranoia of hunger and instability, which in turn can lead to a disintegration of principles, but also economic prosperity can lead to the same result. In his short story *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit*, Böll gives a striking portrayal of economic crisis from a perspective *à l'envers*: economic boom as social crisis. In the immediate post-Second World War era the *Wirtschaftswunder* – the so called “economic miracle” – following the war had begun to gain momentum. Although this is an understatement, for by the end of 1948 three-fourths of the industrial production of the pre-war era had been regained in the three zones of Allied occupation.⁶⁷ In terms of a cyclical pattern, this seemed all too repetitive of the boom and bust experience of the 1920’s.

If seen from Böll’s perspective as someone who had witnessed the abject misery of the Great Depression and the subsequent rise of the Nazis as a result of economic crisis, then it becomes clear what the concerns Böll had over the possibility of another recurrence of a ruined economy. The possibility of another period of economic decay is only part of the story, for the unprecedented swift return to affluence following the destructive force of the Second World War created unprecedented distractions in terms of dealing with the experience of war. The all too common leitmotif of ignoring the reasons and causes of the war became part and parcel to the German collective experience. By filtering the short story through a mythic narrative, Böll clearly voices his concerns about his compatriots’ unwillingness to deal with their individual, as well as their collective roles in the post-First World War, Nazi, and also the post-Second World War periods. His aim is to broach the undesirable topic of the roles individual family members played in bringing about the rise of the Nazis, and the use of traditions

⁶⁶ Conrad, Robert C. *Ibid.* 5.

⁶⁷ Fischer Taschenbuch. *Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur von 1918 bis zur Gegenwart*. Originalausgabe Januar 1981. Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag. Print.

to firmly protect their positions in the social hierarchy, during and after the war. Through the use of myth Böll provides the necessary distance for people to approach this difficult topic without destroying personal identity or causing shame, for he recognizes the inherent value of myth as humanity's oldest means of communication in terms of seamy topics.

These ideas can be seen in *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* which relates the incident in which the narrator's aunt, Tante Milla, is interrupted from performing her Christmas tradition as it had once been done (i.e. setting up the Christmas tree): "Denn der Krieg wurde von meiner Tante Milla nur registriert als eine Macht, die schon Weihnachten 1939 anfang, ihren Weihnachtsbaum zu gefährden" (NW 67). The war years had disrupted this tradition for six years. Following the war's end, the family goes about setting up the Christmas tree as they had always done, but when they to take down the tree after the Christmas holiday, Tante Milla suffers a psychosis: she begins to scream incessantly. The family remains at a loss as to the cause of her histrionics. Slowly, it begins to dawn on them that the lack of the tree is the *racine* of her skirls. Tante Milla no longer wants to celebrate Christmas only at Christmas time, but all the time.

In and of itself, a daily reiteration of the Christmas tradition may have been tolerated, but Tante Milla's stipulation that all members of the family be present, every evening, for the traditional holiday celebration gives rise to grievances on the part of her immediate family members. Soon their forced participation becomes so overwhelming that they, in turn, begin to suffer their own mental breakdowns. This leads to their abandonment of any semblance of their once idealized middle class reputation. In the end, the family's members become so weary of the celebration that they replace themselves with actors and even waxen-dolls. The story is filled with humorous and ironic moments that represent the issue of resentment on the part of those required to participate in old traditions (i.e. especially on the part of the post-war generation). For instance, the narrator refers to his cousin Lucie, who had been "bisher eine

normale Frau, soll sich nächtlicherweise in anröchigen Lokalen [...] Tänzchen hingeben" (66). Her earnings to find an "existential" meaning for life are a direct abandonment of an identity based on the perfected simulation of her parents' notion of traditional German identity, which, for her, simply reinforces a falsehood of an identity modeled on traditions used by the Nazis. The irony of the situation is that the narrator, who comments on his cousin's new and loose lifestyle, fails to realize that his sense of a traditional German propriety enables the schism within the German home for coming to terms with the war.

Böll's story is not simply a humorist's tale of the problems he sees as plaguing contemporary society, but is transcendental in scope. This reflects the essence of myth, which functions as a fabric upon which societies produce *mythopoeia* – the myth-making process. Myth has been, since time immemorial, the illustration by which societies depict their collective ideal. Traditionally, myth is taken to refer to a divine or semi-divine hero, who is infused with the power of the gods, but with all too human character flaws. In myth, the distance created by the divinity of a god disallows for an attachment of spectators, and in a very real sense this was the first *Verfremdungseffekt*. Böll's use of myth allows for a shared identity between his figures and readers, but provides an appropriate distance from which his readers can take to heart the central messages of his short stories (i.e. the need to be engaged in reconciliation between past and present identities and the roles played by family members in the war).

One of the ways Böll creates the necessary distance in *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* is through the use of kinship ties, for the story is told from the point of view of the family's nephew: "In unserer Verwandtschaft machen sich Verfallserscheinungen bemerkbar [...]" (65). In the same way that myth provides a disassociation through the use of divinely endowed immortals or demi-gods, the same process of detachment is accounted for through familial relation of the nephew to the family. Böll thus

uses kinship ties to implicate those family members who had been involved in helping bring about the war. This becomes especially poignant in light of the role played by members of the *bourgeoisie*, who Böll most strongly criticizes for having suffered the least during the war, even though they played a major role in bringing Hitler and the Nazis to power: “Es tat uns leid, daß sie (Tante Milla) nach harten Kämpfen, endlosen Disputen, nach Tränen und Szenen sich bereit erklären mußte, für Kriegsdauer auf ihren Baum zu verzichten. [...] Glücklicherweise – oder sol lich sagen unglücklicherweise? – war dies fast das einzige, was sie vom Krieg zu spüren bekam” (69).

The narrator’s comments on the roles his immediate family played in the war demonstrate the function of kinship ties as a means to inhibit *pathos*. It becomes understandable that the narrator in *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* slips small amounts of criticism into his tale about his family, especially in matters which concern their decisions and behavior, after all that is what family members do for one another. But Böll uses his narrator’s position in terms of kinship to illustrate one of the most fundamental and ancient concepts of myth: irony. No matter how much one wishes or feigns to remain detached from the circumstances of the past and present, individuals making up society participate, whether through action or in-action. It is only a question of the manner in which those individuals participate that can lead to something like a government of Nazism or a democracy. No one can remain aloof to social phenomena while at the same time providing a running commentary. Such a Kantian notion is illustrated by Colin Falck in *Myth, Truth and Literature*:

It would be impossible for us to have any awareness of ourselves as *experiences* of the world if we did not also have an awareness – which was more than merely an “observed” awareness – ourselves as agents able to exert an influence in that world. I know about my bodily movements and my bodily situation in an especially direct way through the active interventions which I am able to make in the world around me.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Falck, Colin. *Myth, Truth and Literature: Towards a True Post-Modernism*. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Print.

This is the place where a significant difference in Böll's use of *irony* and *humor* emerges. The implicit notion of duality within these two literary devices is explained by what Northrop Frye calls a naïve and a sophisticated irony: "The chief difference between sophisticated and naïve irony is that the naïve ironist calls attention to the fact that he is being ironic, whereas sophisticated irony merely states, and lets the reader add the ironic tone himself."⁶⁹ These two forms of irony occur throughout Böll's piece, but the latter of these two definitions is most heavily used. On one hand, the narrator draws attention to a fact for the explicit purpose of stating the irony, while on the other hand, he fails to realize that he also is caught up in the absurdity of the moment. A case in point is when the narrator ends his description of his family's wartime roles with: "Doch will ich hier nicht die politischen Sünden meiner Verwandten aufzählen" (NW 69). This is Böll's specialty: irony within irony. The narrator is aware and yet unaware that he too is included in this statement, which Böll uses to show the need for individual family members to look not only at the roles other members of their family played in the war, but also that of their own family's role. Böll, in essence, implicates himself as subject for such a discussion, for he is conscientious that he is speaking about his own need to deal with the role he and his family played.

Lastly, an important dimension to Böll's short story is the manner in which he uses symbolic imagery to constitute certain objects of social phenomena. The meanings of symbols can be various and often are chosen by each person individually, although symbolic meaning is created within the context of cultural temporality. For instance, the Christmas tree can be seen to represent the concept of rebirth. In ancient customs the tree was perceived to be divinely endowed and "offerings were made to the tree deity, and the tree served as an oracle."⁷⁰ In *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* the narrator describes a similar concept of Tante Milla toward her tree: "Allerdings war ihr Weihnachtsbaum von einer

⁶⁹ Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990. Print.

⁷⁰ Whittick, Arnold. *Symbols, Signs and their meaning*. London: Leonard Hill [Books] Limited. Printed in Great Britain by J.W. Arrowsmith, Ltd. Bristol, 1960. Print.

besonderen Sensibilität" (67). Böll uses symbols to function as a critical language in his illustration of the natural process by which customs and traditions are revitalized, but old meanings for these social devices are infused with new ones (this is especially relevant to Böll's perception of "the economic miracle" as an entity which provides superficial meaning to cultural symbols). This results in a layering effect, though cultural meaning can still be understood by individuals of a society. The signs and symbols within any particular culture are continually in a state of transformation, yet their meanings are comprehended through a slow process of acculturation. This understanding of symbols is a process which "proceeds from a deep level far below consciousness."⁷¹

In *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit*, Böll infuses the Christmas tree with its divine status as a signifier of capitalism's productive might. The enormous amount of affluence created in the post-war era created a "new" meaning for the age-old tradition of Christmas. The family members display their understanding of this new meaning at a subconscious level, which takes place through abreactions, rejection of identity and choices that are recognized by the narrator to be disjunctive in comparison to their previous characteristics: "[...] mein Vetter Johannes –, ein Mensch, für den ich jederzeit meine Hand ins Feuer gelegt hätte, dieser erfolgreiche Rechtsanwalt, Lieblingssohn meines Onkels – Johannes soll sich der kommunistischen Partei genähert haben [...]" (NW 66).

Here Böll emphasizes the process of creating new meanings for old objects without human involvement in meaning-assigning methodology (i.e. the process of production had previously taken place solely through human influence, whereas in the post-war era new meaning is now created through capitalist modes of mechanization). The reproduction of meaning now functions like a machine that produces cardboard sheathings: it is an indiscriminately automated process. Hence Vetter Johannes' disillusionment, and subsequent rejection, of his father's mercantile profession and *bourgeoisie* class

⁷¹ Bühler-Oppenheimer, Kristin. *Zeichen, Marken, Zinken Sings, Brands, Marks*. Switzerland: Arthur Niggli Ltd. 1971. Print.

standing. Böll does not appear to be a communist, but he does demonstrate a great deal of sympathy for those who choose to embrace its principles. In the end, if old meanings are to retain their validity, then the human element of interaction in society with its produced objects needs to take a more active role in the process of assigning meaning to those objects, especially if a coming to terms with the war is to take place.

Böll's *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* seeks to establish an understanding of German traditions without undoing what it inherently means for Germans to be German. Already in the short six years following the war a cultural lapse in coming to terms with the war took place, and this was, for Böll, aided by the capitalistic productive power of Germany's economy. The phenomenon of purposeful disregard for coming to terms with the war caused a "generational gap" in Germany, but it was much more serious than a simple rebellion against the "parent generation," for the rift between the Nazi generation and post-war generation created a tension that threatened to undermine German cultural identity. Böll steps deeply into the fray in order to provide for a catharsis and also means to a meaningful dialogue between family members (i.e. parents who were Nazis and their children).

Böll hopes to alleviate the social tensions of the time. This can be seen to be his principle reason for his use of myth. His short story illustrates the failure on the part of one generation to understand the other generation, and vice-versa. Böll understands that a rejection of identity between generations is a natural process in humanity's forward-moving progress. But there is the Second World War and Germany's bout with Nazism that needs to be addressed before any semblance of generational understanding can take place. Böll illustrates that his greatest concern for a cultural and generational schism is capitalism's use of production as a means to divert attention away from the pressing issues of the day: the need for family members to discuss their roles in the war with their children. Böll reminds his contemporaries through the most ancient of story-telling devices that it is possible to come to terms

with the unpleasant realities of family member's roles in the war without undoing the cultural identity of Germany.

Section I.

Fairytales, Myths, and Ironic Families

It is through the function of the fairytale, mythic narrative, and the relation of irony between each of these devices that Böll deals with tradition and the memories of the past. Implicit here is the overlap between the concept of past and present identity of culture. These two concepts form a lacuna between the structures of symbols (i.e. a symbol of the war-generation can have a much different meaning for the post-war generation). Such a notion is important when examining this particular short story, since it can be seen as a discourse on German society's past and present understanding of a social event, especially in light of the war. Böll's use of irony as a device for dealing with unpleasant aspects of identity reflects the literary genres of fairytale and myth, which is a common device within these two genres. Myth and fairytales are so closely linked that it is often difficult to determine or distinguish one from the other. However, the use of miracles is one aspect that separates these two genres, "Miracles can only occur in fairytales; [...] The miracle is a formal, *structural* characteristic of fairytales that distinguishes them from all other folklore genres."⁷²

Whereas the miracle helps to distinguish the fairytale from the myth, irony helps to distinguish the myth from the fairytale in that myth tends to be situated within ironic occurrences. This is a literary device Böll often uses within his pieces, but he also illustrates the *irony of the ironic*. This is a *remise-en-cause* through the use of a subtle disparity between object and subject. The implied use of the "economic miracle" throughout *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* falls along the lines of fairytale, but Böll's

⁷² Somoff, Victoria. "On the Metahistorical Roots of the Fairytale." *Western Folklore*, 61, no 3/4 (Autumn, 2002): 277-293. JSTOR. Web. 18 July 2011.

piece is heavily imbued with elements of irony. Böll uses the myth and fairytale in their traditional sense as tools to aid with collective memories. These genres elucidated common truisms by turning truth on its head, which allows for an easier access to dealing with issues that may hit too close to home.

In *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* Böll's use of the family unit and its individual members as representative of society in general is an important concept. Within the opening paragraph, the narrator's reference to a family in a state of decline, "in unserer Verwandtschaft machen sich Verfallerscheinungen bemerkbar [...]" (NW 65) alludes to the fact that that society is made of singular units of the family. Böll spins this notion into an ironic reversal in that the narrator's reference to the *Verfallerscheinung* of his kinship ties – *Verwandtschaft* – highlights a concern for the integrity of society's culture at its most basic level: the family. In relation to this notion of decline, the narrator uses an analogy of "fungus," which is not representative of a sudden discovery of decay, but rather that of subterfuge. Beneath the topical surface the spores of decay have already long been embedded within the structure, they simply have gone unnoticed: "Es ist einfach, rückwirkend den Herd einer beunruhigenden Entwicklung auszumachen – und merkwürdig, erst jetzt, wo ich es nüchtern betrachte, kommen mir die Dinge, die sich seit fast zwei Jahren bei unseren Verwandten begeben, außergewöhnlich vor" (67). In a larger context, the spores of the fungus can stand as a metaphor for the seeds of social change, for both lie dormant until some event brings them into fruition.⁷³

Generally, these changes become visible when they can no longer be ignored. The narrator in *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* does not want to project an image of doom and gloom in relation to his family, but alights on a tendency of societies and people to ignore change until it can no longer be pushed away: "Man bemühte sich eine Zeitlang stillschweigend zu übergehen, deren Gefahr ins Auge zu blicken man nun aber entschlossen ist" (NW 65). In doing so, the narrator illustrates an integral aspect

⁷³ Here I refer to the "event" as being that of a rain shower for the fungus, or in the case of a society, a war or some other great social upheaval.

of culture and society: fear of change. He recognizes the danger of a Cassandra-like prognostication: “Noch wage ich nicht, das Wort Zusammenbruch anzuwenden [...],” (65) but is unable to restrain himself from commenting on what he sees as the end of world as he knows it. The reality of the present is in conflict with the perceived reality of the past, yet the narrator remains stoically complacent toward the other side of his family’s decline. This perceived downfall creates in-group turmoil that anthropologists and sociologists call “culture crisis.”

One way Böll endeavors to deal with such a crisis is by relating his personal experience of social change at the level of the family. His tale is an example which he offers for analysis. What the narrator views as a decline is a social phenomenon taking place across the social spectrum and within various kinship units. The irony of the situation, however, is lost on the narrator, who misperceives his position within the structure of the family as remaining outside the problem, for he constantly speaks in terms which infer that change is taking place on other side of his family. As a member of the familial unit, he is included in the subset of the term *Verwandtschaft*, though he believes himself to be witnessing its downfall from the safe position of an outsider. His attempt to objectify reality through the use of narrative results in an impossibility, since he is unable to present a story about his family in any objective manner.

Böll endeavors to illustrate that it is not just the other-branch of one’s family that allowed the Nazis to take control, but instead it is all members of a kinship-tie who are responsible. Throughout the text, humor and irony of the situation rests in the narrator’s naïveté. He is unaware of his dilemma, even though he believes he can help prevent social change through his narration of the issues he sees plaguing his family. By writing or discussing what he sees as symptoms of decline, the narrator attempts to rectify his family’s mistakes, and on a larger scale, the mistakes of society. In this manner, Böll, in essence, inserts himself into the text, thus rendering himself as a part of the cultural phenomenon he

sees occurring. Böll transcribes what, he as a writer, feels is an important social issue for analysis, but knows only too well that he too is part of issue. In doing so, Böll demonstrates a self-conscious awareness, for “We come to know ourselves as we use narrative to apprehend experiences and navigate relationships with others.”⁷⁴

The social and familial changes, whether through intentionality or happenstance, represent a unique experience for its time and place; and experience is representative of the notion by which a becoming aware of the world takes place. One of the key factors in understanding experience is that it takes place from the position of hindsight, where the perception of change becomes easily perceived. Most often, however, the perception of change can be seen only from the vantage point of a temporal distance. Within everyday usage of language, such realizations often take place in the utterances of the ubiquitous “should have’s” or the impersonal “one ought to have’s.” Such moments constitute a large proportion of everyday language. In the case of the narrator’s family, his cousin Vetter Franz saw the seeds of change from the very outset, but as often happens his words went unheeded: “heute müssen wir es bedauern, die Stimme unseres Veters Franz überhört zu haben” (NW 65). Even if change is perceived as it occurs, it can still remain irrelevant for most people, who are either too focused on what they perceive as happening, or simply pay no heed, for it simply does not correlate to their own notions of change.

Section II.

Archetypal Characters of Culpability and Nazi Sympathizers

One of the best literary devices for illustrating change in terms of society is through the use of a Jungian archetypal figure. This is a device for representing social ideas and can be understood as a

⁷⁴ Ochs, Elinor and Lisa Capps. “Narrating the Self.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25, (1996): 19-43. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 July 2011.

prototype which refers to images or patterns that often appear while at the same time function as commonplace experiences. A fact about the occurrence of social change also depends on the one who is doing the perceiving. A social phenomenon is the act of experiencing several changes at once. This concept is further elucidated by the British lawyer and philosopher Viscount Haldane, who wrote extensively on Kantian and Hegelian notions of experience:

Experience does not arise out of any merely mechanistic putting together of unconnected sensations. It seems rather to consist in what is more concrete and complex, but is broken up by the methods the psychologist employs into what are not facts but abstract descriptions of them, inasmuch as the supposed facts are severed from the system and activity to which they belong. [...] At the foundation of experience there lies system, not what is static, but the systematic activity of our minds. [...] Experience may be faint and undeveloped. But if it is really experience at all its resemblance is rather to a system of intelligence than to the externality that is characteristic of mechanism and in some degree of life.⁷⁵

In this respect, Vetter Franz was aware of the changes taking place and its inherently mechanistic qualities. However, his lack of a reputation, due to his profession as a boxer, becomes grounds for the rest of the family to slough off his warnings, for he ran with the wrong crowd, (i.e. of the “suburban type”). He and his “fragwürdigen Kumpanen” (NW 65) would meet for pugilistic competitions “in abgelegenen Parks” (NW 65). Vetter Franz is the archetype of a “bad seed” from the narrator’s point of view, but admits that only now he is able to understand the implications of his cousin’s preemptive warnings: “heute beginne ich manches zu ahnen” (NW 66). Such a post-realization demonstrates the importance of hindsight and the central role it plays when evaluating past experiences, which Böll injects throughout the piece as a subtle reminder to those who would condemn past actions of others without themselves having been present during the occurrence.

As such, experience is a means to understanding the past. Conversely, an understanding of societal choices can only take place through the act of experiencing the situation. However, through the unique position of the pariah, understanding via experience can be obtained without having to sacrifice

⁷⁵ Haldane, Viscount. *Human Experience: A Study of its Structure*. Intro. Greenwood Press. Westport, Connecticut. [Originally published in 1926 by John Murray, London]. First Greenwood Reprinting 1970, U.S.A. Print.

time in order to gain experience. Böll illustrates this notion through the figure of Vetter Franz, who also functions as a symbol of the Fool:

The fool is distinguished from the normal group member by a deviation in person or conduct which is regarded as ludicrous and improper. He is usually defined as a person lacking in judgment, who behaves absurdly or stupidly. The antics of the fool, his ugliness, gracelessness, senselessness, or possible deformity of body represent departures from corresponding group norms of propriety. The fool is the antithesis of decorum, beauty, grace, intelligence, strength, and other virtues embodied in heroes; and, therefore, as a type is antiheroic.⁷⁶

Vetter Franz' figure potentially illustrates these same qualities. Boxers are generally not perceived as intelligent, yet Vetter Franz perceived what no other member of his family was able to perceive. He is viewed as someone who acts absurdly, for his choice of a profession is understood as brutal in terms of the family's middle class propriety. After all, beating people up for a living goes against the decorum of a respectable family. If Klapp's notions of deformities are also taken into account, which tend to be the hallmark of the boxer on account to a life of receiving blows to the face, then Vetter Franz becomes ever more the archetype of the Fool. However, even though he exemplifies many of the negative qualities of his role, he also represents the positive qualities, for pugilism combines the elements of grace and strength, which are quintessential for a boxer.

Böll's portrayal of Vetter Franz is a criticism toward those who had the foresight and the means to prevent the social calamities caused by the Nazis. Whatever prognosticative experience Vetter Franz has through his figure as the Fool, he goes about his business with an air of indifference to other people's actions. He is able to establish control over the situation through his indifference, which disallows for any control others may have over him. After Vetter Franz becomes a well-known "Faustkämpfer," (NW 66) he summarily rejects the praise from his family with the same indifference as he had before he was famous. Even in notoriety, he is able to establish his world as something which

⁷⁶ Klapp, Orrin E. "The Fool as a Social Type." *The American Journal of Sociology* 55, no. 2 (September, 1949): 157-162. *JSTOR*. Web. 12 July 2011.

exists on the outside. Thus, he maintains the image of the Fool as always situated on the pariah of a social group.

In relation to Vetter Franz, the other two siblings stand in stark contrast. On one side is the *Lieblingssohn* Johannes, for whom the narrator would stick his “Hand ins Feuer” (66) without hesitation. Johannes represents the model citizen. He is an “erfolgreicher Rechtsanwalt” (66) and symbolizes the normative expectations of social behavior. He adheres and promotes the accepted social standards of his time as defined by law. Johannes represents someone who is in line with the norms of his society and culture; and ultimately he espouses the notions of justice and liberty, which are assumed to be the highest notions of capitalistic-democratic societies. In an ironic twist of events, the narrator mentions a rumor, which involves the “favored” son has having “sich der kommunistischen Partei genährt” (66).

On the other side is cousin Lucie, who is described as having been, up to this point, “eine normale Frau” (66). However, it is also rumored that she visits disreputable taverns, with her “hilflosen Gatten” (66). There she gives herself over to *Tänzen* (66). The narrator attributes her nocturnal jive sessions as being “existentialistisch” (66). Unfortunately, the narrator does not indicate which type of existential tenet cousin Lucie’s dancing represents. It is left to the reader to surmise that what is meant is connected with the German philosopher Heidegger, whose philosophy is concerned with the temporality of man’s being, and that the only certainty in life is death. For cousin Lucie, whose dallies in existentialist concepts of life, the way to live “authentically” is to live in the moment. It is thus quintessential that she only needs to be aware of the certainty of death in order to live by her own nature and choosing. However, Böll uses such a rationale to demonstrate irony, for cousin Lucie uses dance as a means to break free from the strictures of tradition, only to be unaware that she is in fact performing one of society’s most sacred traditions.

Cousin Lucie's desire to embrace her own "nature" through dance is actually a traditional medium of communication. Dance is used "for special events [in order to] tell a story."⁷⁷ It is no stretch of the imagination to see the age-old pattern of soul-searching revitalized through a newer, more modern form in cousin Lucie's nightly carousing habits:

Dance is celebration and dance is language, a language beyond words. [...] Often explosive, its aim is to throw off every vestige of the dual nature of temporal things to rediscover at a bound the primeval Oneness. Then body and soul, creator and creation, visible and invisible meet and anneal timelessly in a unique ecstasy. The dance proclaims and celebrates its identification with the imperishable.⁷⁸

Throughout the ages, what had been considered the standard (i.e. the ability of a woman to dance) of a "normal woman," has become by the standards of the narrator's time no longer a valid expression of womanhood. Dance had previously symbolized what was the traditional norm for women. However, it had by the late 1940s become symbolic of a *quean* or a floozy. This shift in the function of the paradigm, in many ways, is representative of discord between the dominant assumptions of social acceptability and generational misunderstanding. Böll's use of dance provides a glimpse at a moment in time, where the process of social change was currently evincing itself. Even though cousin Lucie's behavior is frowned upon and is cast in a light of condemnation by her relative, the narrator, she nevertheless still acts out traditions in the space between the rules set down by the social group, which defines what is permissible. Her nightly gyrations on the dance floor are, in fact, performed under the umbrella of custom – i.e. sanctioned social norms.⁷⁹ She is, nonetheless, able to maintain a sense of propriety by dragging her "helpless" husband with her to these seedy bars: "(sie ist) von ihrem hilflosen Gatten begleitet" (NW 66).

The process of social change is highlighted even further, when the narrator describes Onkel Franz, who had been a paradigmatic representation or archetypal figure of societal success and vitality.

⁷⁷ Angrosino, Michael V. *The Essential of Anthropology*. New Jersey: Research & Education Association, 1990. Print.

⁷⁸ Chevalier, Gheerbrant. *Ibid.* 273.

⁷⁹ Angrosino, *Ibid.* 78.

However, in Onkel Franz' own words, he has become "lebensmüde" (66). The narrator hints that Onkel Franz' weariness of life extends to the point where it may even affect his business ethics, which had once been held in the highest of esteems: "ein Vorbild dessen, was man uns einen christlichen Kaufmann zu nennen gelehrt hat" (66). Böll hints that through social change even the most resilient paradigmatic expressions of social stability and concepts can undergo a metamorphosis.

Lastly, it is through the figure of Tante Milla that a tyrannical archetype figure emerges, for she is the only member of the family who is not affected by the changes, even though she brought them about. The narrator describes her as the impetus behind "the event" – *die Urheberin*. As is often the case, the originators of an event continue with their lives unaware of the upheavals they have caused. The narrator wryly mentions that Tante Milla is unusually blessed with good health, and that she is as carefree and comfortable as she has ever been. Yet, these blessings do not go unnoticed, before long they are envied, for "[...] ihre Frische und Munterkeit beginnen jetzt langsam uns aufzuregen" (66). This transition to loathing results in a recognition that those who brought about change, are most often those who suffer the least from the changes they helped bring about. Böll implies that those who escaped the war, though they were most likely Nazi sympathizers, still are unaware of the consequences of their actions. Whether or not he refers to German families or society as a whole as finally recognizing the roles certain members played in the war remains ambivalent: "Denn es gab eine Krise in *ihrem* Leben, die bedenklich zu werden drohte" (66).

Section III.

Tradition as Social Awareness and the Hypocrisy of Prognosticators

The narrator's ambiguity illustrates the difficulty in pinning down the impetus of change: namely the daily recurrence of the Christmas celebration and the fallout of forced adherence to tradition. The

chain of events that led to the “crisis” can only be analyzed from the perspective of after-the-fact. There is no possibility to view an event before its occurrence, and is almost as difficult while social change is occurring. Böll uses his narrator to demonstrate a prejudiced retroactive prognostication. Instead of having a biased opinion of events before they take place, the narrator indicates that he has a post-judgment of the phenomenon. Thus the narrator tries to maneuver himself into a position from which he substantiates his own awareness: “[...] – merkwürdig, erst jetzt, wo ich es nüchtern betrachte, kommen mir die Dinge, die sich seit fast zwei Jahren bei unseren Verwandten begeben, außergewöhnlich vor” (67). As with the verbal utterances of the everyday life of “should have’s,” the use of the conditional past here describes an unrealized or an unfulfilled potentiality and hints at the fact that now something ought to be done about the past. The narrator demonstrates this notion when he says that: “Wir hätten früher auf die Idee kommen können, es stimme etwas nicht” (67). Certainly, measures *could* have been undertaken in order to affect the outcome in relation to the narrator’s present. However, this only highlights the impossibility of being fully aware of a situation and the difficulty which lay in taking action.

Böll mythologizes the family’s encounter with the tradition of Christmas in order to draw awareness to the cyclical pattern of social change. By using Tante Milla’s “Vorliebe für die Ausschmückung des Weihnachtsbaumes,” (67) Böll illustrates a German tradition, which he describes as a special weakness for Germans, and one which is quite ubiquitous throughout the Fatherland. Traditions and myths have been around since humanity’s earliest beginnings, and were a source of understanding both the past and present. Both myth and traditions are cultural tools that later became intertwined with the writing process. Writing differs from these two only in that specified forms of tradition or myth can be passed on successively from generation to generation without much alteration. This is on account of the fact that myth and traditions, orally transmitted, tend to flourish and then die off. They reappear with the changing seasons of society. But through the use of a written text, the

changes of past societies can be more clearly understood by later generations. In much the same way, Böll's short story is a modern version of ancient myth, for it allows future generations to recognize the manner by which a social upheaval (i.e. the Second World War) took place without there being a loss of cultural or generational understanding.

Böll illustrates this notion in his *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* through the use of generational misunderstanding. This phenomenon is a natural process of societies, yet there exists a danger of predilection for a particular aspect of culture, for the rejection of any one aspect can lead to the acceptance of everything or nothing at all. Böll illustrates this concept through Vetter Franz, since "er legte einen Widerstand von frühster Jugend an gegen diesen 'Rummel' an den Tag," (67) when decorating the Christmas tree was traditionally held. Vetter Franz' non-participation in the traditional decorating of the tree, though seen as something of a peculiar nature, eventually becomes normal. Even though he tries to escape tradition, this, in turn, becomes an aspect of tradition: "Meine Tante hatte sich daran gewöhnt, daß Franz der Vorbereitungen in der Adventszeit fernblieb, auch der eigentlichen Feier [...]" (67). Any attempt to break free from the perceived social norms simply becomes another aspect within the same old process: a tendency that myth illustrates in dynamic fashion.

As noble as Vetter Franz' aspirations may have been, he plunges to the depths of grotesque ordinariness. The narrator mentions that Vetter Franz remains distant through the *Adventszeit*, as well as for the period in which the actual Christmas time festivities take place. He only first appears when the celebration reaches its apex: the banquet "[...] und (er ist) erst zum Essen erschienen" (67). Though Vetter Franz' exclusion of all the other aspects of the tradition are demonstrative of a rejection of tradition, his willingness to partake in the banquet undoes whatever symbolic statement he previously made. Thus, Vetter Franz exemplifies his participation in tradition and the world by joining in the feast.

As Bakhtin asserts that it is here, in the banquet image, where “man tastes the world, introduces it into his body, makes it part of himself.”⁸⁰

Böll uses Vetter Franz’ participation in the feast to illustrate a humorously hypocritical behavior, but its placement in the text highlights an important dynamic within social relations. Böll sheds light on the fact that individuals who feign abstinence from any wrong-doing, but are more than willing to sit at the table to placate their gluttony. The emphasis here is on the duality that exists within individuals. One minute someone can attain the heights of a noble cause, and in the very next fall prey to base desires. This is demonstrated by the fact that Vetter Franz was correct in his assessment of the family’s metaphorical decay. His role as the Fool is endowed with a certain prognosticating power as a truth-sayer. However, his powers of influence are limited by his position as a social pariah, as well as by his purposeful abnegation to engage in cultural traditions, save for the moments from which he could most benefit.⁸¹ In myth and tradition, the image of a truth-sayer plays a central role through light-hearted and merry utterance of truth, although such utterances often contain a deeper significance, which Bakhtin claims “[...] are filled with powerful historic awareness and lead to a deep understanding of reality⁸²”

Section IV.

Böllian and Bakhtinian Images of the Banquet

The banquet is an important part of traditions and Böll uses the imagery of the feast in order to illustrate an encounter with the social environment and the undergoing change surrounding the family. The feast is an expression of humanity’s triumph over the harshness of the natural environment, for

⁸⁰ Bakhtin, *Ibid.* 281.

⁸¹ Böll would appear to be leveling a charge against individuals like Thomas Mann, who had the necessary provisions, whether through notoriety or monetary surplus, to be able to escape the looming Nazi noose. The West, most especially the U.S. would have held such figures in high regard as individuals who could foresee the impending doom of Nazism, rather than the fact that most who wanted to flee were unable to do so.

⁸² Bakhtin, *Ibid.* 208.

people are able to consume the world without themselves being consumed.⁸³ Böll wields such a notion into the ultimate image of devouring: war. War is the zenith of grotesque devouring. It represents the insatiable desire of consumption and destroys the point of demarcation between the world and humanity. It is cannibalistic in nature and demonstrates the images of a savage mind. The image of war is the epitome of the social body at its worst: “Im Krieg wird gesungen, geschossen, geredet, gekämpft, gehungert und gestorben – und es werden Bomben geschmissen – lauter unerfreuliche Dinge” (NW 67).

However, as it destroys, it recreates old images and old traditions, which are reordered through its violent nature. War imports change to previously understood social customs. It is like a stack of cards which has been violently reshuffled. The order of images is changed. However, the meanings of the cultural images themselves remain unchanged, but the significance of those images no longer holds the previous value as it had once been understood. War is simply the impetus of unprecedented change, which can be seen as an act of consuming all images at once, purporting to change the meanings, yet ultimately failing to do so. War as the ultimate act of consumption reflects certain aspects of the banquet, but from a negative or dark perspective. Through the images of banquet and war as consuming entities, Böll elucidates a victory over war as the ultimate signifier of war as destruction and change: “This element of victory and triumph is inherent in all banquet images. No meal can be sad. [...] The triumphal banquet is always universal. It is the triumph of life over death.”⁸⁴

By its very nature, war destabilizes a society’s preference for one ordered set of symbols for another ordered set of symbols. Generally, this rearrangement takes place at the level of society’s younger members, while the older members still attempt to retain the old meanings for symbols. This has more to do with temporal understanding of the symbols’ meanings than a direct rejection of a generation’s understanding. One way to keep things as they should be is through the use of traditions.

⁸³Paraphrase of Bakhtin, *Ibid.* 281.

⁸⁴ Bakhtin, *Ibid.* 283.

The importance of tradition is represented in the figure of Tante Milla, who after all simply wants “ihre gute alte Weihnacht in absoluter Permanenz wiederhaben.”⁸⁵ The war, which had been underway for four months by Christmas of 1939, is only registered by Tante Milla as a power or force – *Macht* – that threatened her Christmas tree tradition. For her the war went largely unnoticed. As a symbol of the impetus of change, war is not recognized as such from her perspective. In fact, one can argue that she is symbolic of the antithetical position of recognizing that *a* war even took place.

The only instance in which Tante Milla appears to recognize that something occurred is via the rupture of tradition, which is specifically represented by the lack of a Christmas tree. The question remains, just what was interrupted when tradition, seen in terms presented by Henry Glassie, was ruptured:

Tradition is the creation of the future out of the past. A continuous process situated in the nothingness of the present, linking the vanished with the unknown, tradition is stopped, parceled, and codified by the thinkers who fix upon this aspect or that, in accord with their needs or preoccupations, and leave us with a scatter of apparently contradictory, yet, cogent definitions.⁸⁶

The continuity of tradition is of a singular importance for Tante Milla. That a war took place is less important than the fact that the rest of the family ought to recognize that Tante Milla’s “Weihnachtsbaum war von einer besondern Sensibilität” (NW 67). Böll uses her sensitivity for tradition in order to illustrate a predilection toward forgetting. Her need for tradition masks her insistence that old images and their meanings be kept as they have always been understood, by which she is able brush the turmoil of the war neatly under the metaphorical rug. Her desire to return to the established order reflects an insistence that can seriously undermine the structural integrity of cultural identity, which it

⁸⁵ Friedrichsmeyer, Erhard. *Literaturstudium-Interpretationen: Heinrich Böll Romane und Erzählungen*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000. Print.

⁸⁶ Glassie, Henry. “Tradition.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 108, no. 430 (Autumn, 1995): 395-412. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 July 2011.

purports to uphold. Her demands that things should remain as they ought to be, only causes resentment and rejection by those required to uphold the values of others.⁸⁷

Böll plays with this notion by his use of the dwarves, which were “die Hauptattraktion am Weihnachtsbaum” (NW 67). Symbolically, dwarves represent the seedier side of humans, which can swiftly dwarf our humanity.⁸⁸ Their position within the text becomes a central axis on which the story unfolds. The narrator’s description of the Christmas scene shows the unique characteristic and function the dwarves play:

Unter den Fußsohlen der Zwerge waren Kerzen befestigt, und wenn ein gewisser Wärmegrad erreicht war, geriet ein verborgener Mechanismus in Bewegung, eine hektische Unruhe teilte sich den Zwergenarmen mit, sie schlugen wie irr mit ihren Korkhämmern auf die glockenförmigen Ambosse und riefen so, ein Dutzend an der Zahl, ein konzertantes, elfenhaft feines Gebimmel hervor (67-68).

It is no small coincidence that Böll uses the image of the dwarves in contrast to the positive image of the elf. Dwarves hold sinister representation with their underworld habitation, and are seen as an intractable impetus – a hidden mechanism, which stands as the ego-consciousness, the part “of our psyche through which we perceive the world and our own part in it.”⁸⁹ This largely represents the idea of the ego/Self split in Jungian psychology. On one hand, the dwarves’ coordinated strikes of their hammers are represented as elfish, and thus, ephemeral, perhaps even heavenly, which signifies a positivistic, healing nature. The elfish qualities produced by the hammers’ blows present an image by which one is able to take solace or find peace. Böll uses the image of the dwarves’ hammering – or mining – to represent the healing qualities of digging through social refuse. On the other hand, the elfish qualities of the hammers reflect the symbolic nature of elves, who “delight to dance in the meadows at night [...] while appearing to invite mortals to join them, in reality, they cause their death. [...] they

⁸⁷ In many ways, Böll uses Tante Milla’s desire to return to the old ways as a reflection of the strict measures by the Nazis to bring about a desired return “Germanness” or older Germanic customs.

⁸⁸ Paraphrase of Chevalier, Gheerbrant, *Ibid.* 321.

⁸⁹ Booker, Christopher. *The Seven Basic Plots: Why we tell stories*. New York: Continuum, 2008. Print.

symbolize the unconscious powers of desire transformed into attractive images and their seductive power tends to inhibit judgment and self-control.”⁹⁰

Böll’s use of the image created by the Christmas tree ornaments, and particularly that of the rosy-cheeked angel creates an image of society as divided. The angel’s position “an der Spitze des Tannenbaumes,” (NW 68) in comparison with that of the dwarves, represents an upper and lower stratum. The image created is one of diametrically positioned parts. The dwarves illustrate a rooting-around in subterranean tunnels of the earth, which can be understood as symbolic of the bowels. In contrast, the symbolic meaning of the angel represents a positive quality of this process. The narrator has unwittingly combined these two disparate images into a single meaning: one of the high – the angel, who signifies a heavenly entity, the other of the low – the dwarves, who represent qualities of the bowels and excrement. Their placement on the tree, which represents the focal point of tradition, gives credence to the idea of the metaphorical applications traditions play in the social body’s need to rid itself of metaphorical social waste.

Section V.

Tradition: The Diuretic of Metaphorical Social Refuse

Böll’s use of the dwarves and angel, when taken together, help to form an image of the grotesque body, though, in this case, an image that is more inclined towards a grotesque parody of the social body. Seen from the perspective of the metaphorical social body, tradition acts as a sort of relieving mechanism: a diuretic. In this sense, traditions help rid the social body of detritus, while providing the opportunity to evaluate the refuse of poisonous elements that may need to be removed. Tradition is the instance in which the metaphorical social body purges itself of toxins, while at the same

⁹⁰ Chevalier, Gheerbrant, *Ibid.* 350.

time it renews itself. The metaphor of tradition as a *drutling*⁹¹ process for the metaphorical social body is an important element within society. Although digging through the social body's refuse may not seem like an enlightening process, it has a similar effect as the literary process, which illustrates many of the less than appropriate sides of the social body. More is to be garnered about a society's predilections and dislikes through metaphorical scatology than through an analysis of society's purported ideals: "[...] waste reveals more about those who threw it out in the first place than about the nature of the revolting. In dirt, observes one anthropologist, there is a system."⁹²

Even though tradition represents a process of excretion, it remains a *felix culpa* – a fault most fortunate. Tradition allows for the analysis of elements ingested by the social body, whether positive or negative. The theme of refuse in Böll's *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* is used in the description of the Christmas tree as the metaphor for renewal. The importance in the positioning of the dwarves and the angel illustrates their symbolic relationship to the social body as grotesque. The dwarves represent a dualistic nature: excrement indicates impuissance, decrepitude, ignominy, and even death, while they also indicate the need to look more closely at the seamy subjects of social discourse. To this end, refuse has, as Valery Allen posits: "an ancient truth that wisdom should lie within what is rejected, yet also a deeply modern aesthetic that art originates in rubbish."⁹³

Tradition as a metaphor of the diuretic process becomes apparent once factors have been set in motion that metaphorically inhibit or block tradition. This is evident in Tante Milla's lack of a Christmas tree throughout the war years:

⁹¹ A term that Valerie Allen in *On Farting: Language and Laughter in the Middle Ages* glosses from John Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* as something which applies to "a dog or a horse that frequently stops in its way, and ejects a small quantity of dung at intervals" (Allen 1).

⁹² Allen, Valerie. *On Farting: Language and Laughter in the Middle Ages*. New York, N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 2007. Print.

⁹³ Allen, *Ibid.* 3.

Nun wird man sich denken können, daß in der Nähe fallende Bomben einen solch sensiblen Baum aufs höchste gefährdeten. Es kam zu schrecklichen Szenen, wenn die Zwerge vom Baum gefallen waren, einmal stürzte sogar der Engel. Meine Tante war untröstlich. Sie gab sich unendliche Mühe, nach jedem Luftangriff den Baum komplett wiederherzustellen, ihn wenigstens während der Weihnachtstage zu erhalten. Aber schon im Jahre 1940 war nicht mehr zu denken (NW 68).

The war lasted six years, five of which included daily Allied bombing missions over Germany. The inability to perform a catharsis through the medium of tradition resulted in extreme costiveness of the social body. If the bombings themselves were not traumatic enough, the narrator reminds his reader of the intensity and frequency of air raids on his particular city: “[...] die Zahl der Luftangriffe auf unsere Stadt [war] tatsächlich erheblich, von ihrer Heftigkeit ganz zu schweigen” (68).

As previously mentioned, the war appears to have passed relatively unnoticed by Tante Milla, save for the interruption of her holiday tradition. The narrator mentions that the family felt deeply for her loss, for she had to do without her *Weinachtsbaum* for the duration of the war. Spared from the ghastly horrors of the war, Tante Milla isolates herself to a world still saturated with the old-ordered images of tradition. She still has not had her morning helping of *anagnorisis*. In a sly fashion, the narrator mentions the dual nature of her plight: “[...] glücklicherweise – oder soll ich sagen unglücklicherweise? – war dies fast das einzige, was sie vom Krieg zu spüren bekam” (69).

The narrator appears to envy Tante Milla and the family’s willingness to accommodate her in her metaphorical constipation, for their social position as a member of the *bourgeoisie* provided a certain amount of benefits that many others had to do without during the war. The narrator’s uncle was able to build an air-raid shelter which was “einfach bombensicher,” (69) and a vehicle was always on standby to whisk his aunt to one of several areas, “wo von der unmittelbaren Wirkung des Krieges nichts zu sehen war,” (69) which was made possible by Onkel Franz’ *Gemüseversorgung* and played a decisive role for the city during the war. In fact, not only did Tante Milla benefit from Uncle Franz’ business, but so did the “favored son” Johannes, who was able to take a position in his father’s business firm, though

he complained vehemently about his job. Vetter Franz, on the other hand, joined the military service and became a soldier. Cousin Lucie served as a volunteer in the *Kriegsdienst*, where she worked in a *Hackenkreuzstickerei*. It is an interesting point that Böll provides such a picture-perfect image of the “perfect” Aryan-girl performing her traditional role of sewing. He uses this analogy to allude to the concept of her forced participation as perhaps the reason for her later rejection of tradition and the identity of her parents.

The family’s bourgeois lifestyle allowed for a fairly comfortable war experience, as the narrator sardonically mentions that he does not wish to comment on “die politischen Sünden meiner Verwandten” (69). Böll draws attention to their position in the social hierarchy as the means which provided the continuation of a lifestyle reasonably unchanged by the war. An important point of consideration is that the family’s consumption of *Nahrungsmittel* went relatively unimpeded, while at the same time the metaphorical purgation process through tradition had been completely shut off as a result of Allied bombings. Foodstuffs were provided for by Onkel Franz’ business throughout the entire war, and leaves little doubt that Böll draws a correlation between the *bourgeoisie* and the detritus characteristics of post war emergent-capitalism:

The dejected space of the domus as the essential site of material accumulation of both money and poop. [...] Take a shit and wash your hands; count your money and rub your hands with glee. Only a bourgeois can be stinking rich. Capitalism is an economy that defines itself in terms of the accumulation of surplus.⁹⁴

The tradition of Christmas and other traditional holidays provide a means by which to deal with society’s surplus. In the case of the narrator’s family, even though the war left Germany in ruins, its aftermath seems to have gone largely unnoticed for the family, especially Tante Milla. The narrator hints that after the capitulation of the Nazi government, the family rather quickly regained its former position in the social hierarchy. Yet Onkel Franz’ business practices are seen in a positive light, for he provides

⁹⁴ Allen, *Ibid.* 13.

essential vitamins for people: “hier gelang Onkel Franz, sich wieder maßgebend einzuschalten, und er brachte die Bevölkerung in den Genuß von Vitaminen [...]” (NW 69). However, the narrator only elucidates on his pre-war and post-war business practices. What those practices were during the war are left dubiously unstated and relegated to realm of ambiguity. Certainly this is a point Böll makes for an all too common occurrence after the war. While Onkel Franz may not have been an ardent Nazi, he nevertheless passively benefited during their rule and was able to avoid any stigmatization following the Nazi’s downfall.

It was not until the end of the war that Tante Milla was provided with the opportunity to once more set up the Christmas tree. Life seems to return to a level of normalcy that would have been recognizable to the pre-war standards. But catastrophe lurks just around the corner, for an event evinces itself: the setting up of the Christmas tree. Böll’s narrator points out that at the time this event seemed like something of no significant value. However, later it is recognized as the “Ursache der ganzen unseligen Entwicklung” (69). With the end of the war, tradition makes its return. Tante Milla insists that everything be as it used to be: “daß alles ‘so sein sollte wie früher’” (70). This was something that caused the family members to smile and take no real heed, for why should they, the war had destroyed so much and the restoration was cause for even more angst.⁹⁵ The family had no good reason to take away the small pleasure of a “charmante alte Dame” (70).

In post-war Germany, commodities were difficult to come by, and as such when commodities are lacking, they become objects of an almost maniacal desire. Tante Milla’s desire to set up the tree reflects her desire to affirm that there is no lack. Böll uses her situation of a lack in order to substantiate his claim that already by 1946 Germans had been attempting to cover the grotesque wounds of the war. In such a short time Germany’s economic situation had improved to a point where things appeared to

⁹⁵ At this point in the post-war period much strife was taking place between the Allied nations of Western Europe and the Soviet communist blocs. Germany, most especially Berlin, had become a hotbed for covert war operations, and Germany appeared to be the next battlefield for a World War III.

have returned to much as they once had been, though the metaphorical social body was still much on the mend. The Christmas holiday signals the notion of return to a “golden age” (i.e. the pre-war era). The dwarves hammer away and the angel susurrates the word *Frieden*. The feeling that the abnormal world of the war years is swiftly obliterated by the return of tradition, and there is a sense of complacency within the family’s collective consciousness.

But elements within the metaphorical social body are hard at work undermining the very notion of return. The war changed the social body, but nonetheless the need to press on in order to resume the purgative pose is dire. Böll sees German society as failing to realize, or more accurately unwilling to come to terms with six years of painful costiveness. When tradition is allowed to perform its function *ad purgandum ventrem* – the purgation of the bowels – the metaphorical cleansing is a natural, seasonal occurrence. However, once stopped, the back-storage of waste threatens to disrupt not just the function of the cleansing process, but also to destroy the social body’s ability to perform any purgation through traditions. As one Old French proverb neatly puts it: “Qui ne chiet ne peut joer.”⁹⁶

Böll uses the significance of holidays to illustrate the importance of meaning in relation to time and place, for meaning is grasped by its inherent positioning within a particular moment, in this case by the Christmas tradition occurring in its traditional time. However, after the war, things are no longer performed in accordance with their traditional temporality. The image of return through the re-establishment of tradition quickly turns into a full-blown case of metaphorical diarrhea. Three months after the traditional Christmas holiday, the narrator runs an errand for his mother and on his way to his uncle’s house must make his way “ahnungslos an bewachsenen Trümmerhalden und verwilderten Parks” (NW 70). The piles of war-refuse are a reminder that much still needs to be dealt with though it is still buried below the horizon of “noticeability.” As he passes by his Onkel Franz’ house the narrator

⁹⁶ Allen. *Ibid.*, 18.

comes to a dead stop, for he can hear songs being sung, which is not unusual, for singing is “eine gute deutsche Sitte” (70). However, it is now March, and Germans have plenty of songs about spring time, but he what he hears instead are Christmas carols: “holder Knabe im lockigen Haar...” (70). A Christmas carol and the tinkling of *Zwergenglocken*, and the whispers of *Frieden*, leave the narrator in a state of confusion and he swiftly returns home to give an account of his experience, but his report only evokes cries of amusement from the rest of his family.

It is from Vetter Franz, in his role as pariah and truth-sayer, that the rest of the family is informed of the reasons for Christmas carols in March. As Christmas ends, Candlemas approaches, signaling the removal of the Christmas decorations, but as the family members begin to take down the Christmas ornaments, Tante Milla begins to scream incessantly. Her family, in a state of deranged stress, quickly rushes neurologists and psychiatrists to the house, though none are able to help and all depart with the same gesture: “achselzuckend” (71). The only option left for modern medicine is to drug Tante Milla with the strongest *Dosis Luminal* available, which only results in a few hours of peace. The situation spirals rapidly out of control. Vetter Franz even suggests an exorcism and makes himself even more disliked. No cure can be found and the screams continue *ad nauseum*. Until one day, around carnival, when “Masken und Pistolen, Cowboyhüte und verrückte Kopfbedeckungen für Czardasfürstinnen füllen die Schaufenster,” (72) Onkel Franz has a flash of genius. He sets up the Christmas tree, and his final act of desperation brings Tante Milla’s screams to an end.

Section VI.

Capitalism’s Use of Simulacrum to Heal Lesions of War

The re-establishment of tradition results in an instantaneous return to ostensible normalcy. Tante Milla once again begins to eat. But the panacea can only last as long as the Christmas tradition remains in place. When dusk approaches and Onkel Franz, who is reading the newspaper next to his

wife, feels the gentle touch of her hand, and hears her say: "So wollen wir denn die Kinder zur Feier rufen, ich glaube, es ist Zeit" (73). What follows is a mad scramble to put everyone into their right places to create the appearance that "alles schien in Ordnung zu sein" (74). But, of course, everything is ostensibly in order. The war has changed everything and it is no coincidence that Tante Milla suffers a psychosis at Christmas time, for it is a tradition which has become the single most tradition infused with capitalism.⁹⁷ The depth of such an infusion creates a disturbance in the natural order of things. The image of rebirth inherent in the tree is pushed to the limits, "die gesamte Vegetation gewissen biologischen Gesetzen unterworfen, und Tannenbäume, dem Mutterboden entrissen, haben bekanntlich die verheerende Neigung, Nadeln zu verlieren" (74). Tradition can serve an important purpose, but only in its proper place and time.

Capitalism made possible the perfect replication of tradition through its technological capabilities. This resulted in a creation of new meaning, for the yearly rebirth of the economy became as important, if not more so, than the tradition of Christmas. Böll illustrates the importance of celebrating Christmas within Western societies, which formerly had performed these traditions in order to show deference to the entity of eternal salvation: Christ. The fact that such traditions occur only once a year provides a distance, which makes possible a moment of reflection on a year's worth of detritus that may need to be flushed away. The time frame between the occurrence of traditions and holiday celebrations allows for a coming to terms with old meanings and new ones; this is a process which has been established over a period of thousands of years. However, as a result of the war, the capitalistic productivity now threatens to undermine the age-old process of reflection by providing a precise

⁹⁷ Christmas had once been a time of (re)birth for both Catholics and Protestants alike. This tradition is dedicated as the moment of Christ's incarnation. Christmas, however, has been re-routed through extreme forms of capitalism which arose as a consequence of the Second World War and were in full force by the early 1950s. To buy material items becomes sacred in and of itself. The traditional holiday that celebrates the rebirth of Christ has become a rebirth of the economy. Although Christ cannot be transformed into dollar signs, but the tradition associated with him can be. Capitalism has thus supplanted the natural order of meaning within the tradition.

reproduction of traditions. The overkill on the bells-and-whistles, rather than a genuine reflection, especially in terms of dealing with the war, is used by Böll to portray the need for a reflective period without the influence of mechanized re-production of age-old symbols and their meanings.

Baudrillard in *Simulations* describes the phenomenon of the simulacrum as, “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.”⁹⁸ Here Baudrillard specifically refers to microchip technology and its ability to recreate the images of a map without the need of human input. The microchip simply takes the old cartographer maps, which had been done by hand, and reads them in order to create its perfectly reduplicated image. The precision generated by a machine has created a new meaning of what perfection is supposed to mean:

Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory – PRECISISSION OF SIUMLACRA – it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own. *The desert of the real itself.*

The process by which the substitution of signs occurs has been with humanity since the first formation of cohesive social groups. The substituting of one thing for the meaning of another was the fundamental basis of the first myth. However, it was in the Middle Ages that the process of substitution found its greatest proliferation through the use of allegory and the extensiveness in Western society of traditional hand-worked objects. In these objects meaning was inscribed by the particular skill of the craftsman. However, the precision of representation of the real had always been created through the fallible hands of man. The artificial, machined precision of the object is the beginning of the liquidation of all referentials. A craftsman’s skill is no longer the meaning-giver in the quality of the object, it has become the perfection of machines.

⁹⁸ Baudrillard. *Ibid.* 2.

Section VII.

Carnival as Representation of Truth *à l'envers*

Böll uses the carnival to present an age old, and still continuing, tradition by which the substitution of signs and meanings are dealt with in terms of human influence in the creative process of objects and cultural meaning. The carnival plays a central role in world culture today, although on the whole, it remains a subsidiary tradition to Christmas. However, the temporal placement of these two traditions is no longer a necessary referential for meaning. For instance, traditionally the needles of the Christmas tree would fall off long before the arrival of carnival. The dead needles represent the cyclical pattern of death and rebirth, which extends to life and traditions as systems of signs and meanings. Through the transition of one tradition to another, a different system of signs and meanings are evinced. The meaning of the Christmas tree can be taken to mean rebirth, whereas that of carnival can be understood as the act of presenting the inner masks people wear. Carnival brings forth elements for what they really are: hidden behind a mask. However, capitalism's new power of precise replication means that there is no longer a need to substitute one system of signs in order to understand another set of signs, which is signaled by the arrival of another tradition. In essence, you can have any tradition, any time and anyway you want it, which Böll understands as the process for continual distraction and leaves no time for contemplation.

As well as symbolic of real social change, the needles of the Christmas tree signify an axiomatic truth of life from the point of view of myth: all things pass, but eventually return. Whereas the carnival provides truth as something which remains hidden, it portrays the world *à l'envers*. In their natural forms, traditions are myth created by man's own hand by which he can understand himself and the world he creates around him. However, through the simulacrum, traditions have become a pre-

fabricated, empty burden,⁹⁹ for they occur without significance and are shallow vestiges of their former meaning. In the case of the narrator's family, which attempts to disburden itself from such senselessness, the members undertake several "sehr vage Versuche, die Feier abubrechen oder ausfallen zu lassen" (NW 75) but to no avail. Tante Milla simply responds in kind: "mit solchem Geschrei [...], daß man von derlei Sakrilegien endgültig Abstand nehmen mußte" (76). The need for tradition as a meaningful experience has been flipped on its head, for the simulated forms create a need to escape the unreal of tradition. The new meaning of Christmas becomes a predominating element in the family members' lives, for they are forced to honor the new meaning by their presence: "das Schreckliche war, daß [...] alle ihre nahestehenden Personen müßten anwesend sein" (75).

But this is no longer tradition. It is forced participation in the worship of a false image created by simulacrum. Tante Milla's insistence that the family members acquiesce to her needs of tradition eventually reaches a crisis, when Vetter Franz attempts to have his mother committed to an asylum, but is denounced by the other members of the family. The priest, who had initially been willing to partake in the sham, cannot continue to vest such long periods of time to a *tradition fausse*, while neglecting his official duties. Luckily, Onkel Franz finds a priest in retirement, who is willing and prepared to dedicate himself, "zur Verfügung und täglich die abendliche Feier zu vervollständigen" (77).

Böll presents capitalism's capacity to streamline the entire process of tradition, thus turning tradition into a hollow illusion. At one time, the process of finding the perfect tree actually involved members of the family trekking into the woods to cut the tree down by hand. The emergence of post-war capitalism's power provides the means to hold traditions at any time:

Die Firma Söderbaum die Lieferung des Baumes in ein wesentlich verbilligtes Abonnement um [...] (auf) genaustens festlegen zu lassen, so daß schon drei Tage, bevor der alte Baum indiskutabel wird, der neue anlangt und mit Muße geschmückt werden kann (77).

⁹⁹ Böll illustrates the notion of "empty burden" by Tante Milla's requirement that all the family members be present for the nightly procession of the Christmas tree tradition.

Capitalism has penetrated the sacredness of the tradition to the point of blasé overkill. This results in an overproduction of signs, which causes the true signifier to be lost, not in a myriad of human imperfections, but rather in an overkill of capitalism's *perfection*. There is an eternal truth here: eating perfected *kaka* every day has a nauseating effect, especially when the realization is made that one is performing a *coprophagous act* (i.e. dung eating). The precision of the tradition has been improved to the point that "die Freude hat am wirklichen Weihnachtsfest in unserer gesamten Verwandtschaft erhebliche Einbuße erlitten" (78).

Although the "real" Christmas was celebrated without incident, the relief of the moment is short lived: "Aber die Erleichterung dauerte nur so lange an, wie die weihnachtliche Zeit dauerte. Schon Mitte Januar brach bei meiner Kusine Lucie ein merkwürdiges Leiden aus: beim Anblick der Tannenbäume, die auf den Straßen und Trümmerhaufen herumlagen, brach sie in ein hysterisches Geschluchze aus" (80). The temporal use of tradition to eject cultural waste is denied for cousin Lucie. This image is reinforced by the symbol *Spekulatius*. The word deserves special attention, for it may have derived from the Latin word *speculum* or mirror and refers to the emblematic images, which "mirror" the bas-reliefs from the wooden-stamps they are cut from. Böll uses the mirror-quality of *Spekulatius* to emphasize the humiliation cousin Lucie must endure, for she is forced to "watch" herself consume the metaphorical excrement of cultural identity.

The reflective qualities of the mirror created by *Spekulatius* gives rise to the notion that there is nothing worse than watching oneself eat the refuse of a social tradition, especially when they no longer hold any value for the eater. Böll uses cousin Lucie as a representation of the possible problems associated with such a lurid concept, for she had been forced to ingest *Spekulatius* as a part of a tradition which does not reflect her social identity. As a result she suffers a mental breakdown, when one of her girlfriends offers her a *Spekulaitus*. The thought of eating more merdurinous cookies outside

the home, while forced to reflect on the act, proves too much for her: “Dann hatte sie einen regelrechten Anfall von Wahnsinn, den man als Nervenzusammenbruch zu kaschieren versuchte. Sie schlug einer Freundin, bei der sie zum Kaffeeklatsch war, die Schlüssel aus der Hand, als diese ihr milde lächelnd *Spekulatius* anbot” (80). The unfortunate incident culminates in cousin Lucie being led away in a *Zwangsjacke*. It is only by slowly reintroducing the topic of *Spekulatius* into conversations that cousin Lucie is able to make a reluctant recovery in terms of dealing with *Spekulatius*. Thanks to a sympathetic doctor, she is provided with proscriptio for eating any more of the cookies, but instead must subsist for the time being on “sauren Gurken, [...] Salate und kräftige Fleischspeisen” (80). Thanks to modern medicine’s healing capabilities, cousin Lucie is released from the hospital four weeks after the onset of her *Spekulatiustrauma*. She is once again present for the daily ritual.

Böll humorously illustrates that the ritual of tradition continues the principles of the past. Although these principles are seen by cousin Lucie as being no longer relevant for present understanding of her social identity. The extreme nature of cousin Lucie’s *Spekulatiustrauma* ushers in a détente on the part of Onkel Franz, who recognizes his stern insistence to partake in the undesirable tradition pushed his daughter’s psyche to limits and this resulted in a direct expression of dissent. Such an abreaction is a self-defense mechanism and occurs “not as a conscious act of will but unconsciously as an act of ego-preservation. In this way we deny our own ‘badness’ and project it onto others, whom we hold responsible for it.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, the rejection of the undesirable manifests itself in the form of cousin Lucie’s symbolic rejection to partake in a tradition she can no longer identify with.

¹⁰⁰ Stevens, Anthony. *On Jung: An Updated Edition with a Reply to Jung’s Critics*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, Penguin Books, 1999. Print.

Section VIII.

Böllian Rumors as Myth, Myth as Böllian Rumors

The rejection of tradition then moves from the realm of the symbolic to the more dangerous aspect of reality, for the “favored son” Johannes, who, it is rumored, attempted to get a life-expectancy quota pertaining to his mother from a doctor. Whereas cousin Lucie’s rejection is towards the mirror, Johannes’ is projected onto the cause of his hatred: his mother. The cultural identity his mother attempts to establish through tradition is rejected, yet he is forced to continue for her sake, which results in an altogether new dimension of frustration. Though matricide may be a hyperbole here, the fact that the “favored son,” as an image of perfected filial-love, is concerning himself with the life-expectancy of his mother, is disconcerting. However, if there is an iota of truth to the rumor, it is left hidden in ambiguity of the rumor: “der Gerücht ist einfach eine Erfindung übelmeinender Verwandter” (81).

It is important to recognize the fact that rumors function much like myth within society. Just as the myth is formed from the hearsay of others so too is rumor created. The whisperings of others result in the inability to concretize and verify. Once the myth has taken form in one of its various guises, that is, rumors, hearsay, or bruit, it begins to flourish under its own accord. So powerful does the rumor become that it can grow to mythic proportions. Rumor can undo or destroy, just as myth can undo or destroy, which is the case of Johannes, who becomes the prime suspect after Tante Milla comes down with an infection resulting in diarrhea and vomiting. Johannes’ position of *Lieblingssohn* is undone as soon as the rumors that he had her *vergiftet* surface. But the harm to his reputation has already been done by the rumors, even though his reputation is only partly rebuilt, in large part, due to the modern practices of scatology, which finds no traces of poisonous material in Tante Milla’s stool: “Es ist eindeutig erwiesen, daß es sich um eine Infektion handelte, die von einem Engel eingeschleppt wurde.

Analysen, die mit den Exkrementen meiner Tante vorgenommen wurden, ergaben aber auch nicht die geringste Spur von Gift" (82).

It should be no small surprise that truth is discerned through the verification of fecal matter. The seamier sides of life are dealt with through the purposeful analysis of offal. Myth is just one of the many tools for rooting around in the metaphor of social refuse. An interesting point to note is that one rarely ever hears a rumor about a positive characteristic or course of action undertaken, for they tend to extrapolate on those qualities that are less than ideal. Their function is to signify commonplaces, which often illustrate truths, though often enmeshed in the isolated form of the archetypal character. In this way, metaphorical scatology helps analyze or open up what is closed off to the social body's understanding in terms of social events like war or in refusal of coming to terms with the roles individuals played in the Second World War. Like airing one's laundry in public, myth's use of metaphorical scatology reveals things which are hidden in the social body. The seamy side of reality is often where the truth lies buried.

In *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* the entire familial body has undergone such overwhelming stress from the home situation that all of its members, except Tante Milla, begin to show signs of a rapidly approaching implosion – or in this case, an explosion through their rectitude of daily traditions. Trying to mask the imperfections through perfection fails, just as eating sugar-coated sweets in the form of *Speculatius* in order to lessen the metaphorical stench is to no avail, so too does the forced participation of tradition fail to cover the stench of the family's bout with Nazism. Tante Milla's projected image of social propriety is an illusion. The dark-side of *merde* plays havoc with purported uprightness, which is illustrated in the narrator's description of his uncle as "dieser biedere Mensch," (81) whose insistent and good-natured character becomes seen as something on a path which is simply *unsittlich* – unethical. He had once been tantamount to such noble ideals, but now rumors have come to

light that the narrator can only describe with a single word: *Ehebruch*. He has taken a lover. Onkel Franz' projected image as pillar of society, in the end becomes his own affirmation of his lack of actually being the embodiment of an "upright" husband. The simulacrum of a righteous man has entered the final stages, where reality does not concur with the purported image projected by perfection.

Whatever last vestiges of Onkel Franz' "bieder" character are left, he has thoroughly quashed them under a sudden shift in morals: "bei ihm ist der Verfall komplett, schon vollzogen" (82). From the narrator's point of view, these changes in his uncle's character appear to be new, but Böll infers that they have always existed, though just unnoticed by the narrator: "Man biginnt sich zuzuflüstern, daß Onkel Franz nun auch geschäftlich zu Methoden gegriffen hat, die die Bezeichnung 'christlicher Kaufmann' kaum noch zulassen" (83). He has become so far removed from his traditional self that he is the first to suggest the idea of allowing actors take his place at the nightly celebrations, which is indicative of the successive phases of the image being replaced by the simulacrum.

Baudriallard describes this process as the perfected reflection of basic reality, which gradually becoming masked, until the perfection actually illustrates the lack of the real within the reality it purports to reflect. A pattern the family has followed perfectly, for the narrator's family enters into its final stage of self-simulated reality with the acceptance of actors as representations of their real self. Onkel Franz' bizarre behavior has culminated into the hiring of an "arbeitslosen Bonvivant" (83) to play himself at the nightly gatherings. The disguise is so precise that only one of the grand-children spots Onkel Franz-*le faux*: "Opa hat Ringelsocken an" (NW 83). The proxy is meant to serve as a simulation of the real in order to bolster the structure from collapse; however, once the simulated figures are discovered for what they truly are, they become "das Signal zum fast völligen Zusammenbruch" (83).

The discovery of the *Bonvivant* initiates a full-blown mutiny, which results in a compromise. Onkel Franz vouches to front the costs of Schwager Karl's, cousin Lucie's and Vetter Franz' replacements

with the understanding that there should always be one of the original four members present along with the children. The imaginary world created by the family is outwardly the *ideal*, but the façade remains precisely the affectation of a simulated truth – thus signaling “a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of a second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity.”¹⁰¹

The relationship between the real and the hyperreal is consummated. Both worlds have become united by the precision of an ordered, simulated plan. As though the family members are all too aware of the fact that they opened Pandora’s Box, at a subconscious level, they are inclined to give the deception the codename of *Spielplan*: “(dieser Plan) wird in unserer Verwandtschaft Spielplan genannt” (NW 84). The actors and family members are equal participants in a false tradition. The simulation is forced into abeyance via the supplementation of the unreal for the real, but they cannot conscientiously commit to the falsehood, so they must mask the deception by assigning a new meaning to real intention of their plan. Böll emphasizes the true nature of simulacrum is only to deceive the self. The family’s deception serves only to deceive themselves, and thus receives the euphemistic title of a game, which is incapable of causing any real harm.

The resemblance to the simulacrum is coming full circle, for even the simulated must take a break from the simulation in order to preserve the “true” atmosphere of the festival. The burden of continually performing the tradition is lessened for the actors, “die Tatsache, daß einer immer wirklich teilnimmt, ist auch für die Schauspieler eine gewisse Vakanz gewährleistet” (84). Böll’s use of irony is overpowering, for seen from a Marxist notion of paper money as the symbolic replacement of skilled labor, the actors are the only skilled labor left to be actually using its artisan skills to earn a living. However, Böll is unable to resist turning such a notion on its head. The actors in *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* are the epitome of the simulacrum. Their livelihood is the representation of the real, yet

¹⁰¹ Baudrillard *Ibid.* 12.

in the wake of capitalism's simulacrum, they too go the way of the Dodo. The narrator mentions that fortunately for the family, actors go unpaid for large periods of time, and there is always a ready surplus of labor in the acting business: "an arbeitslosen Schauspielern kein Mangel herrscht" (84). These last vestiges of a skilled labor class are reduced to monetary figures in terms of cost analysis: "noch ganz erheblich herunterzusetzen, zumal ja den Schauspieler eine Mahlzeit geboten wird und die Kunst bekanntlich, wenn sie nach Brot geht, billiger wird" (84). The capitalistic desire to extract as much meaning out of a signifier, as cheaply as possible, is only a natural process by which capitalism believes it must adhere to in order to survive.

Section IX.

The Touristic Drive to Confirm *Authentic* Existence

The loss of meaning through capitalism's simulacrum often provides for the need to confirm one's existence. One way this can be achieved is to escape one's culture, which Böll illustrates by Schwager Karl and cousin Lucie's plans of emigration, which "scheinen sich zu realisieren" (84). Schwager Karl finds a country in which "man trägt [...] Kleider, die den ihren nicht unähnlich sind, man liebt dort die scharfen Gewürze und tanzt nach Rhythmen" (84-85). A simulacrum of perfected traditions creates a desire for a return to the old rituals and is linked to the overbearing effects of perpetual affirmation of one's own tradition – in this sense: Christmas. As Dean MacCannell notes in *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*: "Touristic consciousness is motivated by its desire for authentic experiences, and the tourist may believe that he is moving in this direction, but often it is very difficult to know for sure if the experience is in fact authentic."¹⁰²

¹⁰² MacCannell, Dean. *The Tourist: A new theory of the leisure class*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999. Print.

That Schwager Karl's plans seem to materialize denotes an emphasis on the imaginary projection of an unsoiled paradise: a place where people can feel free from the restraints of social roles. It is interesting to note that such a possibility is largely brought about by the accumulation of wealth, which provides for the ability of leisure. Although there is no mention of tourism, the German word *Auswanderung* can be seen to be similar in application to the Australian-Aboriginal usage of *walkabout*, for they both imply an eventual return after enough wandering is done in an outward-lying area, though not explicitly so. One can only surmise that Schwager Karl and cousin Lucie's pressing need to travel abroad was fueled by the images of a poster in some *Reisebüro*. The relationship between the images of a projected paradise and that of the individual's desire to escape society often occurs as the "first contact of a sightseer has with a sight is not the sight itself but with some representation thereof."¹⁰³

Whereas cousin Lucie seeks to revive meaning through *other* traditions, her brother Johannes seeks to annul all such traditions: "[...] leider hat sich das böse Gerücht bewahrheitet: er ist Kommunist geworden" (NW 85). The rumors maintain their identity through a reflection of partial truth that turns out to be true. One can only assume that such a turn from the ideal was brought about by the forced participation in a tradition that reinforced the overbearing tenets of capitalism: the signifier of accumulation of wealth. Seen from the Marxist point of view, capitalism is the love of gold that "represents the misdirected desire for immortality and lack of bodily corruption [...] the denial of finitude and death, themselves represented by shit. Shit and gold stand as repressed metaphor for each other."¹⁰⁴

Whereas one brother chooses rejection of a ritual which signifies the positive aspect of accumulating surplus, the other chooses the epitome of ritualizing the accumulation. Vetter Franz' divergent behavior takes the form of penance: he becomes a man of the cloth. The narrator comments

¹⁰³ ---, *Ibid.* 109-110.

¹⁰⁴ Allen. *Ibid.* 93.

on his *Zustand* as something which had not previously happened to any member of the family: “er ist arm” (NW 85). This negative precedence is lessened by his decision to remain single, for the undue burden of poverty, as a result of his *unverantwortliche Frömmigkeit*, affects only him. However, the brother’s separate paths have resulted in a positive outcome, for they reach a rapprochement of sorts as a result of being forced to deal with their mother’s incessant need for tradition.

Section X.

Bourgeois Notions of a Perfected Simulation of Family

In the instance of Onkel Franz, his behavioral change can be seen in light of trying to obviate his finitude. Despite his age he is still able to manage a lover. But, most of all, it is the manner in which he is able to run his business that causes the rest of the family to marvel. He has become the epitome of a captain of industry. No longer forced to manage the production of illusion at home he can do what he wishes in his free time. Böll correctly predicts a current concept of business: outsourcing. Onkel Franz makes use of an unemployed stage manager, whose only task is to make sure all the simulacrum of family traditions run “[...] wie am Schnürchen” (86). The stage production has achieved automation and the actors are no longer even a skilled guild. The previously hidden mechanism is no longer hidden, but has evinced itself and taken control of all aspects of the simulacrum and the curtain falls on the last remaining vestiges of skilled labor: acting is replaced by the perfected simulation.

Das fremde Künstlervolk produces nightly productions of the tradition, though the perfection of the production has eroded any remnants of *natürliche Gastlichkeit*. One evening the narrator stops by and hears unmistakable lyrics of a Christmas song: “weinachtlich glänzet der Wald...,” (86) but is unable to make out the rest of the song, because just then a *Lastwagen* rumbles down the road. The symbol of mechanized objects as an interruption for understanding meaning could not be any clearer. As the

narrator mentions, the precision of the simulacrum is too true to be believable: “Die Ähnlichkeit der anwesenden Mimen mit den Verwandten, die sie darstellten, war so erschreckend, daß ich im Augenblick nicht erkennen konnte” (86). The simulacrum is present in all its *fausse gloire*: the hammering dwarves, which he cannot see, but he hears; the angel’s whisperings of *Frieden* which he cannot make out, yet he instinctively knows it is there, for this is the result of the simulacrum: it is perfect. Simulacrum does not fail, and can always be depended on.

In the thick of the simulated perfection of tradition and family is Tante Milla, who appears to be truly happy, for she, and her paid for priest, perhaps the only two “real” people in the spectacle, are content with this illusion of the world. They are so lost in their complacency that they fail to notice that “die Schauspieler offenbar auch mit Zigarren, Zigaretten und Wein traktiert werden” (86). The seriousness of tradition has been incorporated into grotesque form, for tradition was meant to supplant the unreal by riding the social body of illusion. Here, however, Böll presents tradition as it had become: *à l’envers*.

The final stage of this upside-down world is adumbrated by the presence of the children, who “sahen blaß und müde aus” (86). Apparently, even the phantasmagoria of Wonderland begins to weigh on the spirit of children. Unfortunately, they are the real sufferers, for they are caught in a situation which they have not created, yet are made to endure the prolonged sufferings of adult fantasy. However, as the narrator mentions, fortunately even children can now be simulated. The narrator strikes upon the novel idea of supplanting the children with “Wachspuppen, [...] wie sie in den Schaufenstern der Drogerien als Reklame für Milchpulver und Hautcreme Verwendung finden” (87). Their existence is equated to that of mannequins, for they need only behave as they are told and look good in doing so. The travesty of the scene proves to be too much for the narrator, who is suddenly

overcome by the urge for sour pickles and he mentions that it is only then that he is able to understand how his cousin Lucie must have suffered.

Eventually the acquisition of *Wachspuppen* is fulfilled, though Onkel Franz had been reticent, due to the cost. However, “es war nicht länger zu verantworten, die Kinder täglich mit Marzipan zu füttern und sie Lieder singen zu lassen, die ihnen auf die Dauer psychisch schaden können” (87). The logic of sparing the progeny is a small victory in this world of the absurd. The only two people who can be counted on – *die Zuverlässigen* – are Tante Milla and the Prälat. As symbols of ritual and tradition, these two represent the ironic condition: their desire for the “gute alte Zeit” (88) is the only thing that keeps the façade of the surreal in place. The yearning for a traditional past as it was understood has created the fantasy of the past as a reality for the present: “When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning.”¹⁰⁵ However, any notion of falsehood matters little, since in the end, the only thing that needs to occur is that “die Feier wird fortgesetzt” (NW 88).

Section XI.

Summing Up Böll's *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit*

Böll's *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* illustrates the necessity to change without destroying cultural identity in the process. In situations like that of cousin Lucie, one gets a sound sense of her reasons for rebelling against the identity chosen for her by her parents. Johannes' bilious complaints about working in his father's business during the war can be seen as a double-edged sword. On one hand, Johannes was blessed to have had a father who could keep from the horrors of the war. On the other hand, the middle class' notion of a productive economy resulted in a need for the Nazis to maintain that image, which eventually led to the war. Otherwise, Germany's economy would have slowly ground to a halt and eventually collapsed in ruin and the Nazis would most likely have been voted

¹⁰⁵ Baudriallard. *Ibid.* 12.

out of incumbency for failure to maintain their promises of a thriving economy. Only Vetter Franz is able to maintain a sense of an original identity, but many would consider a Fool to be irrelevant in terms of substantiating the importance of foreseeing cultural change.

Böll clearly levels charges at the absurd, capitalistic trends of the late 1940s and early 1950s, although he attempts to provide a balanced look at both the negative and positive aspects. On one hand, the rapid recovery and subsequent affluence of this time period proved that the Germans could triumph over the adverse effects of the Second World War. On the other hand, that same affluence provided for a state of complacency and an attitude of neglect in regards to the effects of the war and the horrors committed by the Nazis. In the post-war period, the merging power of the capitalistic mechanism was only just getting started, yet was already signaling its ability to cloister away the seamier sides of the war's reality. The war and its aftermath cannot simply be pushed under the metaphorical rug. A point Böll recognizes and one which endeavors to open a dialogue on in order to deal with these issues. He goes about such a task through the tried and true form of myth as a social device to bring about a coming to terms with new and old notions of cultural identity, especially in light of the Second World War.

One of the most important issues in *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* is Böll's treatment of the precision of mechanized forms as cultural signifiers of identity and the hindrances they impose on understanding culture. The perfections of simulacrum are dangerous and can undo the traditional ways for dealing with social issues (e.g. cultural crisis). If the meanings ascribed to new traditions by the simulacrum are allowed to continue, then the risk of not having the necessary tools by which to deal with future issues is greatly increased. It is through traditions that the social body had traditionally been able to recognize its metaphorical refuse, and thus rid itself of toxic elements. However, because something is traditional does not mean that it is necessarily appropriate for dealing with social ills. A

point Böll illustrates throughout the short story through the humorously hypocritical remarks of the narrator, who sees the undoing of tradition as a negative quality of modern society. The traditions of any given culture hold valuable cultural notions of identity, but each generation must decide what should be kept, improved upon, or excluded. The lessons of the past can only be learned through a careful analysis of past traditions, even if they are seen in meridianous light. Böll's short story functions in the same manner as ancient myth had done, for both provide a look at a cultural period which acts as a tool by which to gauge each subsequent generation's concept of identity and cultural mores in relation to the previous generations.

Section XII.

A Last Look at Myth in Böll's *Der Mann mit den Messern* and *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit*

Heinrich Böll's *Der Mann mit den Messern* and *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* are two socially authorized myths, which seek to understand certain experiences within the Second World War and post-war era. These works are effective guides for individual as well as collective understanding in relation to the war and its aftermath. Böll's use of myth and writing serve as tools for the search of lost moments, for through the written word cultural and personal experiences can be firmly situated in the collective conscious of society, most specifically, that of the German experience of the war. It is through the myth that any society can find its needed guidance, for myth has ever been mankind's natural means of dealing with the issues that affect the social and individual mind. These two short stories stand as productions and revelations of a time and an event that Böll sees as imperative not to forget, and rather than allow for a representation of such a hellish experience to be created by someone else, he has fashioned tale out his own experience and character. Yet, this concept is in a very real sense a double-edged sword, for Böll's experience once written down becomes his own loss of self and a falsification of

the event he experienced. However, whatever loss occurs far outweighs the alternative of distorting grotesque representations from others.

Although myth is formed via the bromide structures of experience, these clichés are utterly dependable. To the modern sense of myth, its usage is often perceived to be wholly erroneous, for the common belief is that all must be demythologized in order to be understood. However, though stereotypes, archetypes, or personal sentiments form the core of myth, these devices are humanity's most basic and primary tool for understanding the world and the events which transpire in and around its environment. Certainly in the most primitive of societies myth took on the explanation of phenomena at the level of divine origin; yet, it is striking as to the similarity between modern and ancient myth. The main difference between these two age-derived concepts is the temporality from which they are viewed. Ancient myth sought to explain the unpredictable volition of deities. Modern myth seeks to explain the unpredictable volition of man. In the end, myth only seeks to fulfill one aim: communication. Even though such a notion is seriously abstract, the fact that such an endeavor is undertaken has always been humanity's purpose in using myth.

In *Mann mit den Messern* Böll uses the device of myth to warn of a modern demagoguery in relation to the Second World War and the post-war era. This particular piece can correctly be seen as apologetic, but this notion does much to reject the validity of Böll's argument, and it does little by way of attempting to come to terms with the rise of the Nazis and the subsequent threat of war. Society's capability for sending messages to its members had reached epic proportions. It is through new technologies that age-old forms of communication can affect an individual's perception of the world. Inherently linked with communication is the notion of spectacle, which is a phenomenon that dates back to an age as early as myth. Böll recognizes the importance that both of these elements have in modern

society, but he also warns of the dangers that exist without a proper investigation of the degree with which they can be used to manipulate.

In *Nicht nur zur Weihnachtszeit* Böll posits that there is a need to demythologize the unimpeded advance of the simulacrum's mechanized perfected meaning, for this new form of meaning-assignability represents an extreme in the awesome power of mass production. This unprecedented ability of capitalism's simulacrum still smacks of the wax-and-wane constitution Böll experienced as a child. Böll sees the capability of capitalism's power of reproduction not through the positive lens of human progress, but rather through the jaded goggles of war's perfected capacity to slaughter. In conjunction with capitalism's reproductive powers, Böll underscores that through such an awesome might a subconsciously created distraction has been formed which obstructs the means for coming to terms, especially in respect to the individual roles family members played in the establishment of National Socialism. As destructive as Nazism had been to Germany, Böll correctly assesses the even greater dangers in a partially conscious cover-up in the post-war years. However, he urges his fellow citizens to become *cityoens engagés*, for there is a need on the part of society's younger members to understand the danger of an apathetic outlook or rejection of identity in terms of the war. Both of these instances reflect the road to a re-occurrence of an event as devastating as the war.

Böll uses myth in order to tell of things which cannot be told. This may appear at first glance to be a paradox; however, myth is the first device human societies had used to substantiate their existence within the world and authenticate the individual as well as collective experience. Though myth may be a condoned prevarication, it has always served the basic function by which societies pass on learned wisdom, knowledge, and even prejudices. Certainly not everything which is inherited holds a paradigmatic advantage, but therein exist the greatest benefits of myth as a tradition, for it allows each successive generation and age to evaluate the mores of the previous ages. Böll correctly assesses the

flaws in human concepts, but he rightly recognizes the need for an awareness of those very tendencies. Thus he substantiates the need for myth via the tradition of mythologizing personal and collective experience in order that the devastating impact of the Second World War may not be forgotten with time.

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