



Heinrich Böll: Short Stories, Novels, and Film

Instructor

Marion Gerlind, PhD

Mondays, Sept 16 - Oct 21, 2024, 10:00 am-12:30 pm

UC Berkeley, Golden Bear Center, 1995 University Avenue, Suite 365

Course Description

In this interactive seminar, we'll explore selections from one of the twentieth century's most famous (West) German authors. Heinrich Böll (1917-1985) became well known for his short stories and novels, examples of *Trümmerliteratur* (rubble literature), after World War II. Much of his writing in the immediate postwar years graphically articulates the wounding and trauma experienced during the war. We'll discuss three of Böll's critically acclaimed short stories (1950s), as well as excerpts of his novels *The Clown* (1963) and *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum or: How Violence Develops and Where It Can Lead* (1974). We'll watch Volker Schlöndorff's and Margarethe von Trotta's 1975 film adaptation of Böll's latter novel, portraying the destructive power of the tabloid press during the political climate of panic over terrorism in 1970s West Germany.

Böll received many prestigious awards, including the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1972. His work has been translated into more than 30 languages.

I will electronically provide the texts (in the original German and English translation) and guiding questions for each session. Your participation in small group and class discussions is highly encouraged.

Week 1: Sept 16, 2024

Introduction to Heinrich Böll, his life and work.

What's to Become of the Boy? Or, Something to Do with Books (Was soll aus dem Jungen bloß werden? Oder: Irgendwas mit Büchern), published in 1981.

Excerpts from Böll's autobiography and his school years under the Nazi regime, 1933–1937

Böll wrote the short story “ ‘Stranger, Bear Word to the Spartans We...’ ” (“*Wanderer, kommst du nach Spa...’*”) in 1950. Set in a humanist *Gymnasium* (high school equivalent) turned into a hospital during WWII, Böll describes a young German soldier being transported back from the front, seriously wounded.

Week 2: Sept 23, 2024

The short story “The Death of Elsa Baskoleit” (“*Der Tod der Elsa Baskoleit*”), 1951.

Dealing with the senselessness of war and the suffering of ordinary people, Böll’s *Trümmerliteratur* (rubble literature) exemplifies wars’ cost, not only in terms of “collateral damage” but also in terms of human life and humanity.

Week 3: Sept 30, 2024

The short story “The Balek scales” (“*Die Waage der Baleks*”) was published in 1953.

Since feudal times, generations of poor peasants and their children have foraged for mushrooms and herbs and have them weighed on the scales of the wealthy Balek family in a small village near Prague. However, the children are poorly paid for their work. As a young boy, the narrator’s grandfather discovers a discrepancy in the weighing of their goods...

Week 4: Oct 7, 2024

Excerpts from the novel *The Clown (Ansichten eines Clowns)*. Among Böll’s best-known works, the 1963 publication of *The Clown* received mixed reviews because of its critical portrayal of the Catholic Church. Böll was a devoted Catholic, but he could not forget the collaboration of the Vatican with the Nazi regime. The protagonist, Hans Schnier, a young man with a wealthy family background, is working as a professional clown. He performs all over postwar West Germany and returns home to Bonn, where the story occurs. Marie, the woman he loves, left him for another man, and Hans is dealing with depression and serious financial troubles.

Week 5: Oct 14, 2024

Excerpts from the novel *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum, or How Violence Develops and Where It Can Lead (Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum oder: Wie Gewalt entstehen und wohin sie führen kann)*, published in 1974. The story deals with the sensationalism of the tabloid press and the political climate of panic over the Red Army Faction, a far-left militant organization in West Germany in the 1970s. The main character, Katharina Blum, is an ordinary housekeeper whose life is destroyed by an invasive reporter and a police investigation when the man with whom she has just fallen in love turns out to be wanted by the police because of a bank robbery.

Week 6: Oct 21, 2024

View this film at home for class film discussion: *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum* (*Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum*). I will give you the film link. This 1975 film adaptation of Böll's novel of the same name (1974) was written by Margarethe von Trotta and Volker Schlöndorff. The script emphasizes the vindictive treatment of an innocent woman by the public, the police, and the media. We conclude with reflections and takeaways from this course.

Bibliography

Texts

Heinrich Böll. *Was soll aus dem Jungen bloß werden? Oder: Irgendwas mit Büchern*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003 (1981). 110 pages

—. *What's to Become of the Boy? or Something to Do with Books*. Trans. Leila Vennewitz. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984. 82 pages

—. "Wanderer, kommst du nach Spa..." *Wanderer, kommst du nach Spa... Erzählungen*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1995 (1967). Pages 35-43

—. "Stranger, Bear Word to the Spartans We..." *Children Are Civilians Too*. Trans. Leila Vennewitz. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977. Pages 34-43.

—. "Der Tod der Elsa Baskoleit." *Erzählungen Hörspiele Aufsätze*. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1967 (1961). Pages 36-39

—. "The Death of Elsa Baskoleit." *18 Stories*. Trans. Leila Vennewitz. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971. Pages 73-79.

—. "Die Waage der Baleks." *Erzählungen Hörspiele Aufsätze*. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1967 (1961). Pages 54-61.

—. "The Balek scales." *18 Stories*. Trans. Leila Vennewitz. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971. Page 25-35

—. *Ansichten eines Clowns*. Darmstadt: Deutsche Buch-Gemeinschaft, 1969 (1963). 275 pages

—. *The Clown*. Trans. Leila Vennewitz. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971. 247 pages

—. *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum oder: Wie Gewalt entstehen und wohin sie führen kann*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1995 (1974). 137 pages

—. *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum, or How Violence Develops and Where It Can Lead*. Trans. Leila Vennewitz. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976. 140 pages

Film

The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum (*Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum*). Dir. Volker Schlöndorff and Margarethe von Trotta. The Criterion Collection, 2003 (1975). In German with English subtitles. 106 minutes

The syllabus is subject to change pending discussion and the instructor's discretion.