

Böll and the Burgundians: Myth and the
(Re)Construction of the German Nation

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My muse is a German
she provides no protection
only when I bathe in dragon's blood
does she lay a hand on my heart
thus I remain vulnerable
—Heinrich Böll¹

It would seem that mythological
worlds have been built up only to be
shattered again, and that new worlds
were built from the fragments.
—Franz Boas²

Since its “rediscovery” by the Romantics, the *Nibelungenlied* has not only evolved into *the* German national epic, but the stories and tales surrounding the myth have come to be synonymous with Germany and “Germanness.”³ After the misappropriation of the saga by the National Socialists, the myth, as well as the themes associated with it, had become tainted, like all things heralded for their “Germanic” nature, in the immediate post-war era. One of the first writers to begin to re-explore the function of myth and to recontextualize the saga was Heinrich Böll. Böll set about to re-examine the mythic elements of the story and did so by shifting the frame of reference away from the National Socialist racial manifestations to one with an ethical as well as a histori-

cal and spatial determinacy. Realizing that it was the mythic elements of the Lay that helped define Germany's literary as well as its own national identity, Böll's references and allusions to the saga in his novels reveal not only a deep attachment to the epic but also Böll's own identification with the German landscape and to a specific moral and cultural tradition. In the absence of a body of literature in the post-war period which could thematically help constitute a new German literature, Böll's reincorporation and recontextualization of the Nibelungen mythology helped not only to restore the use of Germanic myth to German literature but also served as a tool for socio-political critique and as a means of examining Germany's past and present so as to help explain the consciousness of the individuals and the society populating his literary prose.

In his introduction to a collection of Böll's poetry, Robert Conard posits that Böll's lyric and prose are characterized by the use of a kind of "personal mythology," which together with somewhat obscure autobiographic elements impart a cryptic aspect to his poetry ("Introduction" 9).⁴ This mythology is rooted in the "history, landscape, religion, tradition and life in and around Cologne. The city, its people, past and present, its churches, its landmarks and buildings all populate the poems as mythological characters rich in significance" (9). Conard notes further that Böll himself has stated in numerous essays that these characteristics of Cologne make for a world of their own, a microcosm of a world that, while distinct in and of itself, nonetheless represents a greater world, one that then falls under the scrutiny of Böll's critical eye. Central to this image of Cologne is the Rhine River, a symbol that recurs throughout Böll's works, from his earliest stories and poetry to his later works, reaching its pinnacle in Böll's final novel, *Frauen vor Flußlandschaft* (*Women in a River Landscape*), in which the Rhine itself is a central character, as informed by the title of the novel.

Inexorably connected with the Rhine, however, is a mythology older and richer than Böll's, and one that is conjured up, willingly or not, at the mere mention of the river—that of Siegfried and the *Nibelungenlied*.⁵ In a number of his works, Böll makes

specific reference not only to the Rhine, but also to many figures from the Nibelung saga. This mythological tradition has throughout the history of German literature become synonymous with Germany and "Germanness." As Otfried Ehrismann has noted in the introduction to his study of the Nibelung reception in German literature: "The national conception of Germany was carried over to the *Nibelungenlied* first in comparison with the Homeric epic . . . then strengthened in its entrustment in *Volks poesie*—the poetry of the people reflected the heroic character of this people (n.p.)." Indeed, it is the mythic components of the *Nibelungenlied* that help define Germany's literary identity as well as Germany's own national identity, and it comes as no surprise that Böll utilizes these elements throughout his works. Consequently, Böll's "personal" mythology often draws on Germanic mythology, thereby lending richer allegorical and associative power to his work.

When asked once what elements most strongly influenced his works, Böll answered "the Rhine, Cologne—and Catholicism"—in that order (qtd. in Conard, "Introduction" 12). While one may at first be taken aback by the order Böll assigns to these influences, upon reflection, the importance of location and geographical space in Böll's works becomes clearer. In the same essay, Böll defines and underscores his identity as a German: "I am a German. I see now that my roots are there for better or worse, sunk deep in the German language and tradition. To me, the recognition of this immutable fact is at once sobering and strengthening; it means that whatever becomes of me, I can never again be culturally *bodenlos*" (qtd. in Conard 10-11). Here Böll acknowledges that his roots are strongly tied to the German cultural tradition steeped in the allegorical Germanic *Boden*, a reference to both Germany's history and its mythology, two elements central to the determination of national identity.

This determinacy of national character and identity through history and location is something Kurt Hübner established in his study of myth as well: "A nation is defined by its history and the space in which this history occurs. A nation does not have a racial or linguistic homogeneity as a condition." (349-50).⁶ Böll's

concern with German identity and history becomes apparent in numerous essays and speeches, as well as in the thematic concerns of his novels, be it the early war stories and novels, or the later novels which critique the socio-political situation of post-war Germany. Throughout these works, Böll consistently makes reference to Germanic mythology, most often the myth of the Nibelungs, a myth that makes reference to German history as well as its identity. Claude Lévi-Strauss, in his structural analysis of mythology, notes that the functional value of myth is based on its universality: "a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place long ago. But what gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future" (209). Thus a writer like Böll, who considered himself a social critic as well as an artist, incorporates mythology and mythical allegory as a tool to comment on both the past and present, as well as to help explain the consciousness of individuals and their society, both of which were formed by a common history and identity.

In an essay entitled "Man and Myth," Joseph Campbell delineates further four basic functions of myth within society: the mystical function, in which man's relation to the size and the secrets of nature are explored; the cosmological, in which the myth attempts to understand and grasp the nature of the cosmos; the psychological or pedagogic, in which the myth establishes models of socialization; and finally the sociologic function, whereby a myth attempts to establish and maintain a social order (see Martin "Nationalstaat" 180-81). While the first two functions of myth lie rather clearly outside the scope of Böll's interests as a writer, the latter two, the psychological and the sociologic, are indeed areas that were important to Böll and are likewise important in understanding his utilization of myth as well, for they both deal with society and the human psyche, two common themes throughout Böll's works, as for example *The Clown*, a work that explores the effects of society and its hypocrisy on the individual. If, as Lévi-Strauss maintains, myth expresses truths about the past, present, and future, in what way does the Nibelung material then inform Böll's writings on a psychological and sociologic level?

To answer this question, one must first ascertain the “meaning” of particular mythic figures or references, or what Lévi-Strauss calls the “gross constituent units” (211).⁷ Assuming that myth is a linguistic phenomenon, Lévi-Strauss postulates that myth, like language, functions on an especially high level whereby meaning proceeds from the linguistic ground which sustains it (210). That myth is so rich in interpretive levels makes it especially suited for literary allusion, and Böll’s references are of course equally multifaceted. Böll draws not only on the myth’s power of historical allusion, but also on what Ehrismann has termed the heroic character of *Volkspoesie*, especially through repeated references to Siegfried as the prototypical, mythic Germanic hero.

In a 1965 essay entitled “Der Rhein,” Böll explains his fascination with the Rhine and the connotations it has for him with regard to its mythological content: “As a child I believed for a time that the Rhine was composed of dragon’s blood which flowed from the Odenwald; I liked Siegfried, who was also a Rhinelander, never took his guilelessness for stupidity and that he was vulnerable, mortally vulnerable, made him great. (Böll, *Aufsätze* 199)” Böll’s personal identification with Siegfried (“[he] was *also* a Rhinelander”), an identification manifested in Böll’s conception of the writer as a hero—a “vulnerable hero” but hero nonetheless—reveals itself here, as it does in his poem “My Muse.” Böll recognizes in this poem, as Conard points out,

That writing . . . is also a dangerous occupation demanding openness and suffering, even contagion, and exposure to ostracism. The writer must be willing to say what is unpopular. . . . Unlike Siegfried he remains vulnerable by intention, not by accident; his Muse places her hand on his heart when he bathes in blood, for she knows that the man who does not suffer with his fellow men is no longer among the ranks of humanity. (“Introduction” 10)

The connection Böll draws between the writer and Siegfried thus serves a two-fold purpose. First, the writer must be the brave hero, willing to tell the truth even if it is an unpopular truth (Siegfried’s bold honesty and trustworthiness cost him, of course, his life). But the writer’s volition to stay “among the ranks of humanity”

by suffering with his fellow man underscores a common theme of Böll's, the necessity of *Leidensbereitschaft* in post-war German society.⁸ Important as well is Böll's conception of a German female, a sort of *Germania* figure, who serves not only as his muse and source of poetic inspiration, but also as a bestower of humanity, for she imposes vulnerability upon the writer/hero, preventing him from being above the common, mortal man. With the establishment of this constellation and identification, the importance of Germany to Böll, in both human and artistic terms, becomes quite clear. Through these myths, then, Böll is able to explore not only the remnants of German identity, but to construct and draft an identity based on history and tradition.

The use of mythology to unite the past with the present and recall history in order to help elucidate the thematic structure of a work is a device Böll employs often in his novels. In *The Clown*, for example, Böll makes direct reference to Gunther and Siegfried during Schnier's first sexual encounter with Marie. The reference at this particular point in the novel recalls of course the infamous wedding scene in the *Nibelungenlied* in which Siegfried is called upon to tame Gunther's bride, Brunhild, after she has humiliated Gunther in his attempt at consummating their marriage. While waiting for Marie to come to bed, Schnier recalls from his school days the lessons on the *Nibelungenlied* and cannot help but think about Gunther's similar predicament: "I kept thinking of Gunther who had to send Siegfried on ahead, and I thought of the frightful Nibelung carnage which resulted from this thing" (37). Using history as a lesson for the present, Schnier is concerned about the possible detrimental consequences his sleeping with Marie could have for her. Afterwards, he is still troubled by the entire affair: "I was dead tired, glad I was able to think of that wretched Gunther without getting into a panic, and then began to feel scared something might have happened to Marie" (39). But this contrast between past and present serves more than merely to illustrate Schnier's psychological fears and motivations; it serves a point of social criticism as well. What both Gunther's and Schnier's actions represent is what Marie's father terms the "hypocritical sexual morals of bourgeois soci-

ety" (38). Just as Gunther was dishonest in deceiving Brunhild, so too was Schnier disrespectful in degrading Marie's own virtue by coercing her into having intercourse against her own moral beliefs. Thus a classic lesson in medieval propriety still holds meaning for modern society, and as such comments on and connects the past and present through German literary history and mythological tradition.

Even in his earlier novels, Böll turns to the Nibelung saga as a means of allegoric representation of the themes and topics dealt with in these works. In his 1954 novel *Haus ohne Hüter* (*The Unguarded House*), for example, a novel dealing with the social problems in the immediate post-war German society, Böll makes continual reference to the old German sagas—"altes deutsches Sagengut" (43). It is quite appropriate that Böll recalls these "altes Sagengut" in a novel dealing so directly with the present and the inability to forget the past. Indeed, Hans Joachim Bernhard sees the dialectic between remembering and forgetting as a central motif in all of Böll's creative works (161). The question of remembering and the need for moral responsibility are themes to which Böll often returns. That Böll would consciously link the problem of remembering the past, though, with the "altes deutsches Sagengut," given the misuse and perversion of such myths in the NS period,⁹ seems at first strange and unnerving. However, the satirical manner in which he portrays the current utilization of these myths at once undercuts and comments on the nature of misappropriation of the past. In the novel, *Bamberger*, a Jew who was later to be gassed in the concentration camps, owned an egg noodle factory and used the figures from the Nibelung saga to adorn his packages:

[Y]ellow, ever so clean noodles, deep blue cartons and vivid red coupons; Siegfried's butter-colored, Kriemhild's margarine-colored hair, and Hagen's eyes as black as Etzel's Mongolian beard, black as mascara; Etzel's round grinning face, as yellow as a very mild mustard, and then the rosy-skinned one: Giselher, and the man with the lyre in a rust-brown gambeson, so handsome, much more handsome than Siegfried, she thought: Volker. (47)

The juxtaposition and comparison of this revered mythology with the banality of condiments reflects the satiric irreverence with which Böll treats his subjects. Böll at once admires the majestic nature of these figures, yet ironically reduces the allegorical power they embody by trivializing their characterization. Whereas the Nazis exploited this mythology for the purposes of a dangerous political ideology of racial superiority, Böll undercuts and eradicates the associations with this ideology by creating a new referential basis—the egg noodle. The conceptions of superiority associated with the myth during the NS regime are stripped away and realigned with the benign reference to the artist/hero, for it was on a box of Bamberger noodles that Raimund Bach began writing poems and that Absalom Billig painted portraits (38). The irony of Judaism, Germanic mythology and art all coming together via a basic food staple was perhaps irresistible to Böll, who considered such basic elements as unifying forces of mankind.¹⁰

But Böll's utilization of mythology is double-sided, for, in the end, these mythic figures were still being exploited, but this time for commercial profit. Böll was no less appalled by the strategies employed during the post-war period in Germany for capitalistic reasons, for they too were to his mind immoral. The desecration of traditional literary themes and artistic motifs within a postmodern, pop culture society was disturbing for Böll, and the trivialized state Siegfried had been delegated was a further sad commentary on the state of literature in modern society. His use of this figure was in a broader sense a protest against the misuse and misrepresentation of art and literature for commercial purposes.

Moreover, Bernhard underscores the unique combination in *Haus ohne Hüter* of a "a principled moral critique from the standpoint of a young boy and a specific critique of the times, which arises from the intentions of other minor characters" (160). The moral criticism exercised within the novel is manifold. The exploitation of both people and ideas was disturbing for Böll, as was the moral decline within the family unit. Specifically, Böll problematizes the effects on both children and the family of the

absence of fathers in the immediate post-war era and the development of "Onkelehen," that is, the cohabitation of widowed women and their lovers. Toward the end of the novel, as Wilma Brielach decides to move in with the baker in order to afford herself and Heinrich a better life, she stumbles across a number of plywood figures abandoned in the attic, "Figures from the old German sagas":

Before the war Bamberger hat given out such signs only to the best customers. Siegfried was there with his butter-hair and his green, green smock, spear in hand pointed at the green, green lindworm looking almost like St. George. Kriemhild stood next to him, Volker and Hagen were there too, and the handsome one, Gieselher—they were all nailed on to a wide, brown molding, which bore in ocher letters the inscription: *Bamberger's Egg Noodles*. (254)

The depiction of these majestic figures in this final scene is both funny and somehow sad—on the one hand, they stand in all their glory and beauty, ready to fight and defend the courtly code of moral ethics, yet, at the same time, they are anachronisms, collecting dust and cobwebs in the corner of an attic: five characters in search of an author. What they lack is animation and the power to mean, having been reduced to lifeless caricatures of themselves. Symbolically, however, they parallel the thematic basis of the novel and as such reflect Böll's "principled moral critique" and "specific critique of the times," namely, the absence of fathers and father figures immediately following WWII.

Peter Morris-Keitel argues in his study of recent adaptations of the *Nibelungenlied*, that too often the "historical and humanistic values of the medieval text are overlooked" (189). The text, he maintains, expresses a close and "controversial relationship between culture and politics." Furthermore, "[t]he tragic-heroic elements still enjoy great popularity, in fact, to such a degree, that the current reception is almost entirely dominated by these supposedly positive attributes. Therefore, the heroes—especially Siegfried—seem to be characterized solely in terms of their manliness" (189). Böll recognizes this tie between culture and politics within the Nibelung material and the inherent characteriza-

tion of Siegfried based upon his manliness, and so utilizes it to further his criticism of post-war society. What is clearly missing in the Brielach and Bach families is a father figure, a role model of heroic proportions, a *guardian* (*Hüter*), who, like Siegfried, stands for morality and virtue. The war has taken Heinrich's and Martin's father and left them in a "Haus ohne Hüter," just as society and history have stripped the mythological figures of their power and greatness and reduced them to figures on an egg noodle box. As Conard has noted, Böll comments in this novel on "the individual suffering of widows and half-orphans in families without husbands and fathers and the attendant phenomenon of wives and mothers living in the past or future worlds that could have been" (Böll 119). Similarly, in the decades preceding the war, society had turned away from the representation of Siegfried as a virtuous hero and concerned itself only with the idea of Nordic supremacy; the contextual meanings associated with Siegfried (and, in a broader sense, with literature as a whole) had been denied or denigrated. These mythological figures not only help problematize this conflict between the past, present, and future, but also reflect the occurrences in society on a literary level: the plight of Siegfried and his "family" is the plight of the Brielachs and the Bachs. Böll employs these small but meaningful mythological references to draw upon the sociologic and psychological functions of literary myth.

The Nibelung mythology is, for Böll, connected with more than just the figures of the saga; it represents a space, both literary and geographical, which Böll has mythologized and transformed into his personal conception of German history and, indeed, Germany itself. In his essay entitled "Der Rhein," Böll portrays the Rhine as a monument of German history ("Germany's river, not Germany's border"), a figure which has experienced and survived the course of German history (*Aufsätze* 197-200). Here lies the heart of Europe, by a river with mythical origins but a concrete history; a river which Böll himself identifies as the primary influence on his work. Fictionally, this area commands a prominent place in Böll's novels—a place of both comfort and corruption. When, for example, the author in *Group Portrait with Lady* seeks a peaceful area to think over his prob-

lems toward the end of the novel, it is to the Rhineland that he travels:

So that he might reflect in peace on all these problems, the Au. began by undertaking a journey to the Lower Rhine . . . through the pilgrims' mecca of Kevelear, through the home town of Siegfried, arriving shortly thereafter at the town where Lohengrin lost his nerve, and thence by taxi another three miles or so, past the home of Joseph Beuys, to a village that seemed almost unrelievedly Dutch. . . . It was a foggy day, mist curling in the air, and it was easy to believe that Siegfried had not only ridden through Nifelheim on his way to Worms but had actually come from this nebulous-sounding place. (322-23)

The combination of past, present, and narrative time is achieved here via the landscape—the “Heimat” of two figures who embody Germany past and present: Siegfried and Joseph Beuys.¹¹ What both share is a common heritage and origins in a shared landscape. It is the associative power of this area, imparted by its mythical background that so fascinates Böll.

Perhaps nowhere does Böll turn more decisively to the mythic locale of the Nibelung saga than in his final 1985 novel *Women in a River Landscape*. The setting of the novel (actually a “Novel in Dialogues and Soliloquies”) is immediately clear from the title: a river landscape—more precisely, the Rhine. While Bonn and its surrounding areas serve as the urban and suburban centers for the action, the *River Landscape*, the land of the Nibelung, gradually reveals itself to be a character in and of itself. That the setting is crucial to the story is evident as well from the opening dedication and comments. Dedicated “Den Meinen an allen Orten, wo immer sie sein mögen” “To my friends everywhere, wherever they are,” Böll quickly establishes the primacy of the location: “Since *everything* in this novel is fictitious, except the place where the fiction is set, there is no need for the usual disclaimers. The place itself is innocent and cannot feel offended” (xii). This exoneration of the landscape is in line with what both Fritz Raddatz and Marcel Reich-Ranicki perceive as bitter and pessimistic overtones in the work,¹² for Böll bemoans the degradation of the once pure landscape and river through the dirt of govern-

mental politics. At the same time, Böll indicts the people figuring in the novel who are responsible—the corrupt politicians, lobbyists, and party members, who, according to Raddatz, are as interchangeable as they are pale, “Männer ohne Eigenschaften” ‘men without qualities’ (11). Only the women are depicted in a positive light, for they, like the landscape, are innocent; as such, Böll creates an unusual relationship between men, women, and nature—it is the women who comfort and support the men, and it is the Rhine which comforts and supports the women.

For the women in the novel, the Rhine is synonymous with nature and tranquillity, but also with “Heimat.” Erika Wubler and Eva Plint both recognize the enchanting power of the Rhine: “It’s the only place I can call home,”¹³ Erika Wubler replies when asked if she will eventually leave the area (189). “The river is enticing,” Eva Plint notes similarly (75), for the Rhine represents, in addition, a sanctuary for women, even in death.¹⁴ Elizabeth Blaukrämer “should have walked into the Rhine” (149) instead of hanging herself, Eva Plint noted, and she herself, following in the steps of her stepmother and many other women before her, will one day drown herself in the Rhine as well, for the river has a mystical peacefulness and permanence which is incorruptible, unlike the men and the politics surrounding it.

But the Rhine reflects something more than just the innocence and cleansing power of nature,¹⁵ namely, German history. Once again, Böll interconnects past and present via the mythologizing of history and the allegory of the Nibelung saga. Whereas in earlier works, Böll concentrated on Siegfried as a positive figure, here Böll centers on the darker elements of the saga—betrayal and greed. As the possessor of the Nibelung treasure, the Rhine has on the one hand a special power of attraction, but on the other hand, it also serves as a reminder of the grim events of German history. The Rhine was above all the site of murder, death, and betrayal in the medieval tale, all of which are again being played out in the present on Böll’s fictive stage in Bonn. What lies in the Rhine is not only the sunken treasure of the Nibelung—its mere presence a constant reminder of murder and betrayal—but also the lies and politics of history, sunken and abandoned

throughout the course of time. Again it is a woman, Eva Plint, who mourns the state of affairs while glancing into the Rhine:

Somewhere around here, perhaps, lies the treasure of the Nibelungs, washed down from higher up the river—mutilated crowns, whose little bit of gold was long since washed away by the waters of the Rhine or rubbed off by the stones on the riverbed. . . . Oh, Kriemhild and Brunhild, to think of your gold bracelets being hammered by the Rolling Stones, whiskered with algae, and perhaps lying next to a Nazi emblem that some anxious citizen discarded in haste as the American tanks rolled in. To think of all the different objects that jostle one another down there in the green slime: SS skull and crossbones, and swords with black, white, and red tassels—Germany's erstwhile honor—jettisoned in those historic moments of terror. . . . (73)

Here, in the depths of the river, the history of the area is to be found, remnants of a fascist culture side by side with those of a capitalist pop culture. The politicians who overlook this sunken past and look only to money and power are thus doomed to repeat it. Kapspeter, Grobsh maintains, bathes daily in dragon's blood in order to stay invincible in the dirty world of business and politics; no linden leaf falls on his back, and as such he remains invulnerable. Eva Plint, however, sees the danger in the greed and power struggles of those around her; property is paid for with dragon's blood, a blood which hardens and desensitizes. Money has no heart and remains invulnerable, unlike the writer in the poem "My Muse." For the poet, as Günter Wirth maintains, is the hope, the *Hoffnungsträger*, in Böll's fictive world, but also in the real world of politics and greed (446). In Böll's poem it is a woman, his muse, who, as in the novel, refuses to give protection, but rather forces vulnerability upon the speaker, for women are, for Böll, *Hoffnungsträger* as well in that they carry the responsibility to point out the misdeeds of the men around them.

In the case of *Women in a River Landscape*, the women, who along with the landscape are of central importance, also represent a hope for change, for they are willing to strive for a new future, having seen the corruption of the present. They are not unlike Kriemhild and Brunhild, who were victims of the intrigues of men and the greed of the powerful as well. What was handed

down as a sad reminder of the tragedy of the Burgundians, but also as a warning, was indeed the treasure in the Rhine: "The (river-landscape) is also that in which the Nibelung saga, fraught with disaster, yet revived anew by every generation, is invested with its legendary loyalty as well as its legendary betrayal (Wirth 439). Böll recalls this symbol of the past to remind us that, ironically, the Rhine, the site of the buried treasure, is today the site of Germany's greatest banks and industry. But at what cost was this wealth and power created? Wirth asserts in this regard, "after all, this river-landscape not only hides the treasure of Nibelungs, but its fog blankets not just a few crimes at specific places in this river-landscape which occurred during a thousand-year Reich or which possibly still occur today" (439).

It is perhaps fitting that Böll returned in his last novel to the one theme that he himself recognized as a central influence on his work—the Rhine. The Rhine, the site of the Nibelung tragedy and of symbolic importance as Germany's greatest river, is itself attributed mythic quality in Böll's novel, for it represents something even greater to Böll, namely *Heimat*. If Franz Boas was correct, and mythological worlds have indeed been built up only to be shattered again, then it was no doubt Böll's wish that the new worlds created from the fragments be better than the preceding ones. Most importantly, however, it is crucial that the builders of the new worlds remember and learn from the past. For Böll, there was perhaps no better way of combining the past and present with the hope for a better future than via the universality of myth; and what better myth to use than one symbolic of Germany, one that takes place in the heart of Europe, and in the heart of his beloved *Heimat*?

Notes

1. "Meine Muse ist eine Deutsche / sie gibt keinen Schutz / nur wenn ich in Drachenblut bade / legt sie die Hand / mir aufs Herz / so bleib ich verwundbar" (Rademacher 129). All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

2. Cited in Claude Lévi Strauss, "Structural Anthropology" 206.
3. See especially Ehrismann's study as well as Levin's analysis of Richard Wagner's and Fritz Lang's adaptations of the myth and "Germanness." Moreover in 1997 the ECON Verlag commissioned eight of Germany's top science fiction and fantasy writers to create a series of books based loosely on the *Nibelungenlied* for their growing fantasy and sci-fi book market. The series incorporates many of the figures and characters from the Lay and other affiliated myths into new tales and adventures, revealing the degree to which this material has resurfaced in the national consciousness as well as the popular culture of German society. See here especially Martin's *Nibelungen-Metamorphosen*.
4. Gerhard Rademacher has compared Böll's poetry to that of Paul Celan in that both use personal imagery and symbolism which rely heavily on personal experience. See Rademacher, "Auf der Suche nach der 'Urbs Abscondita,'" *Heinrich Böll als Lyriker* 79-94.
5. Böll makes reference to other figures of Germanic mythology, to be sure. See, for example, "Briefe aus dem Rheinland," a fictive exchange between two figures named "Freund" and "Lohengrin," in which reference is made to "Loki," a mythological god who in the original Icelandic sources (Snorri Sturlson's *Eddas*) is also connected to the Nibelungen circle (in fact, Wagner utilizes this source to a greater degree and indeed ties Loki in to Siegfried in the *Ring* cycle). References to the medieval *Nibelungenlied* are, however, much more prevalent in Böll, most likely because the Lay is considered more "Germanic."
6. Here I am indebted to Martin ("Nationalstaat" 184) for this reference, as I am for his discussion of Campbell's understanding of the functions of myth (see Martin's note 8).
7. Lévi-Strauss offers a structural comparative analysis of myths and uses the Oedipus myth as the basis for his argumentation. In treating myth like language, he is able to reduce a myth to its smallest constituent unit, corresponding to the phoneme, morpheme, and sememe in linguistics. In doing so, Lévi-Strauss argues for the universality of myths, by illustrating that they all share certain common elements and meanings.
8. Here too Böll stands in a long tradition of German writers. One thinks of course of Lessing and his theory of tragedy and the compassionate individual ("der mitleidigste Mensch ist der beste Mensch").

9. It was not only the transformation of the betrayal of Siegfried into the "Dolchstoß" theory that revitalized the Nibelungen saga during the Nazi regime. In 1924, Fritz Lang filmed the entire saga as a "gift" to the German people. Leni Riefenstahl then made reference to the material some ten years later in her documentary of the party conference in Nuremberg "Triumph of the Will." Thereafter, the saga was often exploited for propagandistic purposes.

10. Günter Wirth notes: "With the word, bread and the house Heinrich Böll touched upon the elemental basis of human existence, which demand easy digestability" (437).

11. That Böll chooses Beuys as representative of Germany's present is not surprising. In an article on the problematic of the term "Heimat," Ina-Maria Greverus relates the search for "Heimat" in the contemporary German art world with *Spurensicherung*, a movement "closely related to the personal mythologies of artists like Broodthaers, Filliou, and Beuys. . . . The artistic *Spurensicherung* made use of the material residue of modern civilization, combined it with natural objects, referred back to the historical heritage of foreign cultures and used utopian environmental models. Even the insignificance of the artist's own *Heimat* and life was a source of inspiration" (14). The result was the merging of *Heimat* and identity in a manner not unlike Böll's own personal mythology.

12. Raddatz writes: "This novel of dead souls produces a feeling of terrible sadness" (11); Reich-Ranicki tells us that: "Of all of Heinrich Böll's novels, this one seems to me to be the saddest and most bitter. It is an elegy with bizarre characteristics, a requiem with satirical accents" (L2).

13. "Er ist das einzige, das ich Heimat nennen könnte" (189). Her use of the term "Heimat" stands in important contrast to the idea of "zu Hause" in that it emphasizes the spatial and psychological connection she feels for the location. On this, see for example Greverus's "The 'Heimat' Problem" 18-23.

14. Böll continues in a long tradition by portraying drowning as an act of cleansing and release for women (cf. Kate Chopin's "The Awakening"). In her monologue, Eva Plint ponders this fact: "'To walk into the Rhine'—it's a beautiful phrase. Perhaps I'll do it myself one day. Not that I'm tired of life—I'm not—but it must be good down there, wandering through history in the green mud." (75).

15. Fred Plotkin, the manager of the Metropolitan Opera in New York, offered an interesting interpretation of Wagner's *Ring* cycle, in which he maintained that the richly allegorical epic is, among other things, "a morality tale about protecting the world from environmental disaster." He writes, "throughout the cycle, the idea recurs that a price in misery and chaos is paid for every environmental desecration. The metaphor is the theft of the magic gold from the Rhine by the evil dwarf Alberich—an act of tampering with the natural balance." Plotkin goes on to interpret various characters as representative of earth, water, fire, and air. The close of the cycle, *Götterdämmerung*, sees the return of harmony to Nature. While I assume that Böll draws on the myth of the *Nibelungenlied*, rather than Wagner's epic, this interpretation of Wagner's cycle is especially interesting in relation to Böll's work, in that Böll was, to be sure, a writer concerned with ecological problems. In fact, reference is made numerous times to the "Dreck" and "Schmutz" in the Rhine, words which can, of course, be interpreted literally as well as figuratively. See Plotkin, "Invite Gore to Wagner's 'Ring.'"

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