

Heinrich Böll Thirty Years On

The Writer as a Public Figure A Public Discussion



Heinrich Theodor Böll (1917-1985) was a German writer and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1972. He started writing after his release as an American prisoner of war. His first novel *Der Zug war pünktlich* *The Train Was on Time* was published in 1949. In 1967, he was awarded the Büchner Prize - Germany's highest literary honor. Böll's wartime experiences; being wounded, deserting, becoming a prisoner of war, were central to his art as a writer. At times controversial, Böll overall maintained a high profile as an author of both bestselling works and a socially-engaged commentator on the state of the German people.

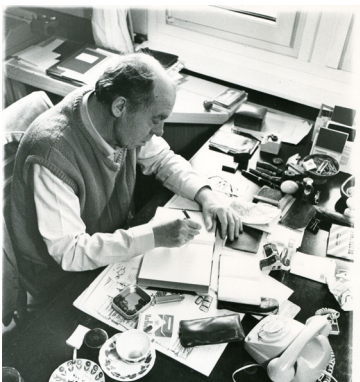
As an activist and as a writer, Mr. Böll was a perennial critic and foe of establishments, bureaucracies and the inhumanity of oppressive institutionalized power. Some critics argued that he was too harsh in his depiction of certain elements in West German society; notably the police and the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church, whose influence is strong in Cologne and elsewhere in the Rhineland. Böll engaged with these and more themes in his fiction, including *The*

Clown, *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum*, *Billiards at Half Past Nine* and *The Train was on Time* are some of his best books. Böll's legacy left a significant vacuum in the German public space, and raised some important questions. Should writers try to occupy this space, or should they focus solely on writing? How should the public engage with the writer as a putative moral compass? Does the public even need a moral compass?

Join us in a discussion led by **Dr. Sheila Ochugboju** as we discuss the legacy of this influential writer and his impact on the German public sphere, while engaging with the broader question of whether or not the contemporary Kenyan writer should be moving towards this profile.

Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor is a Kenyan fiction writer, conservationist, cultural activist and a past Executive director of the Zanzibar International Film Festival. Yvonne Owuor won the 2003 Caine Prize for African Writing for *Weight of Whispers*, a story told from the perspective of a refugee fleeing after the 1994 massacres. In 2014, she published *Dust*,

examining the post election violence in Kenya and the culture of secrecy and hushed-up wrongs that prevails here.



Garnette Oluoch-Olunya is a consultant for the GoDown Arts Centre, a Director of The Centre for Creative and Cultural Industries in Technical University of Kenya and the author of *Contextualizing Postindependence Anglophone African Writing: Ayi Kwei Armah and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o Compared*. Alongside Kimani Njogu, she co-authored *Cultural Production and Social Change in Kenya: Building Bridges*.

Parselelo Kantai is a Kenyan investigative journalist, academic and creative writer and a founding member of the East Africa literary magazine, *Kwani?* His stories *Jerusalem Boys' Band* and *You Wreck Her* were nominated for the prestigious Caine prize for African writing in 2004 and 2009 respectively.



30th July 2015 at Alliance Française, Nairobi
Time: 6:00 p.m – 8:00 p.m
Drinks and Bitings will be served.

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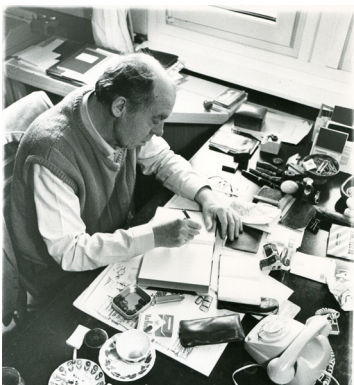
A Public Discussion

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