Wolfgang Borchert (1921-1947)

Wolfgang Borchert is best known for his play *Draußen vor der Tür* (1947), one of the key texts of so-called ‘Trümmerliteratur’ – literature of the immediate post-war years that depicted the material, moral and social ruin of post-war Germany. Borchert initially worked in the theatre, but was sent to fight on the Eastern Front during the Second World War, where he was imprisoned for treason and sentenced to death. Despite the sentence, he was sent back to the Front and remained there until the end of the war in 1945. When he finally made it back to the ruins of Hamburg, he was seriously unwell, and died two years later.

‘Die Küchenuhr’ (1947)

‘Die Küchenuhr’ is a short story that, like much of Borchert’s work, is set in the immediate post-war period. Read it and consider the questions below:

- The story starts ‘in medias res’ – leaping suddenly into the action without any preamble and without introducing the characters. What effect does this have on the reader?
- There is an immediate distinction between ‘sie’ (they) and ‘er’ (he). How is this division developed through the story? How do the ‘Mann’ and ‘Frau’ respond to the young man?
- At what point do we start to sense what has happened to the young man? What are the clues?
- ‘Innerlich ist sie kaputt’; what is the significance of this phrase?
- What does the kitchen clock come to represent for the young man and for the story?
- How would you describe Borchert’s style in this story?

You can read a collection of Borchert’s stories, as well as his play *Draußen vor der Tür*, in: Wolfgang Borchert, *Draußen vor der Tür und ausgewählte Erzählungen* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2007).

An English translation of this and other stories by Borchert can be found here: [http://www.bsu.edu/classes/warner/resource/translite.htm](http://www.bsu.edu/classes/warner/resource/translite.htm)

Trümmerliteratur

Perhaps the most important proponent of ‘Trümmerliteratur’ was the author Heinrich Böll. In 1952 he published a ‘Bekenntnis zur Trümmerliteratur’, in which he sought to explain and validate the movement:

‘Wir schrieben also vom Krieg, von der Heimkehr und dem, was wir im Krieg gesehen hatten und bei der Heimkehr vorfanden: von Trümmern; das ergab drei Schlagwörter, die der jungen Literatur angehängt wurden: Kriegs-, Heimkehrer- und Trümmerliteratur.’ – Heinrich Böll, *Bekenntnis zur Trümmerliteratur* (1952)

Recommended works by Heinrich Böll:

*Der Engel schwieg* (written 1949-51; published 1992)
*Wanderer, kommst du nach Spa...* (1950)
*Wo warst du, Adam* (1951)
*Und sagte kein einziges Wort* (1953)