

*measures as legal, because they had been ordered by the government.... As a civil servant I had been schooled in the spirit of unconditional loyalty and obedience to the government.... I therefore did not try to shun from, to circumvent or to literally refuse to execute orders, especially in what regarded participation or presence during shootings.*

■ *Do you think there is a capacity for murder in all people when activated by special circumstances? In what way were these circumstances unique?*

■ *How do you think the policemen of Battalion 322 adapted to the killings?*

■ *At what point do you think they overcame their moral scruples? Do you think they questioned their actions with any killing operation or do you think it became routine?*

■ *What are the different retroactive justifications given by the men for their participation in the shootings?*

## LITERATURE

Heinrich Böll

### Cause of Death: Hooked Nose

In this fictional story, Nobel Prize-winning author, Heinrich Böll, who was a German soldier at the front during World War II, examines the role of the perpetrators and bystanders at one of the shooting sites in the East.

*When Lieutenant Hegemüller returned to his billet, his thin face was trembling with a nervous pallor....*

*Quaking in every limb, he smoked with trembling fingers, knowing that he must do something to fight this madness. For he felt that he was not without guilt, that he had been forced into the stony heart of guilt, a heart that must lie at the center of this ceaselessly grinding atrocity. Neither the pain he suffered nor the nameless horror and mortal fear could wipe out the consciousness that he was shooting and he was being shot....*

*On and on went that biting, grinding, spitting, demented sawing of the machine pistols. There followed a few minutes of ghastly silence that must make the birds tremble in their hiding-places, and then a detonation.... And again shots, shots, one after the other in an endless chain, each one of them struck Lieutenant Hegemüller in his very heart.*

*But suddenly he heard a different sound, ... the Russian woman was on her knees sobbing, sobbing so that the tears dripped from her blouse onto the floor.*

*...the woman jumped up and screamed: "They've taken him away, my Piotr."*

*"But he's not..." the lieutenant shouted back.*

*"No sir, he's not a Jew, no. Oh sir, sir!"*

*The tears gushed from between the fingers that she was pressing against her face as if to staunch a bleeding wound....*

*Driven by some overpowering inner force, the lieutenant turned on his heel and, calling out something to the woman, dashed into the street....*

*A strange burning cold flowed over him from the dead façades of the houses. And yet he was filled with something like joy – no, it actually was joy – what a glorious feeling to run for the life of a human being! In those minutes, racing through the streets at breakneck speed, almost beside himself, his subconscious came to understand many things; a thousand things were revealed to him from out of that nebulous haze he had called his ideology, rising like stars to pierce him with their brilliance and then die away like comets, but their reflection remained within him, as an accumulated source of subdued light.*

*Panting, covered with dust he reached the outskirts of the town where the doomed had been herded together at the edge of the steppe. They formed a square surrounded by vehicles mounted with machine guns; in the vehicles, guards lounged behind the slim barrels, smoking their cigarettes.*

*...[A]t that instant he envied the doomed people and was shocked to realize that he was wearing the same uniform as the murderers. Blushing with shame he croaked "The man whose house I'm billeted in is here. He's not a Jew." And since the sentry stood there in apathetic silence he added: "Grimshenko, Piotr."*

*An officer approached the group and raised his eyebrows at the sight of the dusty, sweat-soaked lieutenant, who was wearing neither belt nor cap. Hegemüller now realized that the executioners and their minions were all drunk. With their bloodshot eyes they looked like bulls, and their breath was like steam from a manure heap. Once again Hegemüller stammered out the name of his host, and the lieutenant in command of the minions scratched his head in a display of gruesome good nature and asked lamely: "Innocent, you mean?"*

*"Innocent, that too." Hegemüller replied curtly.*

*The lieutenant seemed taken aback as this little word fell into the pool of his heart. But the word had sunk without trace, without raising ripples....*

*...as he followed the drunken lieutenant, it seemed to Hegemüller that the crowd ... had dissolved into a procession of noble personalities, while the few murderers seemed like brutish clods. Each of those faces he so anxiously scanned in search of Grimshenko seemed to him calmer, revealing an inexpressibly human gravity. The women with babies in their arms, old people and children, men, girls ... rich and poor, ragged and well dressed, all were endowed with a sublimity that left Hegemüller speechless.*

*The lieutenant tried to make conversation by throwing out oddly apologetic fragments, not as an excuse for the killings but to gloss over his drunken condition while on duty: "Tough job, this, you know. Couldn't stand it without booze ... hope you understand..."*

*But Hegemüller, in whom horror had aroused a strange and sober calm, was nagged by a single question: What do they do with the babies, the tiny ones who can't stand or walk – how is it technically possible? Meanwhile his eyes never left the procession of the doomed, never rose to the rim of the quarry where the pallid afternoon was punctured by the thwacking and spitting of the machine pistols. But on reaching the point where the slope flattened out he saw the answer to that nagging question. He saw a black boot kicking the bloodied corpse of an infant into the abyss and, averting his eyes in horror and looking along the rim of the quarry, he suddenly saw Grimschenko at the head of the line, saw him collapse under a bullet. With a wild and terrible cry he shouted "Stop! Stop!" So loud that the executioners held their fire in alarm....*

*Hegemüller had grasped Grimschenko's body and hoisted him onto his shoulders; he could feel the flowing blood congealing between his fingers. Behind him the detonation exploded in a cloud of leaden sound into the sky; the rim of the quarry collapsed, and the earth buried both the dead and half dead, the infants and the old men who for ninety-four years had borne the burden of life....*

*It was no surprise to Hegemüller that the row of killers, waiting with smoking barrels and dull eyes for the next batch, made way for him without resistance. ... Unhindered, he passed through the row of murderers, hearing behind him the upsurge of renewed firing. He found a waiting vehicle and shouted at the dozing driver: "Get going – the nearest field hospital!" as he jerked open the door, let Grimschenko slide from his shoulders, and laid him on the back seat. .*

*Suddenly he was dreaming: he was running, running with a number of others in a mad, grueling race to a lake in whose waters they wanted to cool off.... The whole world was one pitiless furnace, and they ran and ran, while the sweat flowed from their pores like streams of sour blood....*

*And then came that curve in the road beyond which must be the lake; with a wild cry he raced round the curve, saw the glittering silver surface of the water, plunged into it with a jubilant shout, knelt down and joyfully dipped his face in the water. Then just as he was marveling at how miraculously cool the water was despite the scorching heat, he woke up and opened his eyes.*

*He was looking into the impassive face of an orderly who was holding an empty jug, and he instantly grasped that he had fainted and been revived with a dash of cold water...*

*"Grish, Grimschenko?" he whispered, but the orderly, instead of replying, turned away. "So, the Russian's name is Grimschenko – now you can complete the medical report, Sister."*

*The orderly stepped aside, and Hegemüller felt the cool professional hand of a*

doctor on his forehead and heard a complacent voice say: "Been overdoing it a bit, eh?"

...the complacent voice spoke again: "All right, sister – got it? Then write down: Cause of death – let's say, hooked nose," and then the complacent voice laughed while the hands belonging to that complacent voice were feeling Hegemüller's pulse almost tenderly. But Hegemüller sat up, took in the white room with a strangely detached expression, then laughed too, and his laughter was as strange as his expression. His eyeballs rolled back as his laughter grew louder and louder; they dimmed and seemed to turn ever further inward, like the closing shutters of a searchlight, taking the whole world inside with them and leaving nothing but a clouded emptiness; Hegemüller laughed, and from then on the only words he ever spoke were: "Cause of death: hooked nose."

From: Heinrich Böll, *The Casualty* (Chatto & Windus, 1986), pp. 38-46.

**Heinrich Böll** (1917-1985), German author and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1972. Böll graduated from high school during the Third Reich, in 1937, and served for six years as a soldier at the front. These experiences were pivotal in his literary work in which he deals with questions of acceptance or refusal of personal responsibility. Böll was regarded as a leading humanist who tried to grapple with his nation's dark past. Among his many works: *What's to Become of the Boy?*, or *Something to do with Books – a memoir of the period 1933-37*, *Where Were You Adam?*, about his experiences as a soldier, *Billiards at Half Past Nine*, *The Clown*, and *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum: Or How Violence Develops and Where It Can Lead*.



■ Hegemüller "was shocked to realize that he was wearing the same uniform as the murderers." What does this imply about Hegemüller's role? Was he a bystander or a perpetrator?

■ What is the nature of the relationship between Hegemüller and the Grimschenkos?

■ Why does Hegemüller try to rescue Grimschenko?

■ What does Hegemüller's moral stance on the overall project of the annihilation of the Jews seem to be? Are there any indications in the text?

■ On what does Hegemüller's attention focus when he reaches the killing site?

■ What is Böll attempting to say through his portrayal of the medical staff?

■ In this text, Böll plays with concepts of guilt and innocence. Where does this appear, and what messages are transmitted?

■ Böll uses irony throughout the story. Give some examples. What is he trying to convey?