

Date: Fri, 31 Oct 2003 06:57:48 -0000
From: "Ivan Mansley" <ivanman dsl.pipex.com>

HEIMAT Part 1. FERNWEH [The Call of Faraway Places 1919-1928]

My video tapes had not been touched since their original recording over 17 years ago. Would the film be alright? No need to worry! There was the familiar pounding music as Edgar Reitz's epic began to unfurl before my eyes. I quickly came to realise that the tapes have lasted much better than my memory. I had forgotten most of the detail but the story quickly captured me.

Much has been made, I think, of Reitz's ability to recreate and convince us of the reality of his scenes through the accumulation of small detail. And it was all there in the depiction of the Simon household, Schabbach and the Hunsrueck region. The particularity of things. The hunk of bread, the bucket, the cart-wheel, women watching in doorways. What struck me even more, however, was the use of symbols and for want of a better word the use of surrealism. For instance, the apparition of the dead soldier by the fire that Paul Simon sees and no one else does. It speaks to him: " Hello Paul. See my white robe. I have a white robe like an angel. All soldiers go to heaven and get a white robe." Wishful thinking! What Paul Simon would like to believe? How did fellow viewers interpret this? It certainly conveyed to me, in a way that realism could not, the horrors and strangeness that Paul had experienced whilst fighting as a soldier, which set him apart from his family and the life back home. Who was the apparition? The angel of death? He had some very reassuring words, however. "Down on earth as you all know there's high and low German but in heaven, as you'd expect they speak the Hunsrueck dialect." The comforts of heimat for eternity.

As for symbols consider the fly paper and the release of the fly? The most vivid symbol is surely the trap set for the pine-marten at the end of the episode. The camera focuses on it as it lies in the puddle and the credits roll over it. Is the notion of "heimat" the trap which has ensnared Paul Simon but from which he escapes responding to the call of faraway places? There is much to say about this, I think. Notice the framing of the episode.

At the beginning a man walks into a village. At the end he walks out of it. A lone man. An enigma! We are no more prepared for this than his family and the other characters. Or are we? Viewers should consider the huge emphasis Reitz gives to the effect of the 1914-18 War on his characters, the village, the nation. Count them up.

Consider the use of colour and its significance or lack of it.

One of the things I had forgotten is Reitz's habit of juxtaposing scenes of near farce with very moving scenes of great intensity. For instance, Eduard's scheme to unveil the memorial is treated comically in a sense and is then followed by the sight of the baker from Simmern, driven mad by grief for the loss of his three sons in the war. The central and most important scene for me was the meeting between Appollonia and Paul in the Rhineland town and her challenge to him never to return to Schabbach. He is unable to break free as yet. There is much in the dialogue which focuses all the themes of this episode. Armand "was so far away from home". " I am 20 now. Must I pay for ever because there was a war." " You came back 3 years ago , but you still aren't at home here." " It's an evil village. Like all the villages out there." A magnificent sequence which I found profoundly moving, far surpassing the soap-opera-like elements and almost completely forgotten by me.

I hope my words will get you all watching and even more important discussing what you have seen. Please feel free to disagree with me but do it gently.

My background was the teaching of literature but I am not an academic nor do I know much about the technicalities of film making and the film industry.

If you feel like introducing an episode please let me know. I have had no volunteers yet but I live in hope! Anyway happy viewing.

Ivan Mansley.

Date: Sat, 1 Nov 2003 01:24:53 +0100
From: "Maarten Landzaat" <gijs xs4all.nl>

Hi,

I just finished viewing Fernweh, which I found fascinating again. Thanks Ivan for getting me to dig up the tapes! I viewed an old WDR broadcast without subtitles. Following the Hunsrucker platt was quite difficult, so I looked up some parts on <http://www.erfilm.de/h1/frame.html>.

I started thinking of the word "fernweh" which (I think) means "longing for the far", but the words literally mean "far" and "pain", which is the opposite, but then again not, since longing is a kind of pain. I found many examples of both the joy and pain of the far:

The longing/far:

- Paul reaching out to the world with his radio
- Paul's popularity with the girls, partly due to his coming from far
- "pilots are the real heroes"
- The plane flying
- Paul and Apollonia (Apollonia moving away farther and farther)
- Paul leaving the village
- Chocolate

The pain/far:

- Eduard reading the newspaper aloud (bad news from far)
- Paul obviously hurt by what happened to him in the war
- The entire village hurt by the war (as Ivan pointed out)
- Throwing stones at the jewish shop
- Apollonia being cast out of the community because she got pregnant by a french soldier.

Some other details:

When Paul came, Paul was sitting against the wooden pole, surrounded by half the village. When Paul left, Maria was sitting against the same pole, with nobody around her (except Marie-Goot), and only a messy spilled mug on the table.

I like Ivan's parallel of Paul and the marten (sp?): both came and went quickly, destroyed a live here and there, and couldn't be caught by the village.

I didn't understand the (or a) meaning or significance of the dead woman in the woods. The only thing that caught my attention was that Paul acted very disturbed. Anybody any ideas on that?

I'm looking forward to learn about your observations!

Maarten Landzaat

Date: Sat, 1 Nov 2003 19:13:05 -0000
From: "Ivan Mansley" <ivanman dsl.pipex.com>

I found your analysis of the word " fernweh " very illuminating, Maarten,..the joy and the pain, the longing. When Paul leaves the village his face is set. We are not shown his inner turmoil but he is leaving his wife and family, his heimat, his everything. For who knows what? Reitz reveals to me a man of determination who hides his inner feelings. Picking up on the radio hobby I was very struck by the sense of wonderment the villagers show when they hear the service from Cologne cathedral direct on their picnic. Also at the end of the episode in the attic we see the dusty remains of radio apparatus and Paul gives them a wistful glance. He had advanced the idea of building a transmitter as his reason for not leaving Schabbach when Appollonia prompted him to do so on their train journey. Either the transmitter was a trap which had kept him in Schabbach for too long or the demands of domesticity had

prevented him from developing his contacts with faraway places and there was no alternative but to leave. I must confess I was shocked by Paul Simon's apparent callousness and cold-blooded calculation in walking out on his family. Contrast the erotic love making and proposal on the edge of the woods earlier. What a complicated piece of work is a man, Reitz appears to be saying. Many years ago now I saw a play at our National Theatre in London by Alan Ayckbourn, whose name I now forget, in which the father of a young family slips out of his child's birthday party and is never seen again. Even tho' one knew from the reviews that it was going to happen you somehow never actually saw him go. Very clever staging. Of no real relevance, of course, as Paul Simon makes no attempt to be furtive in his departure but no one knows his real intentions.

As for the dead woman in the woods my take on it was that it perhaps signified the moral decay of those years. Eduard had earlier been reading of the murder of a shopkeeper in the locality and now this. We learn she was Jewish, don't we, and that she had been shot in the back of the head. Reitz seems to focus on the way that politics controls the investigation and it is ludicrous. Talk about prejudiced and bumbling incompetence! Glassisch gives some voting figures and the chief suspect becomes someone who voted the wrong way. Police work and justice perhaps are perverted by politics in this era.

Ivan Mansley.

Date: Sat, 1 Nov 2003 14:08:49 -0600
From: "Susan Biedron" <susan jsbiedron.com>

Maarten, Ivan and all,

Everytime I watch a Heimat chapter, I notice new things. As far as Fernweh - I have an Austrian friend who uses this word when she is tired of working and hasn't had a vacation in a while - for her it means she has longing to travel.

I had not watched this series in about 2 years or more. I was trying to get some meaning out of the flies that Ivan mentioned - and one thing that struck me this time was how the town treats Glassich (sp?). He comments that if he had died in Flanders and his name was on the war memorial, he would be treated with respect. I can understand considering the times, why the townspeople treated Appolonia as an outcast, but why Glassich, who served the Fatherland? This brings me to the instance when Glassich extends his hand to Paul, but Paul grabs a fly off the flycatcher. What does this mean?

I started out liking Paul, but then when he leaves his wife and small children, my feelings change. Of course, in the later episodes when he visits, Paul is a real jerk. Yet, Paul is about the only one besides Maria that treats Glassich with respect. Perhaps because they were both in the war. My only thought is that Reitz shows that once a soldier has served in a war but comes back injured or dysfunctional, society has no more use for him. (A fact proven again and again by history.) What do other people think?

I also think that right before Paul leaves, he looks at his sleeping wife and sees the fly on her - it seems this contributes to his leaving.

The other thing that struck me is that when Paul first arrives home from the war, the first thing his father says to him is to tell him about the neighbor's boy who died in Russia. What a "first" thing to say! Does this make Paul feel guilty - is that why he imagines seeing his former friend?

Susan Biedron

Date: Sat, 1 Nov 2003 15:54:12 EST
Subject: Re: heimat123: Re: fern weh

The Cassell's German-English/English-German Dictionary gives the translation of Fernweh as being "n. wanderlust". This is a good translation. My feeling is that Edgar has used this segment of Heimat

to set the scene, to give us a detailed description who's who, what's what, where everyone is coming from, and a little bit about their inter-reactions with another. It's turn of the century small village, central Europe. Paul had enough, and returning after the war it hadn't changed, he was bored, and left.....

I sympathize with him totally. My situation is very similar. I left a small village in Illinois in 1965, and return occasionally to check in, but it's still the same too. Nothing going on, same people, same clicques, same town dodo, same big cheese in town, very very similar to Schabbach. Not to change the subject, but since it's a continuation, Heimat 2 has more of the same parallels for me with Herman. But we all know that this is really Edgar himself, his life story - a great guy that could not find what he was looking for in his home village, and the wanderlust was the only way out. I personally don't think that Edgar was using the flies as any sort of symbols other than one way to show that Paul bored, still not a happy camper, and that everything at home was basically unchanged. It is an interesting topic, however, and I will ask Edgar next time I have the opportunity - the flies are interesting that he picked them.

Joel
Gemünden, Germany

Date: Sun, 2 Nov 2003 16:21:16 -0000
From: "Ivan Mansley" <ivanman dsl.pipex.com>

Susan and list members,

Just like you, Susan, every time I look at a scene from Heimat I notice something different. It's probably true with all films in a sense. Scenes and images flick by and we cannot reflect on them all in our cinema seat but Reitz does repay attention, doesn't he? Some of your very insightful comments made me go back and have a look at the video again. You will probably think my remarks about the flies and the fly-paper fanciful to say the least. Like you I noticed how Paul refuses Glasisch's preferred hand and looks up to the fly-paper. What is Reitz telling us? What is the significance? I was puzzled too. Earlier after urinating in the yard Paul seems to see the fly-paper in colour in a vision. It is very striking. The paper is a bright yellow and the container is blue. The camera dwells on it!! The paper is covered in flies. When Glasisch arrives there has been some discussion about his skin disease, I think, from the mustard gas used during the War. Paul, on one level, may simply wish to avoid contact but he rises, and with an almost demented look in his eyes plucks a fly from the paper and blows it from his finger and thumb. The fly was a prisoner and now it has been given its freedom. Maybe I'm talking nonsense but Paul [and Glasisch] is a prisoner and he releases himself and Glasisch from the trivia around them or from the imprisonment of being soldiers and the legacy of the war. Later, as Susan writes, we see a fly crawling over the sleeping Maria's hand, over her wedding ring finger. The fly is still there. It has not found freedom nor has Paul. So he must leave. Did you notice the music start up as Paul views his old radio apparatus in the loft?

I am writing this after my Sunday lunch during which I imbibed a bottle of wine and a couple of cognacs. I looked at bits of the tape again. The final scenes where Maria knows that Paul has gone and is not at an exhibition of radio parts in Mannheim made me cry at the sadnesses of life. Alcohol-induced? Maybe. But also Reitz's skill.

Ivan Mansley.

Date: Sun, 2 Nov 2003 17:56:11 +0100
From: "Maarten Landzaat" <gijs xs4all.nl>

Just a thought:

Maybe Reitz just tries to show us that Paul is very aware of the "trap" notion (fly trap, marten trap, village/marriage trap)? Since Paul doesn't say much, we are visually informed about this awareness?

I was deeply moved as well by Maria's grief at the end. She somehow knew it all along, but this doesn't

make it easier for her to accept.

Maarten

Date: Sun, 2 Nov 2003 13:36:12 -0600
From: "Susan Biedron" <susan jsbiedron.com>

Ivan, Maarten and all, (answers after text)

Ivan's comments:

>> Paul, on one level, may simply wish to avoid contact but he
>> rises, and with an almost demented look in his eyes plucks a fly from the
>> paper and blows it from his finger and thumb. The fly was a prisoner and now
>> it has been given its freedom. Maybe I'm talking nonsense but Paul [and
>> Glasisch] is a prisoner and he releases himself and Glasisch from the
>> trivia around them or from the imprisonment of being soldiers and the legacy
>> of the war.

I like this explanation - and I did not notice the fly-paper in color.

Maarten's comment:

>> Just a thought:
>> Maybe Reitz just tries to show us that Paul is very aware of the "trap" notion
>> (fly trap, marten trap, village/marriage trap)? Since Paul doesn't say much,
>> we are visually informed about this awareness?

Paul is indeed very quiet. He doesn't seem to say what he thinks, except with Appolonia. The "traps" seem to be a good devise. I have never had any type of film course, so I'm guessing here - but these explanations sound good to me. Paul's family is not exactly communicative - but neither was my family (100% German ancestry), so this is probably a German thing.

Ivan:

>> I am writing this after my Sunday lunch during which I imbibed a bottle of
>> wine and a couple of cognacs.

Zum Wohl! :)

>> I looked at bits of the tape again. The final
>> scenes where Maria knows that Paul has gone and is not at an exhibition of
>> radio parts in Mannheim made me cry at the sadnesses of life.
>> Alcohol-induced? Maybe. But also Reitz's skill.

It is sad and the village could be seen as a trap. Yet the townspeople love their village - there's a scene where they are singing about their "Heimat" - and unfortunately I can't remember right now where it occurs. (Is it the weaving scene?) I like the village - to me it has a nice feeling and I would like to walk its streets. It's nostalgic - but if I lived there everyday, I would probably have a different feeling!

Susan

Date: Mon, 03 Nov 2003 00:24:41 +0100
From: Raymond Scholz <rscholz zonix.de>

· "Ivan Mansley" <ivanman dsl.pipex.com> wrote:

> Also at the end of the episode in the attic we see the dusty
> remains of radio apparatus and Paul gives them a wistful glance.

I was surprised seeing all the things covered with dust - yet another detail I never noticed before.

> He had advanced the idea of building a transmitter as his reason for
> not leaving Schabbach when Appollonia prompted him to do so on their
> train journey. Either the transmitter was a trap which had kept him
> in Schabbach for too long or the demands of domesticity had
> prevented him from developing his contacts with faraway places and
> there was no alternative but to leave.

I like your first explanation very much.

Yet another thing about faraway places: Schabbach may be the centre of the universe but during the first episode we must get the impression that all interesting things, all advance takes place outside Schabbach. Eduard's ongoing announcements from the newspaper, the radio broadcasts from far away, the dance hall in Simmern, and so on. Only Paul can imagine to leave, the others don't. And, btw, the centre of the universe is the only place not moving :-)

Cheers and good night, Ray

Date: Sun, 02 Nov 2003 23:46:10 +0100
From: Raymond Scholz <rscholz zonix.de>

I think primarily "Fernweh" is just the opposite of "Heimweh" in a technically way, abusing the German language. But over the years "Fernweh" became exactly the meaning you describe, f.e. when talking about holiday destinations.

Cheers, Ray

Date: Sun, 02 Nov 2003 23:54:47 +0100
From: Raymond Scholz <rscholz zonix.de>

"Susan Biedron" <susan jsbiedron.com> wrote:

> The other thing that struck me is that when Paul first arrives home from the
> war, the first thing his father says to him is to tell him about the
> neighbor's boy who died in Russia. What a "first" thing to say!

For me this cold welcome by his father should be a clarification of Paul's duty to work at his father's smithy and on the fields again. There's no time to work up the things Paul must have seen during the war. Very harsh indeed, but impressive. And yet another brick in the wall that makes Paul think he's not belonging to Schabbach anymore.

> Does this make Paul feel guilty - is that why he imagines seeing his
> former friend?

I don't think so.

Cheers, Ray

Date: Mon, 03 Nov 2003 00:07:43 +0100
From: Raymond Scholz <rscholz zonix.de>

"Ivan Mansley" <ivanman dsl.pipex.com> wrote:

> Much has been made, I think, of Reitz's ability to recreate and convince us
> of the reality of his scenes through the accumulation of small detail.

For the first thirty minutes acting (and dialect of some actors) and scene appears somewhat "wooden" to me. Maybe that's because of the age of Heimat (celebrating its 20th birthday next year...) - but then it was gone. Usually I stick to these things for the whole film and forget about following the plot. But somehow Reitz convinced me not to do so - which is a miracle...

- > For instance, the apparition of the dead soldier by the fire that
- > Paul Simon sees and no one else does. It speaks to him: " Hello
- > Paul. See my white robe. I have a white robe like an angel.

I saw an white angel later when sheet was lifted up to the sky during the unveiling of the memorial.

- > The most vivid symbol is surely the trap set for the pine-marten at
- > the end of the episode. The camera focuses on it as it lies in the
- > puddle and the credits roll over it. Is the notion of "heimat" the
- > trap which has ensnared Paul Simon but from which he escapes
- > responding to the call of faraway places?

A trap Hermann will be caught in years later?

Cheers, Ray

Date: Mon, 3 Nov 2003 17:32:38 +0100
From: heimat hoenemann.de (Thomas_Hönemann)

Dear Heimat-Fans all over the world, dear Reinder, Ivan, Maarten, Susan, Raymond and Joel (special regards!),

Many thanks for all your enlightening comments about Fernweh, the first part of Heimat. It was very interesting to follow the very deep discussion of the last days.

Today I want to post my contribution referring to some thoughts you brought up in the last mails. Please excuse my English which sometimes may be poor and hard to understand, I will do my best.

The first part, Fernweh, meets the center of the whole topic of the Film, that is Heimat, a word that can not be translated into any other language in an adequate way, so I will go on using it. Edgar Reitz once said that the feeling of having an Heimat can not rise before having left the home, the Heimat. And leaving home is characteristic for the people from the Hunsrück: in any time, especially during the 19th and 20th century, people left the Hunsrück because this very agricultural region was weak of economic structures and couldn't stand the changing of economical structures from the agricultural sector to the industrial and services sector (see the theories of Jean Fourastié). So the Heimat could not feed all of their children anymore - and for this reason many of them left. So nowadays lots of Hunsrücker have relatives in the Ruhrgebiet, the U. S. and even Brasilia (Matto Grosso) (that is what Maria even will explain in some of the following parts). Talking about the "Geschichten aus den Hunsrückdörfern" (1980/1981), which was the project that built the basis for Heimat (or even can be seen as the documentary alter ego of Heimat), Reitz said: This documentary shows people who are living in the Hunsrück and did not leave their Heimat (yet). The Series [Heimat] will show, that almost all people are going to leave their Heimat. (see <http://www.fdk-berlin.de/arsenal/text2000/009dokument.html>).

Some of you wrote about the first parts title: Fernweh. I really agree with Raymonds thought: we will be able to understand this word best by looking at the opposite: Heimweh, the longing for home, Heimat. Pauls feelings are different from that: he disapproves his Heimat - possibly without being aware of that one having concrete reasons for it. But he has one thing in mind: "I will do something very special and I won't stop before I am done" (this is what he tells Maria while assembling the radio). Her answer is: "You are already doing it!" which characterizes Maria's narrow drawn horizon not longing out above the villages borders. Paul instead has the feeling that he can't realize his dreams and targets in the (mentally) strong tightened Hunsrück borders. The radio indeed is a symbol for his longing to the far,

and especially Apollonia is, the girl that does not seem to fit in the peoples expectations of how somebody has to look like and behave. She has the courage to leave, and this way Paul loses his only brother in mind and his first love. She sees through Paul, who seems to be absent with his thoughts for so many times: "Anyway, Paul, you are different from the other people around." ... "Paul, now you are back from the war since three years now, and you are still not home again." (taken from the scene at the Deutsches Eck in Koblenz). Shurely the fact that Apolonia has the courage to leave intensifies Pauls longing and makes his urge to leave more concrete. Nevertheless - before leaving he follows the traditions and expectations of the others again by supporting his father, marrying and founding a family. Besides: even Eduard and Pauline are longing to the far. Pauline takes the step out of the village by moving to the "big city" (Simmern) and becoming a business-woman, while Eduard tries to move the wide world (represented by Lucie, the girl "aus den besten Kreisen der Reichshauptstadt") into the Hunsrück. Without wanting to say too much about the following films, one day, when Paul got back from the U. S., Eduard will express his complete agreement, sympathy and even admiration for Paul having done this step, having left the "poor Hunsrückvillage", explicitly.

The function of the scene where Paul finds the body of the dead woman is not clear to me, either. In fact Reitz and his co-writer, Peter Steinbach, lived in the Hunsrück while writing the plot and did very intensive researches in newspaper archives and other chronicals to look for authentic facts they could integrate in their story. The murder of the woman relates to a series of murders which took place in the Hunsrück in the 1920th. So this dead woman is no fictive element but a historical detail. But the question is: why does Paul find her, and why does he get so upset we will never see him again throughout all the film? Sure, finding somebody dead will leave nobody of us in complete coolness - but maybe this experience even is just "another brick in the wall" (I like this Pink Floyd-methaphor used by Raymond very much - and it fits) that makes Paul (unconsciously) deny his home. (I even asked Edgar Reitz for the meaning of this detail, I will keep you informed if there are news wich can get this topic straight.)

Another detail that was discussed is the meaning of the color-shot of the yellow fly-trap. To understand this we should have a look of the philosophy of Edgar Reitz and his cameraman, Gernot Roll, concerning the using of color-material (all following information are taken from a documentary which is to see at the german video-release by absolut-medien on the last tape). Generally the use of color and black and white-material was one of the most discussed topics after the first broadcasting of Heimat in 1984. Reitz and Roll decided genereally to use black and white, because they thought color had no real relevance in people's memories. (Maybe we can understand this by thinking of our own historical memory, e. g. Hitler and WW2, which is often based on the impressions of old black and white films.) They decided to use color only while capturing impressions which they thought of that they would be remembered in color, for example the fiery iron, easter-eggs, the red post-car or the landscape - and: the fly trap. I myself can remember exactly this dirty yellow of fly-traps hanging around in my grandma's kitchen on their farm. So for me this color-shot completely fits in the concept. Reitz said about this discussion, that the most complicated theories were created of an aspect he and Roll did not spend much preparation on, often they just decided right before filming which material to use. Nevertheless: this color-shot gets a special emphasis because of the symbolical meaning of the trap.

So, this is i for today. Feel very friendly invited to visit my Heimat-Webpages on <http://home.t-online.de/home/th.hoenemann/heimat/index.htm> wich I already introduced to you last year (if the link does'nt work copy it and paste it into your browser's adress-line).

I am really looking forward to the following contributions because we all can never stop learning about this great, great film.

Best regards to you all, heimatliche Grüfle,

Thomas Hönemann

34 years old, 2 children of 3 and 1 year, teacher, Heimat-fan from Rietberg, Germany

<http://home.t-online.de/home/th.hoenemann/home.htm> (general section)

<http://home.t-online.de/home/th.hoenemann/heimat/index.htm> (Heimat-section)

Date: Wed, 5 Nov 2003 22:00:30 +0100
From: "Theresia en Martijn" <theresia_martijn_onetelnet.nl>

Dear all,

First of all I've to confess that I didn't watch the first Heimat episode this weekend because I was away. And I still haven't had a chance to watch. Anyway I've seen the whole film many times so I suppose I can also give my reaction by everything I remember.

I've noticed that the kitchen scene seems a little too long and a little too boring for some people, it's a scene where people can get stuck and then they don't bother to watch the rest of the movie. They've no idea what they miss... The first time I was confronted with Heimat was on Belgium TV (they broadcasted it before the VPRO in Holland I think) I must have been 14 years old. I had never seen such a beautiful thing before and 18 years later it is still the best thing I've ever seen. After watching the whole film it feels to me like you've lived a whole life, that's how real Heimat is. It was only one or two years later that my parents took me to the Hunsrück because I wanted to see whether or not I could find some spots I'd seen in the film. It gave such a special feeling to drive through these villages but I didn't recognise anything and the tourist information couldn't help us either.

I always watched Heimat with Dutch subtitles and I thought I would know most of the lines by heart but the last time I watched Heimat it was without subtitles and I've to say it is VERY hard to understand the dialect. The good thing about watching without subtitles is that you start to hear more and new things, words they hadn't translated. Once a German man told me that some actors have a Hunsrücker dialect which sound very made up. Lucky for me I can't hear that difference between real and not so real dialect I suppose it could spoil some of the power of Heimat for me.

How weird the idea that your son comes home after several years in war and that there's no hug, no intimate way of saying hello just going back to normal life, helping his father. Maybe this was the only way for people to live on, the war could have been too confronting otherwise. Of course Katherina has her own way of happiness about Paul's return, of course the kitchen is full of people who are all curious to see him but they all talk about different things. Not really about Paul, they talk about themselves, their village, their world. Already in the first scene you can see that Paul doesn't belong in that world, the gap is too big.

The soldier by the fire speaks his Hunsrücker dialect, he speaks the words which we'll hear again in the last episode, at the cemetery the farmer uses the same words and at the end we'll hear the same text in the song sung by the choir. So Reitz has really created a circle. I really like that.

A thing which I never understood in the first episode is that Marie-Goot speaks about Glasisch Karl like he is someone she just knows, later we'll find out that in fact he's her son (I think the family tree makes it clear in the last episode)! Mäthes-Pat is her husband but he isn't the Glasisch's father. I always wonder if not making this clear was done on purpose by Reitz.

I always thought that Paul does avoid Glasisch's hand and the only way to do that without being too rude is to concentrate on the fly-paper. Glasisch does the same and right at that point you see a bond between the two man, they're so different but both soldiers with their own horrible experiences. Isn't it painful that Eduard who always speaks about planes and pilots doesn't get the chance to fly, and that his brother Paul gets this chance in stead. I always feel so sorry for him! Eduard would have loved it so much. And in stead of enjoying this huge opportunity (imagine flying over the Hunsrück in the early twenties!) Paul starts too shout that he wants to land because he's trapped in an illusion (he thinks he sees Appollonia). How must Eduard have felt after hearing this!

It's difficult to decide what to think of Paul. Should he have stayed with his wife and family? Should he have married Maria anyway? Appollonia was the one he loved but he never made that really clear. When he was lying between Maria's legs in the wood what else could he do then to ask her to marry him? Maybe he thought that she could and would join him in his desires and dreams. When Maria is young she doesn't seem the conservative woman we'll later see. A woman who doesn't dare to make changes, not even to go on holiday with Pauline. I think her mother in law travelled more and further

than she did! Even on Hermann's wedding in München she is not there because her world isn't bigger than Schabbach. Paul certainly is an enigma, a man who intrigues people because he's so mysterious in a way... Later on he is so very different, so open and joyful, so American. It's hard to believe that this is the same person as the one who's left in the first episode.

That's what I like so much about Heimat and also what makes it so real. Real people are playing here, they're not good or bad ones, they have good and bad sides like everyone. Could it be that it feels so real because so many amateurs played a part? I once heard that Katherina was an amateur actor as we Could anyone tell me whether this is true? If she was then she must have played her own self, absolutely brilliant she is in every scene.

I like the paradox between feeling safe in such an idyllic little village, at the same time I know (because I was born in one) how horrible it can be to live there, people always know about every step you take and even worse... they talk about it! A town or city protects you much more although a little village has the image of being protecting.

It's great to get the chance to read all the different ideas people have about the scenes. It's such a pleasure to discuss things, to learn and to think about! Of course I knew that there were more people who love this film as much as I do but to be in touch with each other is really special! I can't say how much I enjoyed (already) to read all your mails. And, Ivan, what a brilliant prologue did you write!

So let's go on!!!

Theresia

Date: Thu, 6 Nov 2003 10:57:25 -0600
From: "Susan Biedron" <susan jsbiedron.com>

Theresia and all,

At 22:00 +0100 5/11/03, Theresia wrote:

> I always watched Heimat with Dutch subtitles and I thought I would know most
> of the lines by heart but the last time I watched Heimat it was without
> subtitles and I've to say it is VERY hard to understand the dialect.

Yes it is very hard to understand the dialect - I can understand "Hoch Deutsch" very well but the Hunsruck dialect is like another language. However . . . I have noticed that the more I listen, I actually pick up a few dialect words here and there. This also happened when I visited my great grandmother's village in the Swabisch Alb - people were very careful to speak in high German to me, but every once in awhile slipped into Swabisch -

> The good thing about watching without subtitles is that you start to hear more
> and new things, words they hadn't translated.

Also true for the version I have with English subtitles - not everything is translated!

> How weird the idea that your son comes home after several years in war and
> that there's no hug, no intimate way of saying hello just going back to
> normal life, helping his father.

Although the "welcome" Paul received bothered me also, I think this is "typisch Deutsch." I grew up in a German American family and they were loving but not affectionate. Other people I knew with German parents said they experienced the same thing. No one hugged! Of course it is probably different in Germany today.?? I was always told "don't cry!" - one was supposed to be very stoical. Then I married into a Polish family - everyone was always hugging and crying - what a cultural shock!

> Already in the first scene you can see that Paul
> doesn't belong in that world, the gap is too big.<<

good point!

- > A thing which I never understood in the first episode is that Marie-Goot
- > speaks about Glasisch Karl like he is someone she just knows, later we'll
- > find out that in fact he's her son (I think the family tree makes it clear
- > in the last episode)! Mäthes-Pat is her husband but he isn't the Glasisch's
- > father. I always wonder if not making this clear was done on purpose by
- > Reitz

I thought this was strange too! One gets the impression at the beginning that Glasisch is alone, that he has no family.

- > Isn't it painful that Eduard who always speaks about planes and pilots
- > doesn't get the chance to fly, and that his brother Paul gets this chance in
- > stead. I always feel so sorry for him!

I think Eduard was jealous of Paul and the attention he received. Eduard keeps interrupting the "welcome" party with reading excerpts from the newspaper. The newspaper is the only way Eduard can experience the world at this point. Then when he says "Pilots are the true heroes" -- is he suggesting Paul is not a hero? A little sibling rivalry perhaps?

- > It's difficult to decide what to think of Paul. Should he have stayed with
- > his wife and family? Should he have married Maria anyway? Appollonia was the
- > one he loved but he never made that really clear.

Marie-Goot looks out the window and comments on Maria and Appollonia - something like "One has money the other is pretty." Is Maria not supposed to be pretty? I think she is beautiful, more so than Appollonia. Although I understand why men would be attracted to someone different. Comments? Reitz shows in Heimat what happened often in Germany and other European countries - men would just leave their family and go to America. We have 3 cases of it on both sides of my family.

Paul certainly is an enigma, a mysterious man, an intriguer. Later on he is so very different, so open and joyful, so American.

SO OBNOXIOUS! (Later when he returns, that is.) I can say that, being American :) But in this episode Paul is very quiet & serious, yet an obedient citizen of the village. You never see him joking around or laughing with the other men. In this episode, he is still likable because he seems special and destined for greater things. Maria thought so.

Can anyone tell me about the death of the actor who played Paul's father? There is a + by his name in the credits. Did he die before Heimat was finished filming or afterwards?

- > I like the paradox between feeling safe in such an idyllic little village,
- > at the same time I know (because I was born in one) how horrible it can be
- > to live there, people always know about every step you take and even
- > worse... they talk about it! A town or city protects you much more although
- > a little village has the image of being protecting.

It fits with the paradox of Heimat and Fernweh. Although a big city can be awful to live in also.

It is so interesting reading the interpretations of others - each posting points out something new that I missed!

Susan

Date: Thu, 6 Nov 2003 20:53:28 +0100
From: "Theresia en Martijn" <theresia_martijn_onetelnet.nl>

Dear Susan (and all the other people who are reading this),

When I was looking again at the family tree I found out that Marie-Goot actually died in 1960. So I wonder how could she visit Hermann's wedding in 1964? Is this a mistake by Reitz or did he decide to give himself the freedom in the Heimat story to let her re-appear?

As far as I know Paul's father (Mathias) died during filming Heimat. At some point Katherina speaks about him, telling that he is so very ill. We won't see him again. I remember I've once read (a long time ago) that his death was the reason why he didn't appear in heaven and I think they invented a brilliant excuse for this- he was blind and that's the reason why they couldn't see him.

Theresia

Date: Thu, 6 Nov 2003 21:17:56 +0100
From: heimat hoenemann.de (Thomas Hönemann)

> I once heard that Katherina was an amateur actor as
> well. Could anyone tell me whether this is true? If she was then she must
> have played her own self, absolutely brilliant she is in every scene.

Dear Theresia, Susan and all others,

Indeed Katharina was played by an amateur actor, Gertrud Bredel. She lived in Bad Kreuznach and was discovered by Reitz as an actress playing in the Laienspielgruppe of the Volkshochschule Bad Kreuznach (= amateur-theatre, Volkshochschule is no kind of university but an offer of seminars nearly everybody can take part in). Even if Bad Kreuznach is not far away from the Hunsrück Gertrud sometimes had to work on the dialect, because the Bad Kreuznach dialect is quite different from the Hunsrück dialect. Even within the Hunsrück the dialect sometimes differs from village to village. Gertrud Bredel unfortunately died some years ago.

This is an extract of an article from DER SPIEGEL 40/1984, S. 263, concerning Gertrud Bredel (excuse me for not translating it, I am too tired):

"Als die Rentnerin Gertrud Bredel, 64, Dienstag letzter Woche in Bad Kreuznach einkaufte, kam plötzlich eine fremde junge Frau auf sie zu und überreichte ihr drei Rosen. Sagte dazu nur: 'Und meine Glückwünsche für ihre schauspielerische Leistung'. Auf der Bühne der Volkshochschule Bad Kreuznach war die begeisterte LAienspielerin von der 'dicken Pompanne' bis zur MArthe im 'Zerbrochenen Krug' schon in vielen Rollen zu sehen. Seit aber HEIMAT gesendet wird, merkt Gertrud Bredel, Darstellerin der Mutter Katharina, 'dass die Leute auf der Strafle mich irgendwie angucken'. Ihre Dachwohnung am Stadtrand von Bad Kreuznach, nur durch eine Kletterpartie über zwei steile Treppen zu erreichen, ist zur ANlaufstelle von Reportern geworden. Vom 'Stern' war einer da, von 'Hörzu', von der 'Welt am Sonntag'. Letzten Mittwoch sendete 'Radio Luxemburg' ein Telefoninterview mit ihr, in der Post fand die Rentnerin Autogrammwünsche. Gertrud Bredel erträgt den plötzlichen Ruhm mit Fassung. Ihr Alltag hat sich nicht verändert. Ihr Ehemann ist als Soldat in Russland verschollen; dne einzigen Sohn, im September 1945 geboren, hat sie allein großgezogen; seit er verheiratet ist lebt sie allein. Nach wie vor probt sie zweimal wöchentlich mit dem Kirchenchor, fährt für Besorgungen mit dem Fahrrad in die Stadt, trifft sich abends mit Freunden von der Laienspielschar oder sitzt vor dem Fernseher, am liebsten bei 'verfilmten Theaterstücken'. Vor den Dreharbeiten zu HEIMAT ist sie 'nie aus Bad KReuznach rausgekommen, nie in Urlaub gefahren'. Zu einer Kinovorführung in Berlin, wo die HEIMAT-Schauspieler dem Publikum vorgestellt wurden, bestieg Gertrud Bredel erstmals ein Flugzeug, in Vendeig, wo sie als Gast an den Filmfestspielen teilnahm, wohnte ise zum erstenmal in ihrem Leben in einem Hotel. Als dann die Filmleute nach einer HEIMAT-Vorführung den Laiendarstellern aus Rheinland-Pfalz minutenlang stehend applaudierten,

war sie 'ergriffen und stolz, das ist wahr'. Dabei hatte sie bei dem HEIMAT-Film 'eigentlich nur aus Neugier' mitgemacht und 'weil ich nicht wusste, dass die Rolle so groß wird'. Ihre 55 anstrengenden Drehtage empfindet die Kreuznacherin im nachhinein nicht als Arbeit: 'Wir hatten Freude daran, wir verstanden uns gut.' Nicht einmal die Gage, sagt sie, war ihr wirklich wichtig - sie hätte auch 'umsonst gespielt'.

Susan wrote:

- > Can anyone tell me about the death of the actor who played Paul's father?
- > There is a + by his name in the credits. Did he die before Heimat was
- > finished filming or afterwards?

Indeed Willi Burger who plays Paul's father died during the post-production of Heimat. That means: he finished playing his role but never saw the film, unfortunately.

Best regards to you all,
Thomas

<http://home.t-online.de/home/th.hoenemann/heimat/index.htm>

Date: Fri, 7 Nov 2003 16:44:10 -0000
From: "Ivan Mansley" <ivanman_dsl.pipex.com>

Dear Thomas and all list members

I have been very interested by Thomas Honemann's contributions to our discussion and by the contributions of all those who speak and understand German, never mind the Hunsrück dialect!! I am ashamed to say that apart from "Noch ein Bier, bitte" und "Haben Sie ein Tassen Kaffee und Apfelkuchen mit Sahne" I am speechless. I am still puzzled, however, by what Thomas told us about what Edgar Reitz and Gernot Roll said in the documentary at the end of the German video-release. Thomas wrote:

"Generally the use of color and black and white-material was one of the most discussed topics after the first broadcasting of Heimat in 1984. Reitz and Roll decided generally to use black and white, because they thought color had no real relevance in people's memories."

I am not sure I would necessarily agree with this but that is perhaps incidental.

Thomas continues: "They decided to use color only while capturing impressions which they thought of that they would be remembered in color, for example the fiery iron, easter-eggs, the red post-car or the landscape - and: the fly trap."

The trouble with this is that it is a bit disingenuous. The use of colour becomes purely arbitrary. The director and cameraman can say "Yes, this part's in black and white because they would remember it that way" and "Yes, this part's in colour because they would remember it that way." And we the viewers cannot argue because it is done. This is reinforced by what Thomas now reports: "Reitz said about this discussion, that the most complicated theories were created of an aspect he and Roll did not spend much preparation on, often they just decided right before filming which material to use."

But what if we, the viewers, do see significances? A character remembers something in colour because it has some special significance for him. The colour of the fly-paper has significance because of the emphasis on the reality and the symbol of the trap. Thomas remembers the dirty yellow of the fly-paper in his grandmother's farm kitchen. Why does he remember it in colour and not black and

white? And this leads me onto another difficulty? Whose memory are we talking about? The fiery glow of colour from the iron horse-shoe, for instance. Is that from the Reitz memory or is it from the memory of Paul Simon eg. His happy childhood with the forge at the centre of it?? Artistically also, the use of colour becomes even more vivid set against black and white. I feel there are significances and it is interesting to see where they lead. Does Reitz tell us things about his characters and their consciousness, their memories, as well, of course, as his own through his use of colour?

I am aware that I am not explaining this very well but I hope you will all understand what I am trying to convey. This problem arises very strongly in the next episode!!

Regards
Ivan Mansley.

Date: Thu, 13 Nov 2003 18:29:50 -0000
From: "Ivan Mansley" <ivanman dsl.pipex.com>

Well, I think it's time to put FERNWEH to bed, don't you? The discussion dried up a few days ago. Tomorrow, I will post my introduction to Part 2. A big thank you to all our contributors without whom this would not be possible. I think we had 8 contributors including myself and there were some 27 posts in all. We discussed, amongst other things, the character of Paul Simon, the use of the Hunsruck dialect, the possible meanings of the title, Reitz's use of colour, some of the historical background, symbolism [the flies and fly paper, the pine-marten and the animal trap], the discovery of the dead woman in the woods and any significance, some of the actors and actresses, personal parallels and much more.

I would like to thank many of you for your kind words and express the hope that more will join us. In our discussions one small rule might be helpful. Please do not refer forwards to later episodes and events if possible, only backwards to what we have already seen. We, thus, put ourselves in the position of new viewers [we can refer to how we reacted to the given episode first time round] and it will also enable any newcomers to feel that they can catch up. I hope you agree.

Ivan Mansley.