

Date: Fri, 14 Nov 2003 07:51:23 -0000
From: "Ivan Mansley" <ivanman dsl.pipex.com>

AN INTRODUCTION TO:

HEIMAT Part 2. DIE MITTE DER WELT. [THE MIDDLE OF THE WORLD]

After watching this episode through from beginning to end without stopping I found that I had written in my notes, "Why does Reitz move me so extraordinarily, because he does?" I will attempt an answer. It is not just that he interweaves so cleverly the history of Germany in these years 1928-1933 with the histories of his individual characters but also that he communicates their "felt life", to coin a phrase. We are made to feel their happinesses, their anxieties, their sense of fun, their aspirations, their forebodings. I could go for ever.

Take the character of Kath, who is central to this episode. She acts as the carrier of tradition from making the Easter eggs for Anton and Ernst at the beginning ["My grandma did this a 100 years ago"] to the making of the fruit[?] poultice at the end for the feverish child, Lotti. She is also the voice of truth. She sees the danger of the Nazis and Hitler. She makes Anton promise not to wear his military style uniform again. She sees the dangers of living on credit, and, lying in bed after a hectic day she utters words which have a chilling resonance: "One day we'll have to pay for all this." But she is also a loving, over-protective mother whose letter to Eduard in Berlin, to be conveyed by the French horsewoman makes us smile at her naivety, but her genuine concern shines through. ["She has the evil eye.don't help her off her horse".] When she smells the bath salts used by this exotic Frenchwoman she is entranced. ["It smells of the big city. It's how I've always imagined it."]. She is a simple countrywoman and yet it is she who can see what Fritz's arrest in the early hours of the morning [for his Communist sympathies] will mean for others. She is a full human being and she made me cry!!

I seem to remember that Reitz was attacked for not making stronger criticism of the Nazis and the German people's involvement in Hitler's rise to power. I think he handles this difficult theme in a masterful way. We see how people are ashamed of their poverty and Germany's enfeebled state. Wiegand wishes that the French horsewoman could have come at a later time. Glassisch reports on the wealth he has seen in France [Gobelin tapestries, mirrors on the floors]. We see the growing prosperity of Germany, the coming of the telephone to Schabbach, new cars and so on. It is discussed when Kath goes to Bochum ["postal charges and rents are down.everything's getting cheaper"]. The National Socialist party brought "Bread and work for the German people", as the banner reads. Reitz shows us how good and decent people lent their support. Robert, Pauline's clockmaker husband is not a vicious man and sees that many of the Nazi marchers are "duffers in uniform" but he thinks his Jewish tenant will sell up because "Things are not so rosy for Jews now." Even Maria seems respectful towards the Fuhrer. When Ernst throws Eduard's Nazi cap she says to her little boy: "What if the Fuhrer saw. He sees everything."

The viewer remembers the strange, half-demented ex-soldier at the immigration centre in New York who warns Paul against -isms, "Mammonism, futurism, Communism, symbolism, expressionism, nihilism, scepticism, Socialism, Zionism, egoism..." The 1930's was a time of ideologies. We see the Nazi at the bar in the brothel [we should notice the link with decadence] boring everyone with his views and quoting Hitler's awful words: "We'll deal ruthlessly with anyone whose opinions differ" and we see that ruthlessness in action with the arrest of Fritz and the words of the policeman bring a chill to the heart of anyone of my age. Fritz will be sent to "a concentration camp for re-education to exorcise that Marxist spirit." His words are meant to be re-assuring!!

There is comedy in this episode. Wiegand, Glassisch , and the inn-keeper trying to talk French is quite endearing. I loved Eduard's plaintive exclamation: "I just wanted to go for a walk." Mathias shaking hands with the city slicker, Lucie, the ex-brothel madam and now wife of Eduard, with his hands covered in dung is a nice moment. We see happiness amongst the villagers. [Maria and the boys carrying on their father's legacy with the radio, Mathias at the window, Eduard and Lucie amongst the beauties of the Hunsruck]. I do not have time in this introduction to deal with the Eduard and Lucie relationship and his time in Berlin. There are many things that can be said about Eduard amongst the

prostitutes and we can return to this. City decadence versus rural simplicities. Was a false note struck by the fact that all the whores had hearts of gold? German romanticism? Eduard and Lucie seem happy with each other despite deceptions by both parties. Would someone like to comment on the title of the episode?

I think I have said enough for now!

Ivan Mansley.

Date: Fri, 14 Nov 2003 12:27:15 -0600
From: "Susan Biedron" <susan jsbiedron.com>

Ivan and all,

I have only re-watched "Die Mitte Der Welt" just past the part that Eduard arrives back in Schabbach with Lucie and she meets his family. But here are my comments so far:

I agree with you that Kath is the voice of truth. She remains a stable character with common sense, she continues with tradition, she does what she believes is right.

What is the purpose of the French horsewoman? I can't figure this out. Does she represent the past? Her visit seems to be the only time that we see Wiegand acting like a normal person. In this scene he seems to let his guard down - he is at a loss for words with this woman. Here Wiegand interacts with Glassisch and the innkeeper as if they are fellow citizens of Schabbach.

I always have wondered - is the horsewoman's ride realistic for the time? Would a woman from an aristocratic background have traveled by horse alone so far?

I'm not sure about the meaning of the title. Perhaps it means that Schabbach is the middle of the world to the characters. I'm interested in other peoples' views on this. Reitz shows how Eduard really loves the village and area when he shows Lucie his favorite places. Lucie seems to have real feeling for Eduard, even though she starts out being a gold digger. Is Reitz trying to show that while some people want to leave Schabbach for the big city or the world, that some big city people (Lucie) think Schabbach/Hunsruck is a country paradise?

Susan

Date: Fri, 14 Nov 2003 22:03:43 -0000
From: "Ivan Mansley" <ivanman dsl.pipex.com>

Susan and list members,

Susan wrote: "What is the purpose of the French horsewoman? I can't figure this out. Does she represent the past?" and "I always have wondered - is the horsewoman's ride realistic for the time? Would a woman from an aristocratic background have travelled by horse alone so far?"

It seems to me that the French horsewoman is a symbol, an emblem, not realistic at all. She symbolises all that is glamorous, exotic, dashing, wealthy, and sophisticated. When I look back at Reitz's film I think of all the realistic/naturalistic details but now I am studying it, so to speak, I find so much which is not naturalistic at all. Madame, or should that be Mademoiselle, Denise de Gallimasch symbolises everything that Schabbach is not. Germany and its people are in a period of depression. Weigand is ashamed of their backwardness and lack of sophistication. The villagers are then allowed to console themselves with the thought that they are at the centre of the world. One of the villagers, who argues with Weigand and says that she would have had to make a detour southwards, is correct, as a direct line from Paris to Berlin, as the rule on my atlas revealed, would pass thro' Bonn. Near enough!! But

the argument that Schabbach lies on a direct line from the N-S Poles is obviously absurd. So does anywhere. It depends on which line of longitude you choose! But you must find consolation somewhere and the French lady's appearance out of nowhere does that. Psychologically true even if not realistic!!

Susan also wrote when commenting about Lucie's motives: "Is Reitz trying to show that while some people want to leave Schabbach for the big city or the world, that some big city people (Lucie) think Schabbach/Hunsruck is a country paradise?"

I think you are exactly right. I hadn't seen it quite like that before. Lucie is an interesting character, isn't she? She grabs Eduard because she thinks he is rich and the owner of vast estates. On arrival you see her face fall as she realises how humble the Simon house and farm are but she soon recovers her poise and decides to make the most of a bad job. I couldn't decide on the exact moment, as I was watching, that she makes this decision. But she soon becomes determined to advance in the world thro' her husband. See the scene in the bedroom. She is an amoral character, if not an immoral one, but I gradually found her quite endearing and likeable with a sense of fun. Comment anyone?

All for now,

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All for now,

Ivan.

Date: Fri, 25 Nov 2003 12:23:43 +0100
From: ReindeR Rustema <reinder.rustema.nl>

It surprises me that there have been so few reactions to part two.

My guess is that many of you have the same reaction to part two as I had. Interesting, many story lines are set out, many openings, but no finished stories. Part one already introduced the characters and the Reitz' esthetics to us, so nothing new in that respect.

I watched the episode together with others who were new to Heimat and I had to be careful not to give away spoilers about how characters would be like later on. We agreed that you can sense that this is going to be a long story. We are still in the introduction stage, not much is happening yet. But how curious we become!

In this stage the viewer has decided whether or not to see the whole Heimat or not. We are looking forward to part three this weekend... One of the shorter ones, only 58 minutes.

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ReindeR

Date: Tue, 25 Nov 2003 10:49:14 -0600
From: "Susan Biedron" <susan jsbiedron.com>

ReindeR,

I too, kept expecting more postings about part 2. Did the people who watched Heimat with you have any comments on Lucie?

I think in this episode we see Reitz's genius to show the characters with many facets. I think Mathias is flattered by Lucie's attention - you could almost say he flirts with her in his own way. A little bit of insight into the usually stern older man who is always seen hard at work - he still appreciates an attractive woman.

I guess part 2 is more "setting" for the rest of the story.

Susan

Date: Tue, 25 Nov 2003 14:51:12 +0100
From: Th.Hoenemann t-online.de (Thomas Hönemann)

Dear Reinder, Ivan, Susan and other friends of Heimat,

the discussion about "Die Mitte der Welt" really seems to need some dynamics, so I want to give emphasis to some of the aspects Ivan already mentioned and bring up some new thoughts.

First of all I agree with Ivan in his characterizations of Katharina. She is really a strong and realistic character, Schabbach's 'living truth' although she is a simple mind - maybe exactly this is what characterizes and make us love her most. She is not blinded by the light of the "new time". The role is played in an very impressing way by Gertrud Bredel, an amateur acteur as I already told you. Gertrud never left her village, Bad Kreuznach, before moving up to the Hunsrück and playing her role. So concerning the biography of Maria there is a personal parallel: she also will never leave Schabbach and die at the place she was born in.

So for these people Schabbach is the center of the world, the center of their own life. And they feel confirmed in this attitude by the rich and aristocratic horsewoman coming through their village and the simple "proof" of one of the inhabitants in the evening. They smell the great, wide world by smelling the perfume of the french lady. This all shows again how narrow peoples minds were and how restricted their geographic room to move was.

Maybe another point to discuss is the soundtrack, the music of the film. I am no specialist in this so I will avoid trying an analysis of the music's harmonies and structure. But you will have recognized: Each of the main characters has a special music-theme which is varied relative to different situations of the film. Most impressing to me is the title-music, this pulsing and deep-going theme which causes a gooseflesh [German: Gänsehaut] everytime I listen to it.

And another thing that is specific (not only) for this episode: the lot of comedy scenes. Reitz once said: Heimat is a comedy, but not a [German: Knallkomödie, which is a kind of very offensive and obvious comedy]." Maybe we have to restrict the validity of this quote for the film as a whole, but there are lots of really funny scenes in every episode, and so in this one. I really love the scene in front of the store of Anton Jakob where Wiegand and Glasich are trying to explain that the Baldenau is a ruin to the french horsewoman (have an ear of the music in this scene: the wiegand-theme is presented in a very humorous way). Or Katharina's fear and dream about Eduard meeting the horsewoman. Or: Lucie's arrival in Schabbach.

Maybe one of you feels like writing o comment on this?

Best regards to you all,
Thomas

feel invited to visit my HEIMAT-pages: <http://heimat.hoenemann.de>

Date: Wed, 26 Nov 2003 17:05:54 +0100
From: "Theresia en Martijn" <theresia_martijn_onetelnet.nl>

Dear all,

After watching the first two episodes, something has caught my attention for the first time. So many scenes are spiritual, so many people almost show psychic behaviour. Like Matthias who says he knows that Paul is still alive now the marten has been caught. He sees it as a sign. Katherina had her foreboding with her family in the Ruhr Gebiet. Sensible people with so much conventional wisdom (about the stairs in the cellar etc.) and spiritual 'knowledge'. Sometimes right sometimes wrong. Kath was wrong with her dream about the French lady and her warning that Eduard shouldn't help her descend from her horse. But in a way she may have been right because Eduard walked in a trap called Lucie.

Whilst watching Heimat again I also see more and more magic realistic scenes. The film is about real life real people but many scenes are like a fairy tale full of magic from another world.

It's also interesting that Paul really doesn't know why he has left exactly. He'll never give us the answer because he never got this question answered. We all can have our own thoughts about it but the only thing he knows is that he just walked and walked and walked.

The 'relation' between Wiegand and Glasisch has a funny moment in this episode. Wasn't there always trouble between them two? How come that we see them working together (!) just before the French woman arrives?! It's the hostility and camaraderie at the same time which you may only find in such a small village. It shows they don't really hate each other and that they sometimes even need each other. When the woman arrives, we would expect the east of Glasisch who seems the underdog of these three men but he's the one who's able to understand (well most of it) French. To me that's the most funny thing of this scene. The other two have more status as a mayor or innkeeper but they need Glasisch to understand what this woman wants.

What's that hanging, in Eduard's room in Berlin, above the table. Is it smoked bacon? And who were Schmeling and Ondra? Please Germans tell me!

When Eduard takes Lucie on the short Hunsrueck tour and shows her the gold he has found, you see her eyes almost falling out. She doesn't listen to the story he's telling she's only interested in the gold. I think this scene says all about their marriage and especially about her expectations. The character Lucie must be so much fun to play for an actress!

I like the use of colour in this episode. Everytime when we get to see 'die Neue Zeit' we see coloured scenes. Like the Bayer factory and the use of electricity when the police switches the light on in Kath's bedroom.

Well I hope you enjoyed my thoughts on 'Die Mitte der Welt'.

Theresia

Date: Thu, 27 Nov 2003 23:36:00 -0000

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

Dear All

I know I shouldn't take it personally but somehow the lack of response, especially in the week following my introduction, left me feeling a little disheartened. Things did pick up a little towards the end of our discussion period. Including myself, we had 5 contributors and a total of 7 posts, again including my introduction. Please feel free to e-mail me personally if you would like me to do something differently.

As no one has answered Theresia's query I will do my best. I am not German so please excuse me. Theresia wrote: "What's that hanging, in Eduard's room in Berlin, above the table. Is it smoked bacon? And who were Schmeling and Ondra? Please Germans tell me!" The latter part first, as it's easier!! Max Schmeling was the first European to win the world heavyweight boxing championship in the 20th century when he knocked out Jack Sharkey in New York in June 1930. His most famous victory was when he knocked out the famed Joe Louis in NYC in 1936. A great celebrity then and I believe he was also a Nazi sympathiser. I remember my father talking about him. Anny Ondra, his wife [Maria comment "a happily married couple"], born Ondrakova in Czechoslovakia, was a well known film star of the time [Lucie admires her dress sense, doesn't she?]. Her career was evidently cut short, after the advent of sound, by her strong Czech accent. She starred in 2 of Alfred Hitchcock's early films in 1929, Blackmail and The Manxman, neither of which I've seen, and settled in Germany in 1930. They were obviously a glamorous couple and a good advertisement for the new regime.

As for the hanging object that is much more difficult. We are only offered a brief glimpse, aren't we? Just after the torchlight procession passes the apartment window. Back in Schabbach Eduard lies about what he was doing at the time and shares the joke with Lucie. I also wondered what it was. Do you know what I thought? Perhaps it's my mind <vbg>!! But I thought this draped object was a pair of ladies' knickers hung around the light bulb, red with black tassels [presumably Lucie's]!! However, going back to have another look, I am not so sure. Lucie seems otherwise attired in the underwear department!! This time I concluded it was simply a lamp-shade. Perhaps Theresia is right. Eduard needs his country foods. Anyone?

No one took up my point about all the prostitutes seeming to have hearts of gold. This seems to me to be a weakness or is it merely Eduard's sentimental and romantic memory? We do see some of the seediness of the building.

When thinking of Part 2 as I started writing this piece I remembered vividly the scene in colour of the women and children picking bilberries. I reflected that Reitz is able to make the ordinary and mundane somehow extraordinary. A great gift! [Did you note also Maria's extreme reaction to the recovery of the dead woman's blood-stained clothes? It paralleled Paul's extreme reaction. I do not understand the significance. A mother shielding her children from the horrors of life/death?]

Anyway, tomorrow to fresh woods and pastures new!!

Ivan Mansley.

Date: Fri, 28 Nov 2003 17:38:24 +0100

From: "Landzaat, MJ (Maarten)" <maarten.landzaat prorail.nl>

Ivan, All,

I watched the 2nd episode just after Ivan's excellent introduction. I did not react directly because after reading everybody else's reactions, I wanted to see the episode again. And so I did, but only yesterday!

These are a few things that struck me:

- In one scene, a remark is made like "things are not so good for the jews these days". A few sentences later, Eduard's letter is read. He writes something like: "isn't it great that in these days, it doesn't matter where you come from". Nobody seemed to pick up on this discrepancy, (because things were going so well? Lots of breads, new cars, etc.), which made me shudder.
 - Even Katharina, the "nicest" woman in this episode, is xenophobic towards the french woman. Reitz trying to show us that it could happen to anyone? That we shouldn't be quick to judge?

 - I felt the "center of the world"-theme was shown in a number of ways:
 - 1 in the story itself: NY (Italians), Paris, Shabbach, Koblenz, Berlin.
 - 2 "Hitler ist ein Columbus" on the banner, which to me refers to the arrogance of someone thinking he is the center of the world. The same arrogance of the nazi in the brothel.
 - 3 Things and people going to and from the Hunsruck (French woman, Paul, Eduard, cars, guano (this particularly struck me as metaphorical: bringing manure to the homeland to make it better), Lucie, Katharina, the sick child, telephone wires.

 - The intense scene of car cleaning done by Eduard in his nazi uniform. Metaphor for the nazis making things look brighter than they actually are?

 - The illness of the child at the ending scene; meant as a metaphor for the illness of the political/economical situation? Anyway the disturbing end music under the scene made me feel that way!

 - I tried to make sense of the colors, but I couldn't. The strange green light on the balcony of the brothel, the blues on the Shabbach hotel, the reds of the nazi flags, I don't know what to make of it, but it drew my attention.
- Maybe I'm exaggerating with the metaphors, but even if Reitz didn't intend them, I'm still fascinated by them.
- I didn't check the "smoked bacon". I thought it was a hat. I will look up the scene again.

 - I didn't understand one bit of the conversation on the leaving of Berlin. Thank you guys for explaining!

 - I found it disarming and funny that both Eduard and Lucie regarded each other as being high in the social hierarchy. Eduard son of a rich land owner, and Lucie from the highest social ranks because she has a car!

 - Ivan, why do you think that the prostitutes being portrayed with hearts of gold is a weakness?

 - The entire village (well woman and children) in the woods picking the <some>-berries was also moving to me. Maybe because in these individual days we just don't do things like that anymore, but deep in our hearts we still want to???

Please let me know what you think of these remarks.
On to the next episode!

Later,
Maarten

Date: Fri, 28 Nov 2003 11:32:43 -0600
From: "Susan Biedron" <susan jsbiedron.com>

Ivan,

You're doing a great job!

I don't know how many other Americans than myself are in this list, but yesterday was our Thanksgiving holiday, so perhaps that accounts for some lack of response - people traveling to visit relatives, etc. So I hope you don't mind my late comment on Part 2.

I am also interested in the "prostitutes with hearts of gold" concept - but I really don't know what to say about that. Edward is definitely a "follower" type. He goes along with the program. It's kind of luck that he and Lucie find each other in Berlin. Does Edward really believe Lucie is from "the best circles"? Or is he just telling that to his family? It could be he believes this because he is incredibly naive. He is definitely thrilled that a country bumpkin like himself comes home with a car and a worldly attractive woman. Lucie on her part does not run off when she realizes Eduard is not a rich landowner - I think she likes being in the country where she can be important rather than stay in Berlin and be only a "working girl."

Maarten,

I like your comments regarding the comings and goings to Schabbach as the middle of the world. I also never thought about Katherina's bringing home the sick Lottie as a metaphor for society's illness - good point.

But I don't agree with your comment that Katherina is xenophobic towards the French woman. Historically this was the attitude of Germans towards the French. She only shows a mother's concern about Eduard being seduced by the French women. Mothers always imagine all kinds of things happening to their children when they leave home. I think Katherina is basically a simple, straightforward, honest woman. What would she have thought if she knew Eduard went to a brothel!

Susan

Date: Fri, 28 Nov 2003 22:44:54 -0000
From: "Ivan Mansley" <ivanman dsl.pipex.com>

Susan and Maarten

Thank you for your kind words.

Maarten wrote: "Ivan, why do you think that the prostitutes being portrayed with hearts of gold is a weakness?"

Susan wrote: "I am also interested in the "prostitutes with hearts of gold" concept - but I really don't know what to say about that."

It seemed to me that this was a weakness because basically prostitutes do not have hearts of gold. Prostitution is an exploitative and seedy business. It coarsens and brutalises those who participate in it and enriches the organisers of it. Literature is full of this notion of prostitutes as whores with hearts of gold. Surely, in real life, Eduard would have been more likely to have ended up in a ditch with his wallet gone than with the acquisition of a wife. This whole episode in Berlin seemed to me to be coloured by sentimentality and a kind of romanticism which does not accord with reality, although there is probably a hidden purpose here which has escaped me. Perhaps it is how Eduard wanted to see it but surely not Reitz.

I was certainly convinced by Maarten's concept of the metaphors lying behind the sick child and the car shining.

Susan wrote: " Does Edward really believe Lucie is from "the best circles"? Or is he just telling that to his family? It could be he believes this because he is incredibly naive."

I felt that Eduard was deliberately lying. He is participating in a kind of confidence trick on his family. He is, on one level proud of Lucie [her good looks, her car, her worldly sophistication] but he knows what she is really and what his family would think if they really knew her background and where he had met her. The city v. country theme is important here. Susan, did you notice exactly when Lucie decided to make the best of a bad job. I couldn't!! I try to analyze her character a little in the Intro to Part 3. She is a wonderful creation. I wonder if Reitz was drawing from real life in her depiction.

Regards

Ivan Mansley.