

Might there ever be a film of “Heimat Fragments – the Men?”

After the Hunsrück Premiere of *Heimat-Fragmente – die Frauen* in Simmern, Dr. Reitz invited questions from the audience. Someone asked if there would be a ‘Fragments’ film for the men, as well as the women. In so far as I understood the German, he replied to the effect that as a man he had great fondness for his women characters, that their lives were more complex and mysterious and there was a greater gap between their hopes and expectations and the realities of their lives. He felt the men's lives were more single-track and straightforward, and that they were clearly either successful or not.

I feel however that some of the male characters in *Heimat* seem as complex and mysterious as the women, and their lives also as unpredictable, although in some cases the line of their lives is altered by their being played by different actors at different ages. I have explored this a bit further in what follows, making use of what I have already written on the English mailing list on Reinder Rustema's site (<http://www.heimat123.net/index.html>), having looked back at my postings there to refresh my memory.

In *Heimat I* Paul seems to me an intriguing and mysterious character, especially as played by the young actor in the first part. We understand that maybe in the War he has had experiences that set him apart from his family and village, and his best friend has died. In the overall structure of the Trilogy he is a bearer of the concept of the one who goes away, who is “homesick” for unknown distant places. He has absences (eg while the fly walks over his face in the clip in the *Fragmente*), and like his mother is intuitively in touch with another dimension of reality (eg the vision of his dead friend) – but lacks her strong down to earth ability to trust her own intuition. Attractive to women, and probably hungry for relationship, he is torn between Appollonia and Marie, and takes refuge in his fascination with wireless technology. Maybe shocked by discovering the dead woman, and perhaps sensing the unspoken reaction of the village (as betrayed by the ancient Glasisch in another clip in *Fragmente*), unsettled by the incident of the pine-marten and the trap he sets for it, he walks away – from what? From the demands of home and family and work on the land, the intensity of his inner hunger and maybe murderous anger, his feeling trapped .. who knows? The strength of the characterisation is that one knows no more about this fictional figure than about any other person in real life, and no more than maybe he knows about himself ... and yet one is entirely convinced by its authenticity... There is no need to “know” any more – but even so two clips from the existing *Fragmente* have already enriched the image of the young Paul. Are there more of similar quality?

Then in film 8 of *Heimat I* there is the disturbing discontinuity of Paul returning as quite literally another man. It may be that the problem comes as much as anything from the casting. There seems to be nothing in the script itself that jars, if one imagines it played by the original actor as an older man, with his original presence and resonance. This might be less true for the script of films 10 and 11 – as maybe by that time the new actor had himself interacted with and influenced the later scripts. It is very unlikely that more fragments exist that could somehow bridge the void between the two impersonations of this character .

Hermann himself is another enigmatic character whose earliest hopes are largely unfulfilled, in spite of his eventual material success. Again the role is played by different actors – but except in the case of the 40-year-old Hermann towards the end of *Heimat I* this is not a problem, since Hermann of *DZH* is a very credible reincarnation of his younger self. But one feels that some of the light and warmth has gone out of the person, not because it is another actor, but through the pain inflicted on the younger Hermann in the previous series. He has consciously rejected and lost access to an open, vulnerable part of his creative self, which was so badly hurt. Always in *DZH* there is the hope that the open-hearted creative Hermann of the time with Klärchen will re-emerge, but except in small glimpses, as in his night with Marianne, it doesn't. Meanwhile a more complex, funnier, sadder, less secure, more self-

centred, and ultimately rather passive person stumbles through to adulthood. Throughout *DZH* he is functioning and maturing, becoming an effective musician, "successful" in the conventional sense, at the level of the "sorcerer's apprentice". In the *Fragmente* film there are a few scenes that have already added a little to our image of him. Would there be any more?

At the same time there is the complementary figure of Juan. As well as being played by an intriguing actor, his character is a masterly creation, potentially the most gifted "artist" of the group, in the clarity, humour and profundity of his perception. His responses to people and situations are spontaneous and creative, often mirroring and sometimes healing or changing them. Juan is the one person in the group who is acutely aware of the others and of their pain, watching them screw up their lives under layers of hurt and damage in their past and emotional dishonesty in the present. As he says, before taking his leave, he loves them. Is it possible that Juan represents the Sorcerer, the Shaman, without access to whom within himself Hermann can never attain his full stature? Whereas Juan, with no Apprentice, no recognised practical achievement, remains in some eyes a failure? I don't suppose any fragments of existing film remain that could illuminate this further – and it doesn't matter. But it would be good to see more footage of Juan, if there were any.

After watching *DZH* I hoped that in *Heimat 3* Apprentice and Sorcerer would integrate and Hermann would produce work musically at the level of *Heimat* itself. But the Hermann of *Heimat 3*, though skilfully played by the same actor, is, as Henry Arnold himself has said, now a quite different person. We can only mourn the circumstances that prevented the production of another *Heimat* series directly after the end of *DZH*, which might have bridged the disconcerting gap. Clearly there can be no fragments from that period, although perhaps the unused hour of footage shot for the day of the *Wende* might enrich our view of the new Hermann, but maybe not. At the start of *Heimat 3* Hermann seems little more than the bearer of the concept of an intellectual at a loss in a changing world, and of a musician struggling to reconcile the demands of his art and a stable relationship. But by the end of the series he has lived through experiences which have brought him to something approaching the grounded everyday inner "heimat" that his step-grandmother would have known. Are there any further fragments of this journey?

Anton and Ernst both throughout their lives remain recognisably sons of Paul and grandsons of Katharina, in their different ways. Both have suffered from the loss first of Paul, then of Otto, and from the start reacted in ways that each resents in the other. Both are capable of so much sensitivity, both are stubborn in pursuit of their own self-determination, in mutually antagonistic ways. Together they bind the world of *Heimat 3* to its roots in the world of the first *Heimat*. The "Footslogger" metaphorically and the "Airman" literally both have clods of Hunsrück loam on their boots – it's only Hartmut in the next generation who weakly wipes it off his shoe before it muddies the Porsche...

It is true that Anton's life is more single track and predictable, but even so there are mysteries. It remains hard to understand how the "brooding inventor" of the early days of Simon Optik, the shrewd, principled, sober, rather puritanical entrepreneur, should have embraced the vulgar opulence of his house and lifestyle in the third series. Maybe it is just one aspect of the singleminded focus inherited from Paul, his father, that he lacks sensitivity to his material surroundings? The relation of Anton and Mara is another intriguing complication, both moving and disturbing – widowed Anton's emotional need, his envy of his own son to whom he had given everything that didn't matter and nothing that did, who disappointed him by not being able to break the emotional chains he had himself imposed. Only Mara is free enough from the history of his dominance to love him in a dignified and adult way, as simply who he is, without hatred or ambivalence at the same time. Anton needs success for his children, for his workforce and for his footballers, and reconciliation of couples within his family - not only for their sakes, but as affirmation of his own mastery and his own world view. This

dominance is also genuinely his way of love, witness his sensitivity to Hermann's situation, on the football field the day before he died.

Ernst is one of the greatest creations of the *Heimat* films, full of contradictions, unfulfilment, and mystery: generous, open-hearted, mischievous, angry, retentive and devious. He is a “Weggeher” who never got away, shackled to Schabbach by his dubiously acquired Nibelungen hoard. He is a loner, despising others, mistrusted by them, flying away from mundane situations, yet lonely and seeking family ties, but only on his own terms. He wants to be a father, but is in fact more of a conspiratorial elder brother to the young Hermann (and latterly (and movingly) the old one), Tobi, and of course Matko – but though he loves them, he lets all of them down. His growing affection for Matko is complex and very touching - especially in the sense that he is recreating for Matko what he himself as a boy received and lost from Otto, and then, like Otto, he is gone.

Scornful of authority, but in the end an unsuccessful entrepreneur, he is too much like his own father, lacking antennae, misreading signals, inward looking, even arrogant. In old age his creative and adventurous ideas fail through his impatient, angry, embattled over-confidence. So he comes to grief in the East by not heeding Tobi’s warnings, and his museum plan is rejected because of his blunt failure to connect with the village - though actually the plan stems from an innerly driven creativity and will to redeem himself, not primarily a response to the perceived needs of Schabbach .

As with Anton, the richness of the character owes much to the presence and experience of the actor, who stands like a bastion against the pressures imposed on the production of *Heimat 3*. In the first half of the series there are several grateful interludes of stillness, humour and open-heartedness around the appearance of Ernst – his first meeting with Hermann at the mill, his delight at being allowed to sit in the cockpit of the military jet, the splendid progress of Lenin, the tender gift to Galina of his family cradle. Are there any more such moments in the recovered fragments (there is already one, in the newest film)?

At the epic meeting of the two brothers through the wire fence – so intimate, so alike, so angry, so clumsy, so stubborn – Ernst has another still moment, now of grief and self-doubt, but tragically it is lost. And then in the strange inverted replay of the encounter, when Hartmut tells him of Anton’s death, Ernst is shaken by the flight of the wild geese – in his grief and guilt, does the grandson of Katharina hear the “wilde Jagd”? Later, too late, there is his great redeeming speech at Anton’s grave, mourning from the heart and reproaching the loss of so much that with his own death would finally be gone.

Finally the angry risk-taking that led to his crash, his death the outcome of a causal chain “entirely consistent with his own character” as Dr. Reitz once wrote of another man’s accident. But after that almost complete silence. There is no footage of his funeral, and very little mourning, apart from that anguished clip of Hermann weeping in Clarissa’s lap, and poor Matko’s ceremony with the carnations. Ernst is hardly mentioned again, except in connection with the inheritance and the museum. There is just a glimpse of his gravestone during Rudi’s funeral. Maybe the structure of the series could not bear any more mourning, yet apart from Hermann and Lulu it ends with no one to remember Ernst. Would the recovered footage yield anything to fill this gap?

There are many other men in the three *Heimats* whom it would be a joy to meet again in any fragments that remain. Eduard, for instance, we have already seen briefly in the new “*Fragmente*”, film and Glasisch too – but we could never have enough of them. From *DZH* more scenes with Volker or the endearing Rheinhard (ever out of his depth and swimming against the tide), or Alex, or Rob and his father, would be good. And then there is Tobi, in many senses a borderline figure, rejecting the material values of both the Simons in the West and Gunnar in the East. Though “hippy” and laid back, he is nonetheless acute and grounded

– more so than the much older Ernst. His life under the regime of the DDR has matured and toughened him in a way that Ernst may never have known in the West. In spite of the bitterness from that time, he is gentle, and the scenes with his partner and Anna are touching. I wished he could have had an episode of his own, and his brief reappearance with Anna at the Millennium party was a delight. Above all of course there is the glorious tragicomedy of Gunnar – after a few initial reservations, some of us couldn't have too much of him either, and were fascinated during the mailing list discussions with the question of how far his fantasies might have taken over his life back in the East. Moreover one of the most moving relationships in the whole *Heimat* series was that of Gunnar with his elder daughter in the final episode. Further scenes of characters like these would bring as much delight as finding Dorli or Evelyne again in the film we have just seen.

In hoping for more “fragments” I am not looking for “solutions” to the mysteries and open-ended questions posed by these much loved characters. It is no more possible or desirable to “know” everything about them than it is to know everything about real living people. As with Paul, it is a token of their authenticity that they convince while remaining enigmatic. At the simplest level it would be lovely just to see any worthwhile unused footage of any of them, just as we have loved the new *Fragmente* of the women (with some of the men) because they are endlessly fascinating, and their scenes are beautifully constructed in light and space, with so many subtle and delicate non-verbal exchanges, and sometimes so much laughter.

All the same, in thinking back through the films, and re-reading my own postings to the Discussion, in order to write down all this stuff, I have found something which I had not previously appreciated and which has surprised me a lot. This is the way in which recognisable family characteristics and family history have so strongly moulded the characters through at least three generations of a purely fictional family. This is every bit as moving and disconcerting as it can be in a real life family. It is not an intellectually contrived narrative device, as it might have been in a TV soap. It feels as though it has emerged organically and unforeseen from the authenticity of the whole remarkable work.

Angela Skrimshire
18 November 2006