

surplus of misery at home, yet most of them do not know this. Jakob Simon, *ein Hunsrücker Bauernjunge* who reads books and has “*Das Paradies im Kopf*” keeps a diary and is the conduit of *Sehnsucht* to his family and friends in the village. He sees families continually leaving the village and the surrounding area, and wonders why, given the pain of parting and the dangers of the journey, so many are leaving.

When migrants leave, they pass over a stout stone bridge and the women washing clothes below watch them trundle over the bridge, heading toward their own future as they simultaneously become part of Schabach’s past. Jakob soon learns why these villagers are leaving: they are going to Brazil at the invitation of the Portuguese Emperor. He spends as much time as he can steal away from work reading books about the flora, fauna and people of Brazil. One day, when the time is right, he will go there, to the land where the sun goes when it departs from Schabach.

Jakob’s horizons are very circumscribed, as are those of all the denizens of Schabach, but the world within those horizons is known and can be counted on to continue as it has always been, misery and mud and melancholy notwithstanding. There is comfort in knowing this, however slight: “...*Etwas Besseres als den Tod* ...”

The harsh class hierarchy of that time intrudes when Jakob is imprisoned following a fracas during a harvest fest, while his brother Gustav gets the only girl in the village who seemed to understand Jakob in a family way. So Gustav and Jettchen, only slightly acquainted and decidedly not in love, are married, this being what has always been done and can only be done when such a situation arises, with each gesture and action of the tradition faithfully observed.

Jakob’s indomitable mother manages to get him out of prison, and returning to the village on Gustav and Jettchen’s wedding day, Jakob is shattered by the news. He leaves Schabach for a time, yet continues to dream as intensely as ever of freedom and Brazil, only returning to Schabach upon news of his beloved mother’s illness. So life goes on in Schabach, with the *alltäglich* in the ascendant and work only punctuated by imprisonment, marriage, suicide, childbirth, illness and always more work.

The catalyst that instantiates Jakob’s dreaming is another death: the child of Gustav and Jettchen dies of diphtheria. Broken emotionally, they act upon Jakob’s dreaming and emigrate to Brazil. So Jakob, the true *Weggeher*, never leaves the home village, being now obligated to stay and take care of his mother and father, while Gustav, the true *Dableiber*, leaves to begin life again in the land of Jakob’s dreams.

Ultimately, everyone is a *Dableiber* and a *Weggeher*, whether they stay in their starting place or leave for *die andere Heimat*. Thus *Heimat* is easy with the inference that while all of us are born *Heimat gebunden*, we are also born *Heimatvertrieben* and are always on the way to Ithaca, heading toward that *Urheimat*, toward the place we left long ago, although we’ve never been there; toward the place that we will spend the rest of our lives trying to reach, as is the case with Jakob.

It is difficult to find precise cognates for *Heimat* in other languages, but Greek gets very close with nostalgia, which in the beautifully blunt original means the pain we feel in wanting to go home. But etymology and analysis aside, it is really quite simple to see why the *Heimat* series (including *Die Andere Heimat*) was such a hit all over the world. Edgar Reitz simply knew that everyone knows what Nietzsche knew when he wrote the following: “*Wehe dem, der keine Heimat hat.*”

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Friday Film Fest Series



Die andere Heimat

By Edgar Reitz

February 19th, 2016

• 6:30 PM •

Film, Food & Discussion

Non-Members \$15, Members \$12

The German Society of PA

611 Spring Garden St.

215-627-2332

Support provided in part by the
Philadelphia Cultural Fund.



Die andere Heimat

Director: Edgar Reitz

Producer: Christian Reitz

Screenplay: Edgar Reitz, Gert Heidenreich

Cast: Jan Dieter Schneider (Jakob Simon); Antonia Bill (Jettchen); Maximilian Scheidt (Gustav Simon); Marita Breuer (Margarethe Simon); Rüdiger Kriese (John Simon); Philine Lembeck (Florinchen); Melanie Fouche (Lena); Eva Zeidler (Großmutter); Reinhard Paulas (Unkel); Barbara Philipp (Frau Niem); Christoper Luser (Franz Olm); Rainer Kuhn (Dr. Zwirner); Andreas Kulzer (Dorfpfarrer Wiegand)

Cinematography: Gernot Roll

Music: Michael Riessler

Release Date: August 2013 (Venice); September 2013 (Germany)

Spieldauer: 225 minutes

Commentary: A. Krumm



Staying and Leaving ...

Every language has words that are emotional depth charges. And in any language, the utterance that elicits the biggest boom in a human heart is that which reverberates with the sounds of “the primary poetry of our lives”. That poetry beckons us back toward the foundations of our existence, to our point of departure, to “the place where we started.” And that starting place means not simply a place defined by geographical coordinates, but a time and a community and a way of being and thinking and speaking that can never be eviscerated from a human heart.

Before Edgar Reitz became fascinated with the poetry of starting places, he acquired a fascination with film which began when his clock maker father gave him a *Kinoprojektor* for Christmas of 1939 (“*ein Spielzeug für 35 mm film...*”). His fascination with time and memory began with his storytelling grandfather. Channeling his childhood passions into a career, in the fifties he worked hands on with every facet of filmmaking, from camera work and editing to serving as a production assistant.

A man can be happy once he has found his life’s work. Reitz’s life was more than half over when he found his, but fortunately for the rest of us, he then made up for lost time. By the nineteen seventies, Reitz had made quite a number of films, some of which were considered path breaking, even sui generis. Yet nothing worked out, neither economically, nor logistically nor even in the end, critically.

By 1978 Edgar Reitz considered himself to be a very well prepared, highly experienced and thorough failure. He was in debt and ready to quit the film making business. Like most people who have arrived at their nadir, he was deep into *Gewissensprüfung* and *Grübelei*, having absconded to a remote house owned by friends on the island of Sylt, where he was literally snowbound.

This soul searching ended up triggering emotional depth charges in his own heart. Why had he become a filmmaker? Nothing in his family background had any connection with such a career. He began to dwell on members of his family and this morphed into an *Entriegelung des Gedächtnisses* in him about all the people and places and times and ways of being that constituted his own particular *Heimat*, a region called Hunsrück. Reitz realized that the memories welling up within him constituted a veritable gusher: “*Ich habe direkt vor meiner*

Haustür eine Ölquelle entdeckt.” While there, he also happened to watch the American television series *Holocaust* and this *Rührstück*, as he rather dismissively called it, spurred him to begin thinking in formal and technical terms about how the past should be retrieved. When he finally left Sylt weeks later, he had a 100 page *Stoffentwurf* and “...*der Keim zur Heimat-Trilogie war in meine Seele gepflanzt.*”

Returning to Hunsrück, he began working with his colleague Peter Steinbach on a script. Reitz’s was determined to delve, as much as possible, into *die spezifische Umwelt* of his childhood region. He did not want to flatten anything out. Rather he sought out detail, the pretty and un-pretty and idiosyncratic alike, as long as that detail was genuine. He wanted to engage (as much as the techniques of cinema and the craft of storytelling allowed) in the *Wiedergabe von Zeit*.

There is nothing sentimental in his work, and if anything there is perhaps more of a bias toward the dark than the light, yet his work overflows with “primary poetry.” Reitz’s *Heimat* trilogy made him world famous and rescued *Heimat* from *kitschification*. Peter Jansen summarized Reitz’s achievement best: “*Edgar Reitz hat das Wort ‘Heimat’ von jenem rückwärts gewandten Odium befreit.*”

In any given *Heimat*, there are always two types of people. There are the *Dableiber* and the *Weggeher*. Reitz himself was one of the latter. Like all *Weggeher*, as a young man Reitz had felt only the negative side of stability and tradition and community. He had given in to the fundamental impulse of all *Weggeher*, the desire for freedom and self-definition and *Wahlverwandschaften*.

Returning after so many years to immerse himself in his project, he experienced somewhat of an emotional reversal, now sensing the negative, destructive side of freedom, and the positive aspects of tradition and community and the beauty of the inescapable givenness of the *Verwandtenkreis* into which one was born.

Heimat, the first installment in his trilogy, premiered in 1984 and focused on *Dableiber* like his parents, spanning the years from 1919 to 1982. The 2nd installment, appropriately enough titled *Die Zweite Heimat* (subtitled *Chronik einer Jugend*) premiered in 1992 and delved into the lives and careers of *Weggeher* like himself in the turbulent decade of the nineteen sixties. *Heimat 3* (subtitled *Chronik einer Zeitenwende*) premiered in 2004 and traversed the years from 1989 to 2000, with the central characters a couple who began as *Weggeher* but in the end returned to their roots to become born again *Dableiber*. Reitz called his approach “epic storytelling” and that is no overstatement, since his grand trilogy clocked in at 53 hours. But Reitz was not finished. This is because, as the critic Carole Angier aptly put it “Failure didn’t stop him before *Heimat*, and success hasn’t stopped him after.”

Hence we have *Die Andere Heimat*, the prequel to the original series, which premiered in 2013. Reitz once again set his main task as the *Wiedergabe von Zeit*. The setting is again Schabbach in the Hunsrück area of the Rhineland, but the story takes place in the 1840s. In retrieving that time, Reitz revives the pace, tenor and texture of the world in which the little people dwelt: the relentless rhythms of work, the economic insecurity and the indifferent presence of death. He captures their dreams, silly and serious, and their habits and speech and the assorted artifacts and implements of their daily lives. Each villager in this story disposes of a melancholic dignity. Each one is “a poor passing fact” and yet Reitz takes care that each one has “a living name.”

Most of the people in Schabach are potential *Weggeher*, ground down as they are by the