

8 The Wedding, Schnusschen 1964

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

Sent: Friday, September 03, 2004 7:51 AM +0100

Well, here you are! What you have all been waiting for after our long summer break!!!

"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;" [W.B. Yeats: The Second Coming]

IVAN'S INTRODUCTION TO: -

DIE ZWEITE HEIMAT. PART 8. THE WEDDING, SCHNUSSCHEN, 1964

The first half an hour of this episode seemed very even-paced, and to be honest, less than riveting. Panic began to arise in my breast. What was I going to write about it? All the themes seemed fairly obvious. We had the contrast drawn between Schnusschen's love of family and her rootedness in it [opening scene is the New Year's Eve party attended by all her extended family; 26 adults and 17 children in all] and Hermann's loneliness and isolation. ["I must make my own way", he says. "All these things - Hunsruck, mother, home - are all chance."] Juan is also conscious of his own loneliness and difference from those around him. We are introduced to what appears to be the perfect couple, Elisabeth and Rolf, in whose flat Hermann and Schusschen create their little love nest. There is much by-play with a black condom and a black negligee. Hermann feels he is in love. He shrugs at his memory of his vow never to fall in love again, and the two young lovers snuggle down to sleep after their love-making like two infants in a nursery. They are secure and warm and happy. Like Eduard in "Heimat" Schnusschen wishes time would stand still and Hermann echoes her thoughts.

Then there come some moments of brilliant cinema which shatter this illusion. It is a betrayal by Hermann of his inner self and of Clarissa. It is done through cinematic image, not words, and it gave me the clue to what this episode is about and how to approach it. The trouble is that it cannot be explained simply. It is about betrayal. It is about the human impulse to create harmony, and about the destruction of this harmony through selfishness, lust, feelings of alienation and loneliness, quarrelsomeness, and many other human weaknesses. The breaking of harmony and the arrival of discord are central to this episode. For instance, and obviously, Hermann's wedding day ends in the tragedy of Juan's attempted suicide and the ejection of all the students from Frau Cerphal's villa for all time. [Compare the ejection of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden]. Paradise has vanished. In the rest of this piece I will attempt to illustrate how Edgar Reitz handles this theme.

We see a train in the darkness. It is the Orient Express. The camera dwells on the signboard: Bucuresti Nord to Paris Est. Alone in a compartment is

sleeping with her cello in her arms. We return to the young lovers, and the sleeping Schnusschen fades into/becomes Clarissa. She rises, and wearing the black negligee which reveals her naked form, she approaches the mirror. Hermann wakes and calls her name, but she silences him by holding her finger to her lips, and then fades or perhaps erotically enters another world through the mirror. Now, as Hermann lies back and takes Schnusschen in his arms [the two women's hair styles make them look almost indistinguishable for a moment] he is thinking of Clarissa. The next scene shows him writing a letter to Clarissa and, as he mouths the words "I was just dreaming of you", there she is behind him uttering the words, "I dreamed that I visited you". The meaning is clear. Clarissa is his true love; they are part of and in each other's dreams, and he is in the process of betraying her and himself. Hermann then envisions her by the balustrade at the foot of the steps in the Conservatoire with snow falling all around. She is soundlessly calling his name. She is summoning him and there he is behind her: "I was just dreaming of you. Now I'm happy to hear your voice." We did not hear it. Is she calling him not to marry? Is she calling for help before the cold snow of death and betrayal overcomes her?

This dream sequence is followed by another; in a way, even more brilliant than the first. This is a nightmare of Clarissa's. She jumbles Hermann's concert with the details of her visit to the abortionist. She reveals to the doctor that her back has turned into a cello, and we see him, complete with harrowing coughing, sewing up the sound apertures as if in flesh, and powdering over the result. The flesh is wrenched and pulled. Reitz is suggesting Clarissa's feelings of guilt at not playing in Hermann's concert mixed with the guilty horrors of her abortion; the pregnancy being the result of the attention of men she does not love. How many betrayals do we have here? In its grotesque horror this sequence reminded me of scenes from a surrealist film I saw long ago; "Le Chien Andalou" directed by Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali[?] Very, very striking!!

Hermann's proposal of marriage to Schnusschen comes after a scene which illustrates well the complexities of human emotion and has tragic implications. Schnusschen is not without intelligence and she knows that the seeds of incompatibility are there. She is worried: "There's something I don't understand. You're different with me." She knows that he is hiding something from her; that really he considers her stupid. "I'm too stupid for you". She is certainly not intellectual, but her feelings are hurt. She wishes, with tears in her eyes, that he would play something just for her. "I've always wished you would." Yet she is desperately in love! Hermann does not answer but we know she has hit upon the truth. Another betrayal!

I will now jump to the reception, banquet, and party after the Registry Office wedding. Reitz handles large groups of actors masterfully, especially around tables eating and drinking as we have observed before. There are so many details, many of which I missed on first viewing. We notice Stefan change his place at table so he does not have to sit next to Helga. Has he seen the light about her true nature? Later she changes places with Annikki, the Finnish girl who has come with Juan. Presumably she wishes to torment Stefan some more!! This exchange puts Annikki next to Rob, who immediately decides she will be his next conquest. Juan, in fact, later witnesses him

ushering her into another room/cellar in order to fulfil his lusts. Both Rob and Annikki have betrayed Juan. I do not think Reitz is saying that this betrayal is the direct and sole cause of Juan's suicide attempt, but it certainly contributes. Juan is left alone to muse over the mechanical birds in their cage. Jean-Marie spends the evening trying to nibble one of the waitresses and not the nut cutlets! Helga is drawn by her sexuality to one of the bandsmen, a trumpeter named Wladimir from the Rhineland. We do not hear what she says to him, the camera looks back at them from a distance. However, Wladimir grabs her by the arm, marches her back to the house, slams her up against the wall, and then virtually rapes her in a kind of store-room. It is violent sex. All this is happening on Hermann's happiest day and we haven't finished.

Stefan witnesses or hears Helga's sexual encounter. He drunkenly provokes Wladimir who reacts and shoves him into Reinhardt. The two old friends fight. There is discord everywhere. Elisabeth and Rolf, the couple we had thought so perfect, exchange bitter words before departing in anger. Alex feels betrayed by Juan's suicide attempt and screams at him. Rob betrays the Finnish girl by saying to Juan, "It wasn't serious any of it." She is mortally offended and stalks off alone. Stefan and Reinhardt have a furious quarrel about the rifle and fight again. Frau Cerphal feels betrayed by them all before throwing them all out. She tells Juan, "I thought you had self-control." Poor Volker has his love for Clarissa thrown back in his teeth. Clarissa has arrived late after her return from Paris and seeing all the empty glasses and plates remarks, "So that was Hermann's wedding". There is a sense of desolation. She almost sobs that something ends every day, "It's like a merry-go-round." I remembered the fun fair at the end of "Heimat" with the ghostly riders and the death of Glasisch.

Betrayal and discord are everywhere. Back in their flat Schnusschen tries to initiate sex but it seems forced. There had been several shots of Hermann in the later stages of the evening with stern face and a twitch in a facial muscle watching proceedings. He has to be called at one point, "This is your wedding." At the very end the camera focuses on the empty table with its left-overs, half-drunk bottles and glasses of wine, wine-stained tablecloth and the awful gleaming rifle. There is a strong sense of finality, of ending, of melancholy. There is a final tableauesque shot of those left at the end with Alex all alone on the verandah steps, signifying perhaps the death of rationality. There are, of course, moments of delight and happiness e.g. the fitting of the rings that Pauline has brought on the fingers of the bride and groom, the success of Volker's present, the mock oompah band but discord, betrayal, and acrimony reign supreme. Such is the nature of human affairs, says Reitz.

I am aware that there is much I have not dealt with. I have a few questions of my own.

1. Why did Reitz not give Evelyne any dialogue at all?
2. Was her African boy-friend in traditional dress the man in the church?
3. What was the significance of the scene where Clarissa plays the cello in a kind of audition? The professor seemed to damn her with faint praise: "Fine. It was O.K." He offers her a ticket for "The Golden Gate". What is that? At first I thought they were in San Francisco and this was a reference

to its bridge. Later Jean-Marie or Volker asks her whether California was O.K. The Eifel Tower gives us Paris as the location but they were speaking in English. Why? The professor was definitely not English. Was her playing too heavy? He reminds her that Cesar Frank was a French composer.

4. I had not realised Helga was Jewish, had you? There was no evidence she was when Hermann visited her parents' home in Dulmen, or did I miss something? She wears a necklace with a Star of David medallion for the wedding party. There is some talk of going to a kibbutz. At one point Wladimir is playing with the medallion. Or is it an affectation on her part?

5. Last but not least! What does Rob have in the small box he carries? It appears to be some kind of disgusting joke. Annikki, the Finnish girl screams when shown the contents, and the waitress at the door nearly vomits. I must have missed something!

Ivan Mansley.

From: "Susan Biedron" <susan jsbiedron.com>
Sent: Wednesday, September 08, 2004 3:45 PM -0500

Ivan and all,

>2. Was her African boy-friend in traditional dress the man in the church?

I believe so.

>4. I had not realized Helga was Jewish, had you? There was no evidence she
>was when Hermann visited her parents' home in Dulmen, or did I miss
>something? She wears a necklace with a Star of David medallion for the
>wedding party. There is some talk of going to a kibbutz. At one point
>Wladimir is playing with the medallion. Or is it an affectation on her
>part?

I don't think Helga is Jewish. I had the impression her necklace was some kind of affectation.

Regarding Juan: when he and Schusschen are talking in the park, Juan comments that he is the type of person no one misses. He is always traveling - what is he searching for?

In one of the opening scenes, Hermann and Schnusschen are talking about their family relationships and obvious differences. Schnusschen needs to see her family and share her experiences with them - Hermann does not. Yet Hermann comments that with Schnusschen, he feels like he has never left the Hunsruck. So in spite of denying any homesickness or feeling for his Heimat, he admits he knows he feels comfortable with her. One thing that struck me in this episode is that Hermann and Schnusschen have many physical similarities - they could easily be taken for brother and sister. Perhaps that is how their relationship should have stayed.

Is the betrayal and discord seen in the other characters a means to show

that Hermann and Schnusschen's seemingly happy marriage/love is really false?

After today, I will be out of the discussion until the end of September. I am making a sort of "Heimat" visit myself. We are going on a long planned trip to visit my grandfather's village in Hinterpommern (Poland near the Baltic). Quite an adventure.

Tchuss
Do widzenia :)
Susan

From: "MYaroshevsky" <ohmfilms videotron.ca>
Sent: Wednesday, September 08, 2004 11:17:30 AM -0400

Greetings to all,

Just wanted to point out a favourite moment in the Hochzeit episode.

It's a 10 second shot of Clarissa in a Paris cemetery. She stands over the grave of Joris Ivens. The tombstone reads 1898-19__ (a flower obscures the date of death which was in fact 1989). A magical timewarp of a tribute to the man Reitz called 'an angel'.

Yours in film,
Michael

From: "Raymond Scholz" <rscholz zonix.de>
Sent: Wednesday, September 08, 2004 10:36 PM +0200

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

> There is much by-play with a black condom and a black
> negligee.

Not to mention fireworks... I'd forgotten about them since I feel ashamed watching a director like Reitz making use of the allegory. Ah, and some foretaste of children dropping in at the wrong moment.

> Then there come some moments of brilliant cinema which shatter this
> illusion.

Which you made into some moments of brilliant description. Thanks for this, again.

> I will now jump to the reception, banquet, and party after the Registry
> Office wedding. Reitz handles large groups of actors masterfully, especially
> around tables eating and drinking as we have observed before. There are so

> many details, many of which I missed on first viewing.

Pauline and Marie-Goot wearing the same dress and generally being very embarrassing to all the guests. Father Schneider certainly draws a more civilized picture of a Hunsrücker.

And later, some kind of Hunsrück gathering in the Fuchsbau kitchen, chanting drinking songs in contrary to the modern music and presumably incomprehensible French song Jean-Marie performs.

> 5. Last but not least! What does Rob have in the small box he carries? It
> appears to be some kind of disgusting joke. Annikki, the Finnish girl
> screams when shown the contents, and the waitress at the door nearly vomits.
> I must have missed something!

I cannot find this on heimat123.net anymore... But Google reveals <http://www.xs4all.nl/~rrr/heimat/books.html> - then look for "Excerpt, pp.215-219". I'm not sure whether the box qualifies as a MacGuffin too: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MacGuffin>

Cheers, Ray

From: "Susan Biedron" <susan jsbiedron.com>
Sent: Thursday, September 09, 2004 2:38 PM -0500

Darn, I wanted to know what was in that box! :)

I will add that I have learned much about film in general from this group. Thank you again, Ivan for a wonderful analysis.

Susan

From: "Ivan Mansley" <ivanman dsl.pipex.com>
Sent: Thursday, September 09, 2004 10:08 PM +0100

Brilliant Ray! Thank you very much for the references. I had never heard of a MacGuffin before nor had I heard of Wikipedia. So Rob's box is a reference to Bunuel's "Belle du Jour"; a Reitzian reference for film "buffs". I loved this, "No sexual perversion staged before the camera can be as exciting as that which remains hidden beneath the lid of the casket. I cited this scene in 'Die 'Zweite Heimat.' Let your imaginations run riot! It says something about the character of Rob, doesn't it? I remember that I likened the scene in which Clarissa rolls up her jumper to reveal her back has turned into the wooden front of a cello, to something from another Bunuel film. That looks even more likely now!

In your reference to excerpts from "Drehort Heimat" pp. 215-219 there is a section entitled "A Rose for Joris Ivens". I do not know his films but Reitz

obviously admired him greatly. He tells us, "Two months later [death of Ivens in June 1989] the team was in Paris, and we visited him in the cemetery. Spontaneously, I suggested that my lead actress should lay a rose on his grave. We filmed it, and as the camera swung up from the hand with the rose to Clarissa's face, a gust of wind came and moved her hair. That moved us so much that we took up the scene in the film." Michael has drawn our attention to this scene which he calls "a favourite moment." I think I shall have to differ slightly. This is a graceful and courteous act of homage to an admired fellow film-maker on Reitz's part, but it does detract somewhat from the story, and Reitz prides himself on being a storyteller. It is supposed to be 1964; awkward questions start to arise. Is Clarissa really a film "buff"? Have one of the film-makers [Rob, Reinhardt, Stefan] suggested this course of action? It doesn't work in terms of the film-story, does it? One wonders how original cinema audiences reacted to this little scene, if they noticed it?

Susan wondered about Juan, "He is always traveling - what is he searching for?" I hope it doesn't sound too pompous but presumably this chameleon-like character is searching for himself! Susan also asked, "Is the betrayal and discord seen in the other characters a means to show that Hermann and Schnusschen's seemingly happy marriage/love is really false?" That is what I meant to suggest. Certainly Hermann is betraying himself. Schnusschen, I think, is swept up by ideas of romantic love and admiration for a fellow Hunsruckian.

Susan, I hope your trip back to your grandfather's village in Poland is everything you want it to be. I take it that it will be your first visit. It will be an exciting voyage to an ancestral "Heimat".

Thank you both Susan and Ray for your kind words about my introduction[s]. It is what makes it all worthwhile!

Ivan.

**From: "Maarten Landzaat" <gijs_xs4all.nl>
Sent: Sunday, September 12, 2004 9:27 AM +0200**

Thanks all for your insights on the falseness of the marriage, and all the beautifully filmed circumstantial evidence for this. Beautifully filmed, but painful to watch. I could feel for Hermann being seduced into something he doesn't really want.

Snusschen is sweet but also very calculating: "I have the best cards" she says.

About the fireworks: first I thought it was a dream or just a (worn-out) cinematic metaphor, but then Elisabeth and Rolf come home dressed the same as the ones in the boat in the fireworks scene. So the fireworks scene was "true" after all!

Further, I noticed a recurring east-to-west subtheme:

- Japanese influences in the Elisabeth and Rolf household
- The shadows of the Japanese boat and the Eifel tower in Elisabeth and Rolf's house
- Clarissa on the Orient Express going west to Paris
- Clarissa going further west to LA/Golden Gate
- Beatles songs (the Beatles' fascination with gurus from the east)
- Helga's Wladimir ("from Russia? No, from Rhineland")

I am all excited about going to the Heimat 3 premiere in Munchen next week with my girlfriend! I managed to book night trains from Amsterdam, and even a reasonably cheap hotel.

Who of you will be there as well? I'd be happy to meet you!

Bye,
Maarten

From: "Ivan Mansley" <ivanman dsl.pipex.com>
Sent: Thursday, September 16, 2004 9:58 PM +0100

Traffic has been very light, I'm afraid. 5 posts + 2 of mine. I suspect all eyes, ears and thoughts are on Heimat 3. Good wishes to all who are going to Munich at the weekend for the German premiere and I hope you enjoy Mr.Reitz's latest work. Please tell us all about it. I haven't seen a single word about any showing in Venice at the film festival.

I know there are people out there who have contributed to discussions on earlier episodes of DZH. Where are you now? Please return. I am sure you have valuable ideas to contribute, or maybe you would like to write an introduction for Parts 10-13? Come on, you don't have much time!!

Ivan Mansley.

From: "Ralf Eigl" <ralfeigl t-online.de>
Sent: Friday, September 17, 2004 7:38 AM +0200

A very late contribution about a tiny detail: I wonder whether the cage with the mechanical birds plays a role here - behind it we see Juan and it almost looks towards the end of the scene as if he were caught in that cage - mere accident or intention?

Or is this intended to describe Hermann's situation who - now that he is married - is caught in a cage he does not want to be in?

You may remember that the cage was used earlier on in the Ansgar episode. I had misinterpreted it back then and given it a meaning like above - but someone wrote that Reitz had then used the mechanical birds to show the artificiality of Nymphenburg castle and

its gardens, which was to be seen in the background of the scene
then...

Ralf