



by Gert Heidenreich
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The Other Home

Die andere Heimat

review

The Other Home was commissioned by Edgar Reitz as working material for the fourth film in his award-winning Heimat series, which was released in German cinemas in autumn 2013. The Heimat films have been well-received among English-speaking audiences, ensuring that this novel would find a ready readership in translation.

The Other Home is set in the fictional village of Schabbach in the Rhineland, close to the Mosel river in the year 1843. It was a time of hardship in Schabbach – with food shortages and a series of brutal winters – when many people found themselves faced with the choice of emigration or starvation, and their religious faith was sorely tested. The narrative focuses on the Simon family: the blacksmith Johann Simon, his wife and their three surviving children. Jakob Simon, the youngest of the three siblings, is the main protagonist. Jakob is a dreamer, a sensitive young man who likes to read about other worlds, and is especially interested in the indigenous cultures of Brazil. He longs to emigrate there and is mocked by his brother and father because of it. When his older, more worldly-wise brother Gustav ends up marrying Jakob's sweetheart Jette, before emigrating to Brazil himself, Jakob is left doubly bereft.

The action takes place on the day before Gustav and Jette depart from their beleaguered homeland in the hope of a brighter future on the unknown continent of South America. It is a moment of leave-taking in which many family stories start to unravel, and the day of Jakob and Jette's first and last illicit romantic tryst, outside the

cemetery walls. Jakob finally accompanies his brother and Jette to the Rhine port of Bacharach, from where they sail to Rotterdam en route to Brazil. Jakob returns to his family in Schabbach, marries a local girl and takes over his father's smithy, abandoning his bookish dreams to forge his own destiny. Jette later has a child in Brazil, which could very well be Jakob's.

The Other Home excels in its subtle portrayal of human dreams and sober realities, and of unexpected twists of fate. It is a book about departure and death, about growing up and generational conflict, as well as about the world of fantasy ('the other home') and the temptations of books and reading. Finally, it is a book about broken dreams. Its tightly-wrought, lyrical prose is full of powerful images and metaphors: a beautiful, nearly perfect work of art.

press quotes

'A compelling, believable, moving story.'

– *Deutschlandradio Kultur, Vladimir Balzer*

'You don't have to have seen the film 'The Other Home' to enjoy this story, it stands alone as a novel.'

– *Süddeutsche Zeitung, Susan Vahabzadeh*

about the author

Gert Heidenreich was born in 1944 in Eberswalde and is an author, journalist and radio presenter. Heidenreich studied German, sociology, philosophy and theatre at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. He has written for *Die Zeit* newspaper and the travel magazine *Merian*, and is also a reader for audio books. In 2013 he won the Bavarian Film Prize with Edgar Reitz for Best Screenplay for the film *Die andere Heimat – Chronik einer Sehnsucht* ('The Other Home – A Chronicle of Longing').

Previous works include:

Mein ist der Tod (2012); *Die Nacht der Händler* (2009); *Das Fest der Fliegen* (2009); *Im Dunkel der Zeit* (2007), all with LangenMüller (Herbig).

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