Heimat Goes Mobile: Hybrid Forms of Home in Literature and Film

Kristy R. Boney
University of Central Missouri, kboney@ucmo.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://newprairiepress.org/sttcl

Part of the Film and Media Studies Commons, German Literature Commons, and the Modern Literature Commons

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License.

Recommended Citation

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.
Heimat Goes Mobile: Hybrid Forms of Home in Literature and Film

Abstract

Keywords
Heimat, cross-disciplinary, film, genre studies

Cover Page Footnote
This review contains comments about a manuscript authored by a member of the STTCL editorial board. This board member was not involved in the review process.


Although many studies have been and will certainly continue to be written about the concept, application, and themes of Heimat, no one has yet to take the term and research comprehensively the topic with a cross-disciplinary approach. Heimat traditionally means habitat, locality, birthplace, homeland, and native place, but in German it is also more emotionally evocative. Here, editors Gabriele Eichmanns and Yvonne Frank compile a series of essays examining and re-imagining Heimat from its traditional perspective to one of plurality; the essays delve into the concept of Heimat in the historical and geo-political context of East and West Germany, and they suggest that the concept of Heimat be extended to transnational and gendered representations, even offering a new perspective on the idea of Heimat in the film genre. After an introduction that poses the question of whether Heimat is even a suitable idea anymore for a nation that is still heavily influenced by reunification and globalization, the first chapter recounts the discourse on Heimat and proposes the idea of Heimat as a hybrid conception, a theme that continues throughout the series. This notion of hybridity allows for new approaches for dealing with Heimat from the lens of multiple fields and methodologies in an attempt to update Heimat studies in the 21st century.

The book is separated into three parts. Part one focuses on the tradition of the Heimat novel and Heimat film in more recent examples which include the work of theorist Hugo Loetscher, filmmaker Tom Tykwer, and author Hans-Ulrich Treichel. The essays draw on established criteria of the genre, but they proceed to show how the examples from theory, film, and literature take the stereotypes and develop new versions of Heimat. Ultimately, this section shows how the Heimat genre no longer belongs to a traditional and restricted definition, but is instead part of a larger hybrid that is shaped by other cultures. In doing so, the studies in part one often debunk the mystification and romanticization of the term. Similarly, part two sets up the parameters of the Heimat debate in the context of the reunification of Germany. The essays in part two discuss key players in East German literature such as Christoph Hein and Herta Müller, as well as East German television movies. These essays take on the notion of Heimat, not only juxtaposing it with significant historical moments between East and West Germany, but also showing how the texts reimagine and struggle with traditional conceptions of Heimat amidst political and social turmoil. Finally, part three discusses Heimat exclusively in film, showing how Heimat belongs to the discourse of displacement in a globalized world.

This book performs a valuable function by examining known players in German studies, but it also introduces the reader to writers and topics not yet fully
developed. Specifically, in the well-developed essay, “Domestic Disputes: Envisioning the Gender of Home in the Era of Re-Privatization in East Germany,” Necia Chronister discusses how the television station ZDF aired a film that didn’t celebrate re-unification, but instead broached the problem of property disputes in the new republic. In doing so, such films show that the idea of property inheritance and its connection to the concept of Heimat is irreconcilable in a modern world of displacement, of property confiscation, and of expanding gender roles. Likewise, Yvonne Frank’s essay on Wim Wenders and Faith Akin connects the Heimatfilm to road films and demonstrates that the Heimatfilm has broken free from its limited patriarchal definition and has moved into a more global realm, with multicultural and hybrid characteristics.

The reconceptualization of Heimat works exceptionally well when viewed through a lens analyzing gender, minorities, and the sociopolitical transformations that Germany and German-speaking countries are dealing with today. Using apt cross-disciplinary approaches, the essays not only connect with each other thematically, but they also cleverly expand the Heimat studies genre, particularly in the context of analyzing the transformation of Europe over the past twenty-five years. This expansion ultimately explores the process of how one remembers and appreciates the past and present. Defining something riddled with connotations and dripping with exclusion in a postwar context is not easy. It requires arresting erudition and extensive definitions of memory and of history. Casual readers will shy away from the complexities of this study, but it is an admirable and authoritative collection on a topic of increasing interest in German studies.

Kristy R. Boney

*University of Central Missouri*