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

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

## **Abstract**

Review of Gabriele Eichmanns and Yvonne Franke, Eds. *Heimat Goes Mobile: Hybrid Forms of Home in Literature and Film*. Rochester, NY: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013. 224 pp.

## **Keywords**

Heimat, cross-disciplinary, film, genre studies

## **Cover Page Footnote**

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

Gabriele Eichmanns and Yvonne Franke, Eds. *Heimat Goes Mobile: Hybrid Forms of Home in Literature and Film*. Rochester, NY: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013. 224 pp.

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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

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