

## 6 Kennedy's Children, Alex 1963

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

**Sent: Friday, June 25, 2004 11:51 AM +0100**

DIE ZWEITE HEIMAT. PART 6: KENNEDY'S CHILDREN, Alex 1963.

I was very struck by the haunting images of the lowering winter skies, the dark clouds fringed with dying sunlight, the flocks of crows roosting in the bare branches of the trees, and the plaintive and melodic voice singing and articulating the Nietzsche text with which the episode opens. The words resonate with meaning for our human protagonists as well as being descriptive. My mind keeps returning to these opening images again and again.

All viewers are quickly made aware that all the events are supposed to take place on the day of President John F. Kennedy's assassination, November 22nd 1963. Everyone alive at the time is supposed to remember where they were when the news was announced. I do, vividly. I was playing bar billiards in a N.London pub when a seated drinker with a radio ordered quiet and we all listened with a great sense of foreboding and anxiety. Juan, Hermann and Schnusschen were watching Elizabeth Taylor in Joseph Mankiewicz' "Cleopatra". Once again we have a scene set inside a cinema where we watch the reactions of the audience to what they are seeing. I wonder how many there are in all in the two Heimats!! As a comparison I might cite James Joyce's "Ulysses" where the events all take place in Dublin on one day in June 1904, now known after the main protagonist as "Bloomsday".

The crows are associated with Alex, the perpetual student. One bedraggled bird is seen shaking itself outside his window as he sleeps until noon. An idea quickly established itself in my mind. The town crow is a scavenger and so is Alex. He is completely shameless and spends the whole day approaching his student friends trying to borrow money. Ironically, one of the people he approaches is Clarissa, who is also trying to borrow money for an abortion, having become pregnant by either Volker or Jean-Marie. A later scene shows Alex rummaging through dustbins to find bottles to redeem to get a little money to continue to pester others. The previous image has been of rats around the same dustbins scavenging for food. The link is unmistakable.

It seems to me that the link which unites all the disparate elements of this evenly paced episode is the theme of friendship and the examination of this concept. Alex's father's portrait speaks to him and tells him that a friend is someone who lends you money. Alex pursues this mercenary concept begging in turn from Hermann, Clarissa, Jean-Marie, Stefan, Reinhard, Rob, and finally Olga, who guesses what he has come for, and rejects with great vehemence his ideas and his group of friends, after his remark that "You are not wrong, comrade." She hates the use of such, to her, phony left-wing language. All these efforts of Alex's are totally unsuccessful. His luck turns when he decides he has enough money, after redeeming more bottles, to

call 6 "friends" to invest in his future. He finds a wallet with 150 DM in it inside the telephone booth. Alex is an exasperating figure. We know his definition of friendship is wrong and his continual scrounging is morally indefensible. But there is more to him than just this. He is extremely intelligent and well-read; better read, says Hermann, than his professors. He is also self-aware. He understands himself. When Olga rounds on him and the whole group of "arrogant geniuses" as she calls Jean-Marie, Volker and Hermann, he retorts, "Nice that you acknowledge his genius, I'd even call that friendship." Note the last word.

After finding the wallet Alex does try to call the old man who might have left it and return the money. However, he then goes down in my estimation as a moral character when he spins a lying tale to Stefan of how a complete stranger gave him the money for a piece of translation from the Russian. He shows his quick wits, quoting his father's words as if they were Pushkin's and making up an almost plausible story. Alex is given the last words, as all the students and their associates are gathered together in the warmth of the Cerphal villa sharing food, "And all us friends were together after one year." As Wittgenstein puts it "the totality of facts" makes him understand that his definition was limited and wrong.

What of other friendships? Clarissa and Hermann continue their tortured way. Someone with more sensitivity than Hermann perhaps would have realised what she wanted the 800DM for and put out the hand of friendship and understanding. Instead, his anger and frustration get the better of him, and this is mirrored in the images of empty cold stone in the Conservatoire with its deserted corridors and hard marble balustrades. They fence with each other. They are both desperate. Hermann: "I wrote the piece for you, only for you." Clarissa: "You're my only friend." After Clarissa's abortion recriminations start to break out between Volker and Jean-Marie but Jean-Marie is decisive. He will not go into details about his sexual relations with Clarissa and states "I want us to stay friends. Stop brooding." Schnusschen, now Waltraud, finds an old friend. Renate finds her Bernd, and last, but not least, our 3 film directors are reunited over a pot of goulash. Reinhard and Stefan had quarrelled bitterly but a spoon of peace is offered and accepted.

The character who refuses friendship and feels so bitter and anguished about her rejection by Hermann and her lack of recognition as a poet is Helga. She stage manages her suicide in a very calculated way. Alex finds her lying on the bed in her apartment where he has gone to break the news of Kennedy's death to her. She has marked her face with black lines [signifying?] and is wearing what looks like the same black underwear in which she tried to seduce Hermann. One nipple is discreetly showing. Candles flicker and gutter. The scene is like some weird shrine. Stefan, who has followed on after Alex, saves her life by forcing her to vomit. Alex does his ineffectual bit. Later she rejects the man who has saved her life, talking about her suicide attempt in flippant and mocking tones and accusing Stefan of only helping her, "So you can say you've done your duty. You can't claim you love me." She has no words of gratitude at all.

I would just like to say a little about the scenes connected with Clarissa's

abortion. She sends for Volker and Jean-Marie to announce that she is pregnant and either could be the father, but that she does not want to have the child, and, most shatteringly, that she does not love either of them. There is considerable comedy in the scene which surprised me. Jean-Marie and Volker are shown arriving together. Both are carrying flowers; roses, to be precise. Both are carrying black umbrellas and are wearing dark overcoats and black shoes. Edgar Reitz has fun making them like Tweedledum and Tweedledee in this scene. Both raise their flowers in unison, place their umbrellas side by side, crumple the wrapping paper of the flowers together and place on the floor by the umbrellas to catch raindrops perhaps. At one point both are on their hands and knees together! It is all very carefully choreographed. Volker, in particular, is hurt by her announcement and asks, "Aren't you afraid of losing us as friends?" This has special resonance with the overall theme.

As Clarissa departs for Rosenheim for her abortion she just misses meeting Hermann at the station. Fate intervenes and her train pulls out! The scene where she walks through the foggy streets to the doctor's basement surgery is powerfully done. She is alone and without friends. The details are awful; the stirrup chair stands menacingly. The coughing doctor holds up two dreadful metallic instruments and tells her to relax. We are not spared many details and her pain and terror and isolation are wonderfully acted. It is noticeable that at the end, around the happy table of friends in the Cerphal villa, Clarissa is absent. She has had the fortitude to do what she feels she has to. Later, after her return, we see how Volker is hurt and how he sees the truth about Clarissa and Hermann. "She was playing with us." In their desire to remain friends we can think back to Hermann and Juan.

What else should be mentioned? We have the incessant rain. Edgar Reitz favourite weather!! I noticed colour being used on occasions that do not correspond with the convenient fiction of b/w [day] and colour [night]. For instance, when Alex has failed to borrow from Jean-Marie who is withdrawing money from the bank for Clarissa, he stands in the rain-swept street and sees arrays of food in a delicatessen in colour. It emphasises the attractiveness of the food to our hungry philosopher. Have you noticed how often Reitz's camera focuses on the preparation and cooking of food. Here we have Olga's fried eggs and the ingredients for Reinhard's goulash laid out on a board. I noticed Clemans on drums in the film making scene. Finally, I must mention that the felling of the cherry tree, which crashes through the window of the practice room in Fraulein Cerphal's villa, must surely be symbolic that the old order is changing. Elisabeth Cerphal is thinking of selling up. This is how Chekhov uses the felling of such trees in "The Cherry Orchard", a play which I am sure Edgar Reitz knows. Thus, the new-found amity at the end of the episode, their new and self-chosen "Heimat", rests on fragile foundations, as does all human life perhaps.

Please watch this tightly structured episode and comment if you have the time and inclination.

Ivan Mansley.

**From: "Susan Biedron" <susan jsbiedron.com>**  
**Sent: Friday, July 02, 2004 5:18 PM -0500**

Comments on Part 6:

Ivan wrote:

>I was very struck by the haunting images of the lowering winter skies, the  
>dark clouds fringed with dying sunlight, the flocks of crows roosting in the  
>bare branches of the trees, and the plaintive and melodic voice singing and  
>articulating the Nietzsche text with which the episode opens.

Is the singing the voice of Clarissa?

Regarding Alex: he keeps stating he is a victim of individualism. Yet he himself is guilty of thinking only of himself. Of course, he cannot know that Clarissa is faced with a much worse problem when he asks her for money. But he continues to interrupt people who are obviously very busy working or arguing, to ask them for money. I felt sorry for him a first, but he quickly becomes very irritating with his begging.

>All viewers are quickly made aware that all the events are supposed to take  
>place on the day of President John F. Kennedy's assassination, November 22nd  
>1963. Everyone alive at the time is supposed to remember where they were  
>when the news was announced.

Here is my memory - I was in school, in gym class. The principle of the school made an announcement on the loud speaker that the president had been shot. At that time we did not know he was dead. I do not remember when we learned that. I do know that the day of the funeral, everything was closed, my parents were home from work. We watched the funeral on television, even though my parents did not like and did not vote for Kennedy. It was not until many years later, when I visited my ancestor's village in Germany, that one of the residents told me how much the Berlin speech had meant to Germans. Even though the joke was often made here that Kennedy actually said "I am a donut."

>I would just like to say a little about the scenes connected with  
>Clarissa's abortion. She sends for Volker and Jean-Marie to announce that she is  
>pregnant and either could be the father, but that she does not want to have  
>the child, and, most shatteringly, that she does not love either of them.

But is also clear at this point that Viler really cares for Clarissa. He is concerned about her, worries about doing something illegal, and at first assumes she will have the baby. Jean-Marie, on the other hand is very practical - he asks if she has found a reliable doctor, asks what it will cost.

>As Clarissa departs for Rosenheim for her abortion she just misses meeting  
>Hermann at the station. . . . We are not spared many  
>details and her pain and terror and isolation are wonderfully acted.

This scene is very scary. It is also extremely sad that she is so alone - even Hermann is now angry with her. But even if she had told him the truth about why she needed the money, I would guess he would have been angry.

>What else should be mentioned? We have the incessant rain. Edgar Reitz  
>favourite weather!!

The weather fits all the problems of the characters. People are bundled against the cold, they are wet, they have colds.

Susan

**From: "Raymond Scholz" <rscholz zonix.de>**  
**Sent: Monday, July 05, 2004 10:11 PM +0200**

"Susan Biedron" <susan jsbiedron.com> wrote:

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> Is the singing the voice of Clarissa?

The booklet of the O.S.T. says "Savina Giannatoy" and Google suggests "Savina Giannatou".

Cheers, Ray

**From: "Raymond Scholz" <rscholz zonix.de>**  
**Sent: Tuesday, July 06, 2004 11:06 PM +0200**

On Jun 25 2004, "Ivan Mansley" <ivanman dsl.pipex.com> wrote:

> It seems to me that the link which unites all the disparate elements of this  
> evenly paced episode is the theme of friendship and the examination of this  
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> is someone who lends you money. Alex pursues this mercenary concept begging  
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> finally Olga, who guesses what he has come for, and rejects with great  
> vehemence his ideas and his group of friends, after his remark that "You are  
> not wrong, comrade." She hates the use of such, to her, phony left-wing  
> language.

In this scene - probably for the first time - I liked Olga . She is the one who does the plain-talking without the self-pity (Alex) and the lethargy (Helga) our friends seem to have been infested with.

> What of other friendships? Clarissa and Hermann continue their tortured way.  
> Someone with more sensitivity than Hermann perhaps would have realised what  
> she wanted the 800DM for and put out the hand of friendship and  
> understanding. Instead, his anger and frustration get the better of him, and  
> this is mirrored in the images of empty cold stone in the Conservatoire with  
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> relations with Clarissa and states "I want us to stay friends. Stop  
> brooding." Schnusschen, now Waltraud, finds an old friend. Renate finds her  
> Bernd, and last, but not least, our 3 film directors are reunited over a pot  
> of goulash. Reinhard and Stefan had quarrelled bitterly but a spoon of peace  
> is offered and accepted.

To quote Rob: "Wenn zwei Regie führen - das ist die Hölle!". I wonder whether Reitz intersperses autobiographical material here. Reitz and Alexander Kluge co-directed "In Gefahr und größter Not bringt der Mittelweg den Tod" in 1974. Then later in 1976 Kluge took over direction of "Der Starke Ferdinand" while Reitz was left with co-production of this movie. Reinhold Rauh talks about an open conflict between them in his biography of Reitz. Kluge was interested in a cinema and TV program far beyond usual conventions while Reitz attached importance to the aesthetical preparation of the story line.

We see some more of that "film in a film in a film...". The recording of the "Raumatmo" for example. I don't know much about film-making but I assume that recording "relative silence" must have a certain significance. But most probably there a ways more comfortable for the actors to accomplish this. So this must be some statement by Reitz. Time stands still? Hmm. Perhaps a forerunner of bullet-time "invented" for the Matrix series :-)

When Renate arrives at the film location I thought that Reitz tried to make her look prettier than usual (or than she is). Given a colourful umbrella as an accessory, accompanied by coaxing piano play and shyly hiding behind the coloured window panes. Well, Bernd must have been impressed by her appearance.

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> abortion. She sends for Volker and Jean-Marie to announce that she is  
> pregnant and either could be the father, but that she does not want to have  
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> and place on the floor by the umbrellas to catch raindrops perhaps. At one  
> point both are on their hands and knees together! It is all very carefully  
> choreographed. Volker, in particular, is hurt by her announcement and asks,  
> "Aren't you afraid of losing us as friends?" This has special resonance with  
> the overall theme.

We can see a poster of "Jules et Jim" in Hermann's room at the Fuchsbau twice. Yet another complicated story of love and friendship but not comparable.

> As Clarissa departs for Rosenheim for her abortion she just misses meeting  
> Hermann at the station.

Clarissa is leaving (again) while Schnüßchen arrives. Again, Herrmann immediately drops back into the Hunsrück dialect when he is getting into touch with his Heimat. Schnüßchen incorporates the cordiality and straightforwardness Clarissa is missing. Juan states that she isn't an artist with a certain kind of aversion. Schnüßchen is the promise of a middle-class life - remember the well-equipped kitchen at the flat of her colleague?

> Fate intervenes and her train pulls out! The scene  
> where she walks through the foggy streets to the doctor's basement surgery  
> is powerfully done. She is alone and without friends. The details are awful;  
> the stirrup chair stands menacingly. The coughing doctor holds up two  
> dreadful metallic instruments and tells her to relax. We are not spared many  
> details and her pain and terror and isolation are wonderfully acted.

Probably without any significance: the camera glances at Albrecht Dürer's famous Rabbit drawing at the wall. Forgive me, I'm showing off that I recognised at least one piece of art...

> What else should be mentioned? We have the incessant rain. Edgar Reitz  
> favourite weather!!

Reitz must have been inspired by a "summer" we're experiencing in Northern Germany this year...

> I noticed colour being used on occasions that do not  
> correspond with the convenient fiction of b/w [day] and colour [night].

Interestingly, this is the first episode with Gerard Vandenberg behind the camera after Gernot Roll left the project.

Cheers, Ray

**From: "Maarten Landzaat" <gijs xs4all.nl>**  
**Sent: Wednesday, July 14, 2004 10:49 PM +0200**

Hi everyone,

I just finished watching part 6 (Kennedys Kinder, Alex). Sorry to be late again, I'm slowly catching up after my holiday. Here's my unstructured list of observations:

What a depressing episode! Crows, rain, colds, rows, abortion, hunger, suicide, broken friendships.

The only warm parts were the Hermann/Waltraud/Juan (eating) scene, the final scene of everybody together (eating), Renate and Bernd (eating), Olga and Alex (about to eat eggs).

Although I find it difficult to make out what this episode is about, friendship seems to be a central theme.

Eating seems to symbolise friendship. Alex is continuously looking for money for food (=friendship?).

I noticed the Suesse Paprika is mentioned a little too often to be coincidental, but I have no clue as to its meaning. Anybody???

Money seems to symbolise lack of friendship. The rich Jean-Marie is the coldest. Money is associated with abortion. The money argument doesn't bring the 3 quarreling filmmakers together (food does in the end).

Fate seems to be a driving force for friendship: Snusschen's arrival, Bernd and Renate, Alex and Olga: all coincidences. But fate also almost blows up the entire Fuchsbau clan: through the falling tree and through frau Cerphal's plans to sell the house. The money left for Alex is a coincidence.

Did anybody notice the numerous references to Italy/Rome/Romans? I counted:

- the Chianti
- picture of the Colosseum where Juan/Snusschen/Hermann eat
- Cleopatra movie
- The roman outside the movie theater
- Olga wanting to go to Rome

Maybe a reference to the "demise" of the Fuchsbau friendships?

Did anybody recognize the melody Juan plays in the last scene? We (my girlfriend Roel and I) recognize it musically, but we don't know what it is.

Hermann's very much absent and passive in this episode, but he does play a central role in many stories.

What about Clarissa's numerous and intense olfactory perceptions at the doctor's house? Is there any significance, or does she just have a better sense of smell since she's pregnant?

Rosenheim: an ironic name for the village where the abortion takes place.

Capabilities: Ivan already commented on Alex equating genius with friendship. I thought Juan was surprised that Hermann likes Snusschen, who is not an artist nor an intellectual. Olga talks about fading capabilities



of herself, Alex and Helga.

The Jules et Jim poster looked very much like the Clarissa/Volker/Jean-Marie scene.

I wasn't yet born in 1963, so unfortunately I cannot tell you where I was. The closest thing is that I remember exactly where I was when my mother called me on my holiday about the 9/11 tragedies.

The humor in the Clarissa/Volker/Jean-Marie scene was somehow "very 60's". It reminded me of the Avengers (John Steed & Emma Peel) TV series from the 60's.

Bye!  
Maarten