



# Fear Eats the Soul

## (Angst essen Seele auf)

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

Like Rainer Werner Fassbinder's other recent imitations of life, *Fear Eats the Soul* achieves a remarkable balance between stylisation and realism.

The movie is an expansion/revision of a story told by a minor character in Fassbinder's own *Der amerikanische Soldat* (1970) and also a revision/remake of Douglas Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* (1955). Its plot is an extraordinary mesh of low-key melodrama and social criticism. Emmi meets Ali when she takes shelter in a bar frequented by Moroccans, Germany's most despised immigrants. To her surprise, her friendly overtures lead to a seduction and, soon after, to marriage; to her dismay, she is immediately ostracised by her neighbours, her three grown-up children, local tradesmen and her fellow-charwomen at work.

Sirk's movies proposed aesthetically viable solutions to the problem of commenting radically on society without alienating audiences; the use of melodrama as a device for preserving a distance from the action – a distance conducive to analysis; the stylistic use of bold artifice (colour expressionism and other formal contrivances) as a means of reducing possible areas of ambiguity. In other words, Sirk offered a variety of subversion that proceeded through a measured, clear-cut seduction of the audience's susceptibilities. *Fear Eats the Soul* begins like a fairy-tale: as in a dream, Emmi is lured into the Moroccan bar by the Arab music on its juke-box, and invited to dance for what is evidently the first time in many years. Stage by stage, everything that follows is hilariously – and agonisingly – predictable; Fassbinder plays on audience expectations so thoroughly that his exposition astonishes by its very exhaustiveness. The types of racial fear and prejudice are catalogued succinctly: the woman neighbour's jealousy, the shopkeeper's self-deluding one-upmanship, the children's resentment, white workers' contempt (Fassbinder himself contributes a sharp sketch of Emmi's layabout son-in-law). The ambience is such that even the one sane response to Emmi's marriage, from the landlord's son, is faintly sinister in its inscrutable courtesy.

The second half of the movie reverses the coin, and explores the equally rigid patterns of social exploitation that reassert themselves once everyone involved has adjusted to the broken taboo. Family and friends renew their old demands on Emmi's kindness and tolerance; Emmi joins her fellow chars in turning a blind eye to wage discrimination against a Yugoslav colleague, and begins treating Ali like a pet. Much, of course, hinges on sex. Ali is a terrific stud (Fassbinder twice shows him 'magnificently' naked) who provokes male envy and female lust, responses that the movie discovers behind nearly all the social façades. Throughout, the themes covert in the Jane Wyman-Rock Hudson relationship in *All That Heaven Allows* are made explicit, and ferociously convincing.

Fassbinder circumscribes the movie's area of interest by fading out on anything irrelevant to his direct concerns (the first night that the couple share;

their turning-point holiday). He films his active characters in neutral mid-shots, never lending disproportionate weight to one or another in the compositions, and the legions of anonymous onlookers who provide the movie's moral 'context' in static, posed tableaux. The acting style he demands is just as artificial, using the hyper-realist, slow-paced diction familiar from his earlier work; Brigitte Mira and El Hedi ben Salem draw from it performances of unerring psychological acuity. The overall approach invites comparison with other European critiques of American genres (Melville's gangster movies, Leone's Westerns); but Fassbinder is clearly as interested in vindicating Sirk as he is in using a rhetorical style to make his unequivocal statements on film. This 'politicised weepie' realises both aims with an assurance of a kind almost vanished from narrative cinema.

**Tony Rayns, *Sight and Sound*, September 1974**

Fassbinder in general uses décor (like the plushness of the Douglas Sirk movies he admires) as so much rich, encrusted detail to both characterise and satirise the stereotypes of the social milieux. Dark, exotic paintings of the Eastern-harem variety adorn the wall of the bar; Emmi's kitchen features a childish farmyard view; and a huge classical landscape mural backs Emmi and Ali in the restaurant where they suffer a mutual social embarrassment. One prop, a television set, is lifted from Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* so that one of Emmi's sons can climax the shocked silence that follows her introduction of Ali to her children by putting his foot through the screen (Jane Wyman's offspring present her with the set as a suggested replacement for Rock Hudson, and for Emmi's son the action seems to be as close as he can get to offering physical violence to Ali). Mirroring the Sirk film in other ways, Fassbinder shows the patterns of prejudice to be peculiarly resilient and self-perpetuating by allowing the actual figures of authority – Gruber, the landlord's son; the police who are called out by the neighbours to protest the loud music from Emmi's flat – to appear quite sympathetic. Likewise, the doctor who tells Jane Wyman that there is no pill that can be prescribed for her complaint has his counterpart here in the final scene (Fassbinder changed his original draft ending to include a bedside scene similar to *All That Heaven Allows*). Making quite explicit the social illness that has laid the hero low, the doctor tells Emmi: 'Foreign workers suffer from a specific stress. It's pretty hopeless.'

**Richard Combs, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, November 1974**

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**FEAR EATS THE SOUL (ANGST ESSEN SEELE AUF)**

*A film by:* Rainer Werner Fassbinder

*Production Company:* Tango-Film (Munich)

*Producers:* Michael Fengler, Rainer Werner Fassbinder \*

*Unit Manager:* Christian Hohoff

*Assistant Director:* Rainer Langhans

*Screenplay:* Rainer Werner Fassbinder \*

*Director of Photography:* Jürgen Jürges

*Lighting:* Ekkehard Heinrich

*Camera Assistant:* Thomas Schwan

*Stills Photography:* Peter Gauhe

*Editor:* Thea Eymész \*

*Art Director:* Rainer Werner Fassbinder \*

*Make-up:* Helga Kempke

*Sound:* Fritz-Müller Scherz

**Cast**

Brigitte Mira (*Emmi Kurowski*)

El Hedi ben Salem (*Ali*)

Irm Hermann (*Krista*)

Elma Karlowa (*Mrs Kargus*)

Anita Bucher (*Mrs Ellis*)

Gusti Kreissl (*Paula*)

Doris Mathes (*grocer's wife*)

Margit Symo (*Hedwig*)

Katharina Herberg (*girl in the bar*)

Peter Gauhe (*Bruno*)

Marquard Böhm (*Gruber, landlord's son*)

Walter Sedlmayr (*Angermayer, grocer*)

Hannes Gromball (*Osteria head waiter*)

Hark Bohm (*doctor*)

Rudolf Waldemar Brem (*bar patron*)

Karl Scheydt (*Albert*)

Peter Moland (*chief garage mechanic*)

Barbara Valentin (*Barbara, landlady*)

Lilo Pempeit (*Mrs Münchmeyer*)\*

Rainer Werner Fassbinder (*Eugen, Krista's husband*)\*

Helga Ballhaus (*Yolanda*)\*

Kurt Raab (*foreman*)\*

Elisabeth Bertram (*Frieda*)\*

West Germany 1974

93 mins

\* Uncredited

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**Le Mépris (Contempt)** Wed 1 Feb 18:10; Fri 17 Feb 20:50

**Daughters of the Dust** Wed 1 Feb 18:15; Thu 16 Feb 20:30

**Sans Soleil** Wed 1 Feb 20:40; Fri 17 Feb 18:00

**M (Mörder unter uns)**

Thu 2 Feb 14:30; Thu 16 Feb 20:40; Wed 22 Feb 18:00

**Moonlight** Thu 2 Feb 20:45; Tue 14 Feb 20:30

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Fri 3 Feb 20:40; Sun 5 Feb 20:40; Sat 18 Feb 18:10

**Battleship Potemkin (Bronenosets Potemkin)**

Sat 4 Feb 12:40; Sat 18 Feb 18:30

**La dolce vita** Sat 4 Feb 14:15; Sat 25 Feb 19:30

**Sherlock Jr.** Sat 4 Feb 17:20; Sat 11 Feb 11:45

**City Lights** Sat 4 Feb 17:20; Sat 11 Feb 11:45

**Goodfellas** Sat 4 Feb 20:10; Wed 15 Feb 20:10

**North by Northwest** Sat 4 Feb 20:20; Thu 9 Feb 18:00

**L'Atalante** Sun 5 Feb 12:15; Tue 14 Feb 18:30; Wed 22 Feb 14:30

**Rear Window** Sun 5 Feb 12:20; Fri 24 Feb 20:45

**Stalker** Sun 5 Feb 17:40; Tue 7 Feb 20:10; Sun 26 Feb 14:00

**Casablanca** Mon 6 Feb 20:30; Sun 12 Feb 13:20

**Psycho** Mon 6 Feb 20:45; Mon 20 Feb 14:30; Thu 23 Feb 20:40

**8 1/2 (Otto e mezzo)**

Tue 7 Feb 18:00; Tue 21 Feb 14:30; Sun 26 Feb 12:50

**The Battle of Algiers (La battaglia di Algeri)**

Tue 7 Feb 18:10; Sat 25 Feb 11:50

**News from Home** Tue 7 Feb 20:45; Fri 17 Feb 18:20 (+ intro)

**Rashomon (Rashômon)** Tue 7 Feb 21:00; Thu 23 Feb 18:20

**The Piano** Wed 8 Feb 20:35; Tue 21 Feb 17:50

**Wanda** Thu 9 Feb 20:30 (+ intro by Jason Wood, BFI Executive Director of Public Programmes & Audiences); Sat 18 Feb 18:20

**Fear Eats the Soul (Angst essen Seele auf)**

Thu 9 Feb 20:55; Mon 27 Feb 18:00

**Ordet (The Word)** Fri 10 Feb 18:15; Sat 25 Feb 14:30

**The 400 Blows (Les quatre cents coups)**

Fri 10 Feb 20:50; Sun 19 Feb 18:40

**Bicycle Thieves (Ladri di biciclette)**

Sat 11 Feb 11:50; Mon 20 Feb 20:55; Thu 23 Feb 14:30

**Barry Lyndon** Sat 11 Feb 19:20; Sat 25 Feb 15:30

**Some Like It Hot** Sun 12 Feb 13:30; Tue 14 Feb 18:10

**The Third Man** Sun 12 Feb 18:30; Tue 21 Feb 20:40

**Killer of Sheep** Sun 12 Feb 18:40 (+intro); Sat 18 Feb 20:40

**Mirror (Zerkalo)** Mon 13 Feb 20:50; Tue 28 Feb 20:50

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**The Apartment** Wed 22 Feb 20:35; Sun 26 Feb 12:40

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