



JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN: THE FILMS OF WERNER HERZOG

Heart of Glass (Herz aus Glas)

Heart of Glass (Herz aus Glas)

Director: Werner Herzog

Production Company:

Werner Herzog Filmproduktion

Producer: Werner Herzog

Production Supervisor: Walter Saxer

Production Manager: Joschi Arpa

Production Assistants: Claude Chiarini, Ina Fritsche,

Alan Greenberg, Patrick Leray

Screenplay: Werner Herzog, Herbert Achternbusch

Original Text: Herbert Achternbusch

Director of Photography: Jörg Schmidt-Reitwein

Editors: Beate Mainka-Jellinghaus, Angelika Dreis

Art Directors: Henning von Gierke, Cornelius Siegel

Costumes: Gisela Storch, Ann Poppel

Music: Popol Vuh, Studio der Frühen Musik

Sound: Haymo H. Heyder, Peter van Anft

Cast:

Josef Bierbichler (*Hias*)

Stefan Güttler (*factory owner*)

Clemens Scheitz (*Adalbert*)

Volker Prechtel (*Wudy*)

Sepp Müller (*Ascherl*)

Sonja Skiba (*Ludmilla*)

Brunhilde Klöckner (*Paulin*)

Wolf Albrecht (*Sam*)

Thomas Binkley (*lute player*)

Sterling Jones, Richard Levitt (*musicians*)

Andrea von Ramm (*singer*)

János Fischer (*Ágide*)

Wilhelm Friedrich (*factory-owner's father*)

Edith Gratz (*publican's wife*)

Alois Hruschka (*Gigl, glassblower*)

Egmont Hugel (*Harp Toni*)

Wolfram Kunkel (*hurdy gurdy man*)

Werner Lederle (*publican*)

Agnes Nuißl (*Anamirl*)

Helmut Kossick, Amad Ibn Ghassem Nadij,

Bernhard Schabel, Friedrich Steinhauer (*farmers*)

Joschi Arpa (*the liar*)

Claude Chiarini (*the thief*)

Martje Herzog (*peasant woman*)

Werner Herzog, Alan Greenberg (*glass carriers*)

Helmut Krüger (*workman*)

Karl Kaufmann

Walter Schwarzmeier

Arno Vahrenwald

Detley Weiler

Siegfried Wolf

Karl Yblagger

West Germany 1976

94 mins

Digital

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

In Werner Herzog the conquistadorial spirit lives again. He sets out to discover new worlds in the manner of a Renaissance explorer navigating by the stars and waging titanic and by now legendary battles with the elements. *Aguirre* is the classic example of filmmaking's new willingness to get its hands dirty, but the subject was such a tailor-made vehicle for Herzog's trailblazing approach that it achieved an intensity which was the measure of his quest. But even when they are not epic tales, all Herzog's major films to date have been intellectual adventures (though he would undoubtedly challenge the adjective). And in *Heart of Glass* this restless need to experiment which often pushes Herzog to eccentricity led him to place the cast under hypnosis. The procedure has already made the film somewhat notorious, but it is justified in the event by lending a superbly somnambulistic quality to the acting out of visions which have more in common with Romantic idealism than modern forms of artistic commitment.

Heart of Glass returns to the period and setting of [*The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*]. It is not a conventional narrative sequel, except to the extent that a tale from the age of revolutions is the logical follow-up to one from the age of rationalism. But the historical perspective is important in providing a moment when the beginnings of capitalism and millenarian visions combine naturally. In saying that the film was 'about the end of factories, like the world has seen the end of castles' Herzog seems to have suggested that the world would be turned upside down. Yet *Heart of Glass* could not less resemble the ecological tract he would appear to have had in mind originally; its political meaning is a faint rumble in the distance, and it is held together by the power of its visions.

The story concerns, essentially, a community in Bavaria at about the turn of the 19th century which lives by the manufacture of an extremely precious ruby glass. The factory foreman dies and with him the secret of making the glass, and the factory owner is forced to search desperately – and unsuccessfully – for the formula without which he and the community cannot live. Hias, a cowherd who spends much time in deep meditation in the surrounding mountains, has a power of vision which is so extraordinary that he has become something of a sage among the locals. He can predict who will cross a mountain bridge and which of the evening drinkers in the inn will be dead on the following morning. But his strongest visions are apocalyptic: he sees fire and destruction, he sees the earth's crust crumbling, plague, famine, the fall of the Church in Italy, the last man running in agony through the deserted village after the holocaust. He is unable and probably unwilling to help the factory owner discover the secret of the glass, in the same way that the owner cannot be deflected from his search to organise the bear-hunting party Hias asks for. Ultimately, both Hias and the owner land in prison, where their affinity is revealed: Hias has foretold the factory's destruction by fire while the owner has actually set it alight in the moment of exaltation which follows the murder of his servant girl Ludmilla.

But *Heart of Glass* is not really a narrative film. The tale of the factory is simply a narrative counterpoint, though it is realised in splendid detail. Herzog takes time off for a number of low-life scenes in the factory and the inn where the

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25*

* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk

SIGHT AND SOUND

JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN: THE FILMS OF WERNER HERZOG

Signs of Life Lebenszeichen

Mon 1 Jan 12:30; Sat 13 Jan 15:00

Fata Morgana + The Great Ecstasy of

Woodcarver Steiner Die große Ekstase des
Bildschnitzers Steiner

Mon 1 Jan 18:00; Wed 17 Jan 20:30

Even Dwarfs Started Small

Auch Zwerge haben klein angefangen

Tue 2 Jan 18:15; Mon 15 Jan 20:45

La Soufrière Warten auf eine Unausweichliche

Katastrophe + **Lessons of Darkness**

Lektionen in Finsternis

Wed 3 Jan 18:20; Tue 16 Jan 20:40 (+ intro by
writer Ian Haydn Smith)

Heart of Glass Herz aus Glas

Thu 4 Jan 18:30; Fri 19 Jan 20:40

Land of Silence and Darkness

Land des Schweigens und der Dunkelheit

Thu 4 Jan 20:50; Wed 10 Jan 20:45; Wed 17 Jan
18:15 (+ BSL intro by deaf filmmaker Sam Arnold)

Aguirre, Wrath of God Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes

Sat 6 Jan 15:15; Sun 14 Jan 11:40;

Tue 23 Jan 18:30

My Best Fiend Mein liebster Feind – Klaus Kinski

Sat 6 Jan 17:45; Sat 13 Jan 21:00

Little Dieter Needs to Fly Flucht aus Laos

Sun 7 Jan 15:20; Thu 18 Jan 20:45

Fitzcarraldo

Sun 7 Jan 17:45; Sun 14 Jan 14:20;

Thu 18 Jan 17:50

Stroszek

Mon 8 Jan 18:20; Sat 20 Jan 20:40

Werner Herzog's Tales of Life and Death:

An Illustrated Talk

Wed 10 Jan 18:30

Nosferatu the Vampire

Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht

Fri 12 Jan 18:10; Wed 24 Jan 20:50;

Sat 27 Jan 15:00

Grizzly Man

Fri 12 Jan 20:45; Sun 14 Jan 18:15;

Mon 29 Jan 18:15

Echoes from a Sombre Empire

Echos aus einem düsteren Reich

Sat 13 Jan 14:10; Tue 30 Jan 20:30

Woyzeck

Sat 13 Jan 18:20; Sun 28 Jan 12:30

The Fire Within: A Requiem for Katia and

Maurice Krafft

Fri 19 Jan 18:30; Wed 31 Jan 20:50

The White Diamond

Sun 21 Jan 18:20; Fri 26 Jan 18:30

Into the Abyss – A Tale of Death, a Tale of Life

Fri 26 Jan 20:45; Sun 28 Jan 15:10

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

lighting and detail of composition are reminiscent of genre painting. His interest in how things work extends to observing craftsmen blowing glass, while the grotesque takes the form of a strip performed by the village idiot on a table in the inn. There are indications that Herzog originally intended to heighten this local colour and emphasise the conventional narrative by ending *Heart of Glass* on the murder of the servant girl. But as the film now stands, it bears far more resemblance to a folk tale, with all the ellipsis and irrationality that the supernatural element allows. It is not even a film about visions, but a film of visions which are realised by Hias and articulate all the sequences. It opens with his view of mists rolling down a mountain valley like the waters of the deluge, and closes with his projection of lonely men standing on a remote outcrop in the sea gazing westward as a small boat sets out from the old world on a doomed expedition into the future. Because of this, *Heart of Glass* is a film in which point of view is systematically blurred – is it what Hias sees? Is it what really happens? – but which has the irrational logic of dreams. Herzog is the sworn enemy of intellectualism and claims that the cinema has more to do with popular entertainment than with scholarship. So *Heart of Glass* might be seen as another attempt to recapture the naivete of *Kaspar Hauser*, and to recreate the folk mentality through the productions of what is literally a dream factory.

There is no doubt that *Heart of Glass* is marked by Herzog's private obsessions: grotesques and overreachers especially. It may be no accident that the factory owner lusts for ruby glass as a vampire lusts for blood, but it is nevertheless a very oblique attack on property. It is also tempting to see the film as a recapitulation of the German Romantic tradition. But beyond any interpretation, what makes it stunning are the moments when Herzog stops filming and starts to paint. Sometimes Hias is the shepherd reclining in the corner of a Romantic landscape with, behind him, torrents and ravines straight from John Martin; sometimes he is the hireling shepherd looking into a distance composed of streaks of Pre-Raphaelite gaudiness; and most often he is St. Jerome musing on the emblems of mortality. Herzog is far too much of a maverick to allow us to see universal significance in these moments. He is very much the visionary outsider that Hias is. But it's the vision that counts in the end.

Jill Forbes, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1977