

Bath Film Festival 2008 Tuesday 4th November

The Edge of Heaven (Auf der Anderen Seite)

Germany | 2007 | 122 m

Director: Fatih Akin

Screenplay: Fatih Akin

Cinematography: Rainer Klausmann

Editing: Andrew Bird

Original Music: Shantel

Leading Players: Nurgül Yesilçay, Baki Davrak, Nursel Köse, Hanna Schygulla.

Ditching the original title (*Auf der Anderen Seite* literally means “On The Other Side”) for the more hyperbolic *Edge of Heaven*, this is thirty four year-old Turkish/German filmmaker Fatih Akin’s second instalment in a proposed trilogy entitled “Liebe, Tod, und Teufel” (“Love, Death, and the Devil”; the first segment was filled by 2004’s incendiary *Head-On*). It tells the intertwining stories of three sets of parents and children across two continents, a tapestry of story in which fates interlock, and, rather like in real life, the characters that move through the web are unaware of the connections that bind them together. Their lives are ruled (and indeed ruined) by coincidence; again, rather like real life. The film turns on these coincidences and, rather like *Magnolia*, *Babel* or *Short Cuts*, (three films it closely resembles), it gives back what you are willing to give to it. That this is also like real life probably goes without saying.

To even begin to unravel the complex plot would take far longer than space in these film notes allow, so let me just say that *The Edge of Heaven* is a big film, if not in length then in the ideas and themes it covers. It is essentially about the tension between Germany and Turkey, to whom postwar West Germany opened its doors for “guest-worker” labourers and about the gulf between the first-and second-generation Turkish-Germans, conflicted about their identity and their relationship with their mother country. A variety of subjects are mined: religious extremism, race relations, the way life can turn on a single missed connection, love and death, the social strains caused in the West by economic globalisation and its accompanying though often unacknowledged need for poor migrant workers, tension within families, tension between generations of immigrants, the way we see ourselves both amongst our own community and as part of the wider polity. Though it casts a wide net, the film is never preachy or didactic, and Akin’s script deservedly won the Best Screenplay Award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2007.

The film is split into three segments, two of which proclaim the deaths of characters within, whilst the third is simply titled “The Edge of Heaven”. The effect is to lend a certain meditative air of impending doom to the proceedings, perversely adding to the suspense rather than diminishing it. Each segment is shot beautifully by cinematographer Rainer Klausmann (*Downfall*, *Head-On*, *Lemon Tree*) and particularly ravishing are the scenes of Bremen, Germany and of the Black Sea fishing villages of the Turkish coast. The acting is also uniformly first-rate (this is that rarest of beasts, a true ensemble picture), though a special mention must be made of Hanna Schygulla as one the film’s loving, distant mothers.

It may lack the “sex, drugs and rock’n’roll” of *Head -On*, for *The Edge of Heaven* is a quieter, more contemplative film; but its gentle optimism and brittle melancholy, its human warmth

and realisation of the distances we all have to travel will stay with you for a much longer time.

BFF film note by Nels Stanley