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BERLIN ALEXANDERPLATZ

A film in 13 parts and epilogue

I. PUNISHMENT WILL COME (Die Strafe Beginnt) 81 min.

1928. Franz Biberkopf is released from Berlin Tegel prison where he has been serving a four year sentence for killing his girlfriend Ida. Gaining a new foothold in Berlin is all but easy for him, yet at last he finds his way around again. He makes a solemn oath: From now on he will lead a decent life and never again do things honest people wouldn't do. And besides, his new girlfriend Lina will help him turn over a new leaf.

II. HOW CAN YOU LIVE IF YOU DON'T WANT TO DIE (Wie soll man leben, wenn man nicht sterben will) 59 min.

Times are tough and work is scarce. At a lower-class amusement park Franz Biberkopf meets a man who is able to get him a job - and some job! Biberkopf becomes a news vendor for the Nazi paper "Volkischer Beobachter". It seems that his fortunes have finally taken a turn for the better but his cronies at his favorite pub are not at all enthusiastic about his standing at a street corner with an arm band displaying a swastika and calling out the latest Nazi propaganda slogans. But what else could Franz do, since Lina is strictly against his peddling sex literature?

III. A BLOW FROM A HAMMER CAN HURT THE SOUL (Ein Hammer auf den Kopf kann die Seele verletzen) 59 min.

Lina's uncle is making good money peddling. Biberkopf decides to accompany him on his rounds from house to house hawking shoelaces. Business is only fair until Biberkopf meets a woman whom Franz reminds very much of her deceased husband. They have coffee together - and more. Franz confides his adventure to his partner and suffers his first big disappointment since his release from prison: double-crossing him, his partner blackmails the woman and Biberkopf is put in the wrong in spite of his earnest efforts to become a decent man. It nearly breaks his heart.

IV. A HANDFUL OF PEOPLE IN THE DEPTHS OF SILENCE (Eine Handvoll Menschen in der Tiefe der Stille) 59 min.

His disappointment with his former partner nearly drives Franz Biberkopf mad. He retires to a lonely boarding-house room and refuses to see anybody; all he does is drink. He watches life thronging past him from a distance, as through a heavy fog. And what goes on around him is no encouragement for him to take his

place in life again: the world he can see from his window is full of evil and malice, and the wrong people benefit from what little justice there is.

V. A REAPER WITH THE POWER OF THE ALMIGHTY (Ein Schnitter mit der Gewalt vom lieben Gott) 59 min.

Franz Biberkopf is back in his place again determined to take up his old struggle against the odds of life. And where could he find a better stand for that than at his usual pub? At the pub Franz comes to know Pums and his gang who are doing a brisk business on the black market. And then Franz meets another man; Reinhold, the stutterer with the sad eyes. An ex-prisoner like Franz? A prisoner, yes, but a captive of his quickly passing infatuations with women. His affairs always follow the same pattern: hardly is he holding a woman in his arms will be tire of her and looking for a way to get rid of her, Franz is the one who can take these women off his hands and he is quite willing to be of help to his new friend. Together they set up a regular, flourishing traffic in girlfriends.

VI. THE PRICE OF LOVE IS ALWAYS HIGH (Ein Liebe, das kostet immer viel) 58 min.

Franz Biberkopf is tired of swapping girl-friends, and besides, he feels that this is not the way to really help his friend Reinhold. More by chance than by intention, Biberkopf becomes involved in one of the coups landed by the Pums gang, a criminal one, no doubt, but - as usual - Franz has only a vague idea of what is actually going on. Now he has broken his oath of becoming a decent man, and it all but costs him his life on top of that. He had better not tell anyone about Reinhold's part in this story - after all, Reinhold is his best friend and Franz loves him.

VII. REMEMBER: AN OATH CAN BE CUT OFF (Merke: einen Schwur man amputieren) 58 min.

Franz Biberkopf is a cripple now, he has lost an arm. but the one which is left is all the stronger. It takes Biberkopf a long time to recover, but in the end he plucks up his courage again, especially since Eva and her friend Herbert take good care of him and even want to avenge the harm which has been done to him. But Franz wants no revenge, he wants to let things past be past and over with. And when he hears Willy talking politics, he even begins considering a tomorrow.

VIII. THE SUN WILL WARM AND SOMETIMES BURN THE SKIN (Die Sonne warmt die Haut, die sie manchmal verbrennt) 58 min.

Franz Biberkopf is about to drop his oath about leading a decent life. Without this obligation he feels better right away. And then he meets a girl called Mieze, the mere sight of her makes the sun come out from

behind the clouds. Such a good woman she is! So tiny beside him, he could easily carry her off in his pocket. Franz falls in love, and his old strength returns. One day, a letter addressed to Mieke happens to pass his way, and Franz cannot resist opening it: it is a love letter from another man who has fallen in love with Biberkopf's girl. Suddenly Franz is numbed by the fear that he might lose his little Mieke.

IX. OF THE ETERNITIES SEPARATING THE MANY FROM THE FEW (Von den Ewigkeiten zwischen den Vielen und den Wenigen) 58 min.

Eva has tried to reassure Franz, telling him that Mieke is a thoroughly decent girl; if she goes out to walk the streets for him, this should be taken as a token of her love. Franz goes to meet Mieke at her usual corner. As he sees her standing there by the board-fence in full sunlight, so fragile and beautiful, it fills his heart with a warm feeling to know that he is the one for whom she is standing there. Suddenly he is aware how much he loves her and how terribly Mieke loves him. From this very moment Franz feels strong enough to face even Reinhold again, the one who had tried to kill him. Biberkopf takes an interest in politics, too: now that he has no work to do he attends a political meeting which he finds very strange, indeed. "Isn't it funny", he muses, "that one can be for a thing and against it at the same time?"

X. LONELINESS CAUSES CRACKS IN THE WALLS OF MADNESS (Einsamkeit reißt auch in Mauern Risse des Irrsinns) 59 min.

Mieke has come up with a new idea: she wants to have Franz's child because she loves him so much. Since Mieke cannot have any children, she wants Eva to have one in her place - after all, it makes no difference who the actual mother is, as long as Franz is the father of the child. Mieke has become very independent in other ways, too: she wants to go on a holiday for three days with one of her clients. Why shouldn't she - the man will pay her well, and Franz is the one to benefit from the money. Franz is desperate: three whole days without his little Mieke! In the end, is he still good for anything at all? Everyone is so concerned about Franz and his well-being that he is not even asked what he really wants.

XI. KNOWLEDGE IS POWER AND THE EARLY BIRD CATCHES THE WORM. (Wissen ist Macht und Morgenstund hat Gold im Mund) 58 min.

Franz Biberkopf feels entirely useless - all he wants is a chance to earn some money of his own. He joins the Pums gang. They don't really trust him there, but they let him run along with them. Now Franz is earning his own money, and his spirits are on the rise. In fact, he is so high-spirited that he has Reinhold hide behind his bed so that his friend may see what true happiness it is to be loved by a woman. But of all possible moments, the unsuspecting Mieke chooses that very

occasion to confess to Franz her love for another man. She does not want to leave Franz; after all, they belong together now. Franz is so stricken with grief - it nearly drives him out of his mind. By a fraction of an inch he would have killed Mieze, his most precious love.

XII. THE VIPER IN THE SOUL OF THE SERPENT (Die Schlange in der Seele der Schlange) 59 min.

Mieze has forgiven Franz and stays with him, although he nearly killed her in the frenzy of his grief. But fate still has another blow in store for Franz Biberkopf, the hardest one of all: Reinhold, who has been after Mieze for some time already, has devised a clever plan in order to catch Mieze alone somewhere. Unaware of the trap which has been set for her, Mieze follows him into the lonely woods. She is almost taken in by Reinhold's attempts to seduce her, and she is murdered in the end.

XIII. THE OUTSIDE AND THE INSIDE, AND THE MYSTERY OF THE FEAR OF MYSTERY (Das Aussere und das Innere und das Geheimnis der Angst vor dem Geheimnis) 58 min.

Franz Biberkopf feels crushed. Mieze has deserted him, the only person he ever trusted and loved in this world, a world which has taught him that nobody is to be trusted and that love is a big lie anyway. At least, he cannot find her anywhere, and nobody can tell Franz where she might be. When Franz learns that Mieze has been murdered, he is unable to choke back a laugh - at least she did not betray him, after all.

EPILOGUE

Rainer Werner Fassbinder:

MY DREAM OF FRANZ BIBERKOPF'S DREAM (Mein Traum vom Traum des Franz Biberkopf) 111 min.

Franz Biberkopf is interned at a lunatic asylum. Not so long ago he had promised to lead a decent life; but how can a man keep such a promise without losing his mind? Now that he no longer needs to live his life, he can begin dreaming it. But the reflection he finds in the mirror of his dreams distresses Franz Biberkopf: he finds a man who is arrogant and ignorant and rude, yet at the same time a coward and a weakling. Has he made a mess of everything by his obstinacy and arrogance? Has he made himself guilty for all this? Thus, a new Biberkopf is born at the end of a long life - a broken man, yet one who is fit for living.