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uneasy hilarity of an immense sick joke. Clément keeps this joke going, prolongs it by twisting it half turn by half turn till we've almost forgotten the grisly reality of war that inspired the joke in the first place. Clément saves that reality as the final abrupt twist, the one that brings rushing to the surface all the pain lying just below our laughter.

Saura gets into trouble when he goes for the macabre-funny touches, for at the same time he can't resist rubbing in the pathos inherent in the very notion of an eight-year-old orphan. In addition to a prosaically wicked guardian and the grinning grandmother, there's also Ana's pet guinea pig that we know at first glance—despite its apparent plump healthiness—is not long for Saura's world.

A similar failing in tone arises from the direction of Ana Torrent herself. We're too much aware of her wistful waif's face and enormous haunted child-actor's eyes. There are too many scenes where we sense Saura's manipulation instead of Ana's emotions.

Allegory provides dangerous territory for moviemakers. Characters become emblems too easily. Chaplin's performance as the mother is delicately articulated, yet in retrospect she becomes more Spain than mother, her long suffering, bleeding, dying somehow the fault of the uniformed father who has been from the beginning the embodiment of paternalistic fascism. And the sympathetic housekeeper becomes the wise earthy peasant, the death's-

Allegory provides dangerous territory for moviemakers.

head grandmother the mute but living past, and so on.

The best film allegories—and one thinks immediately of Renoir's *La règle du jeu*—are either the ones that don't allow an imbalance between the human and the emblem or those that play such an imbalance for all it's worth, as with Bunuel's *L'Age d'Or*.

Saura doesn't appear confident enough for either approach yet; more academic than instinctive, he seems awed by his title of heir apparent and by the other predecessors he continually alludes to. So many tributes and references, so much careful movement and spotlessness—I'd like to see Saura get a little careless, a bit sloppy. I'd like to see him let his actors have their heads, at least let them move about and explore the tight allegorical structure he's provided them.

Cria Cuervos says a lot about Spain and its bloody heritage, about the black hopelessness bred over centuries that won't be dispelled by the best of liberal intentions.

Unlike *Jeux Interdits*, *Cria Cuervos* allows its audience no final catharsis. There's no release from Ana's mourning, Saura says, because there is no release from Spain's past. I would be tempted to agree with Saura's verdict (just as I'm tempted to agree to the enduring dismalness of Ana's existence because it reinforces my belief that there's no such thing as a happy childhood) except for the fact that I seem to catch glimpses of him enjoying the bleakness of it all. ●

RAINER WERNER FASSBINDER'S FEAR OF FEAR

Reviewed by Barbara Leaming

Rainer Werner Fassbinder, by now a familiar name in world cinema, had yet another film at the New York Film Festival last fall. And again, Fassbinder's appearance was far more than a pro forma one, for his 1975 *Fear of Fear*, the 1976 festival entry, is a subtly articulated cinematic analysis. According to Fassbinder, the film, which deals with a woman on the verge of a breakdown, is based on a short story by a German housewife recounting her own experience. The film's main character, Margot, played by Margit Carstensen, one of Fassbinder's regular leading actresses, is a woman on the brink of madness, acutely aware of the abyss before her, and obsessed by fear, fear of something she cannot name. Like the visual structure of the film, the source of Margot's fear is masked, obscured—obsessive but elusive. In a society such as ours, one so complex that the sources of power, the origins of things, are shrouded in a fog of obscurity and complexity, so Margot's fear is generalized, unanalyzed—and hence unconquerable. Fassbinder, however, constructs an elegant dialectic here, for as Margot herself withdraws, first into the stupor of valium and brandy, later into the artificial euphoria of "happiness" pills, he forces the audience into a rigorous analytical survey of Margot's psychic state. Rather than plunging into the abyss of her madness, Fassbinder ruthlessly probes it with his analytical camera eye.

In the past Fassbinder's films have often been concerned with isolated people—with the outsider. In *Fear of Fear*, once again the central figure is set apart—she is a woman whose world is largely a world of family, a family that perceives her not only as an outsider, an intruder, but more importantly as someone "abnormal." For them, there is no question of what it is which constitutes the norm, for her sister-in-law explicitly and flatly states, "We are normal." They are the ones certainly who hold power; they are then the ones who determine the norm. Yet it is not even this outsider status within her husband's family which seems to mark the critical point in Margot's passage towards madness. There is a far more crucial sense of strangeness, of alienation, which she feels: her failure to identify with her own image. And it is this alienation from image—and hence from role—which provides the central structuring device of Fassbinder's film. Repeatedly we watch Margot confront her image, her image as an image, as she looks in Sirkian mirror after mirror. The apartment is filled with square and oval mirrors, waiting to catch her glance, waiting—if she were "normal"—to confirm her identity, to confirm her sense of self. But for Margot this face in the mirror remains "other," remains an image and nothing more. It cannot, she says, be she. But if the image is not she, then what is it? This is the abyss, the void

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which fills her with fear. For us, however, in the audience, the recognition of the image has quite different effects. Seeing the image as an image, we, in turn, see the figure reflected in the glass and on the screen itself as an image as well. It is never a "natural," unchangeable reality which we face in Fassbinder's film. Rather it is always an image made by someone, and hence is subject to change. It is thus that one can make sense of Fassbinder's comment at the film festival press conference that the film has an optimistic ending, *for the audience*. The audience is learning to think of reality as changeable, as something made by people and hence alterable by them. What Margot does not know, we may in the end begin to sense.

The mirror is not, of course, the only device serving to call attention to the status of images as images in the film. Fassbinder has further developed one of his earlier devices of framing within the frame of the screen. The interior frame which limits the material we see calls attention to the ordering and shaping of what we see; it calls attention to the "work" in the production of an image which is never posited as "natural." Margot herself is often obscured in part by the door frames of the apartment which crop her image on screen. She is not a whole woman we see; she is simply a part, a part which expresses a particular perspective.

Unlike the filmmakers of the transparent classical realist cinema, Fassbinder uses frames within the frames and other devices to make it difficult for us to see. For example, Margot's sister-in-law functions as a kind of voyeur, watching Margot's every move out of the house through a window. It is significant that this window, the emblem for realist art, is not able to give direct access to the sights she watches below, for her view is obscured by a leafy tree or a curtain. She, like us, must look through something. Our attention has been detained at the level of the signifier. We are reminded that something is producing meaning and that that meaning is therefore not simply "natural."

In addition, the curtain and the tree separate us, keep us apart from the object of our gaze. We are distanced from it, just as the doors which separate the rooms of the apartment, where Margot and her husband Kurt live, serve as a realized metaphor for the distance between them. For instance, in one of the film's early scenes, as Margot is still desperately fighting to stave off engulfing madness, she tries to make contact, to speak to Kurt, but he remains enclosed within the frame of one room and she of another. As if to underscore this separation, Fassbinder's camera moves emphatically between the two rooms rather than cutting the scene into two shots. The space between them has found a visual articulation.

The color of the film is in marked contrast to the sort used by Fassbinder earlier in films like *Merchant of Four Seasons* or *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*. In *Fear of Fear*, rather than bright colors, we encounter an extraordinarily drab, washed out spectrum of dull greys and greens, bleached blonde hair with black roots,

white skin faded to ashes, broken only by the harsh orange plastic of the chairs and the red clothes on the infant. It is a world that is colored like an old print of a Hollywood melodrama, perhaps Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life*, which has now reappeared in a new faded incarnation years later.

None of this is accidental. Nor is this the only reference to other films. Even Bergman is quoted here with a tank from *The Silence* moving in front of a window. What happens when Fassbinder reveals his filmic frame of reference so clearly in this film and in so many other of his works is a question of crucial importance. When an image with which we are already familiar appears in a new context, something happens to the content of that image—our attention is shifted away from the signified to the signifier. Suddenly style becomes visible as style. In terms of his manipulation of the sign system, Fassbinder's work is similar to that of certain Pop artists. What has happened in *Fear of Fear* is precisely what Lawrence Alloway perceived in Roy Lichtenstein's paintings: "He is not discovering unsuspected wonders or conferring dignity on the overlooked: on the contrary, his subjects are known beforehand to the spectator and depend on being recognized as existing signs. The original source which was a signifier becomes the signified in the painting..." (*American Pop Art*, p. 80). In Fassbinder's films, materials exist in a realm of similar simultaneity: signifier becomes signified, yet echos in our memory as signifier still. The sign as convention has been revealed, its "naturalness" called into ques-

tion. As in Pop Art, style has become "subject matter." The political significance of Fassbinder's interest in style as subject matter ought perhaps to be clarified, for in no sense is this an outmoded art for art's sake, a precious formalism. Rather, Fassbinder reveals to us an art made by people, an image made by people, a world made by people, a world, an image

which is changeable by people. He reveals or demands active rather than passive spectators. People who transform. People who change.

Fear of Fear, then, is the politicization of style. Stylistic politics. As Jorge Luis Borges has said, "Each writer creates his precursors." In *Fear of Fear*, Fassbinder creates his precursors and thereby creates a politics. ●

Cria Cuervos

A Jason Allen release. Producer: Elias Quereta. Screenplay and direction: Carlos Saura. Sets and cinematography: Teodoro Escamilla. Cast: Geraldine Chaplin, Ana Torrent, Conchita Perez, Juana Sanchez Almendros, Monica Randall.

Star Wars

A 20th-Century Fox release. Producer: Gary Kurtz. Direction and screenplay: George Lucas. Production Designer: John Barry. Director of Photography: Gilbert Taylor, B.S.C. Music: John Williams. Costumes: John Mollo. Special Photographic Effects Supervisor: John Stears. Editors: Paul Hirsch, Marcia Lucas, Richard Chew. Cast: Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, Peter Cushing, Alec Guinness, Anthony Daniels, Kenny Baker, Peter Mayhew, David Prowse.

Underground

An Emile de Antonio, Mary Lampson production. Directors: Emile de Antonio, Mary Lampson, Haskell Wexler. Cinematography: Haskell Wexler. Cast: The Weather Underground.

Citizens Band

A Paramount Pictures release of a Fields Company production. Executive producer: Shep Fields. Director: Jonathon Demme. Screenplay: Paul Brickman. Camera: Jordon Cronenweth. Editor: John F. Link II. Music: Bill Conti. Production design: Bill Malley. Set decoration: Ira Bates. Sound: John K. Wilkinson, Gene Cantamesse. Costumes: Jodie Lynn Tillen. Assistant Director: Charles Okun. Cast: Paul Le Mat, Candy Clark, Ann Wedgeworth, Bruce McGill, Marcia Rodd, Charles Napier, Alix Elias, Roberts Blossom.

Welcome to L.A.

A United Artists release. Producer: Robert Altman.

Written and directed by Alan Rudolph. Camera: Dave Myers. Editors: William A. Sawyer, Tom Walls. Music: Richard Baskin. Sound: Richard Portman, Jim Webb, Chris McLaughlin. Cast: Keith Carradine, Sally Kellerman, Geraldine Chaplin, Harvey Keitel, Lauren Hutton, Viveca Lindfors, Sissy Spacek.

Angst von der Angst [Fear of Fear]

A Westdeutscher Rundfunk (Cologne) production. Written and directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Producer: Peter Marthesheimer. Photography: Jürgen Jürges, Ulrich Prinz. Editors: Liesgrett Schmitt-Klink, Beate Fischer-Weiskirch. Sound: Manfred Oelschlegel, Hans Pampuch. Music: Peer Raben. Art Director: Kurt Raab. Cast: Margit Carstensen, Ulrich Faulhaber, Brigitte Mira, Irm Hermann, Amin Meier, Adrian Hoven, Kurt Raab, Ingrid Caven, Lilo Pempeit.

Edvard Munch

A Norsk Rikskringkasting/Sveriges Radio AB release. Written and directed by Peter Watkins. Production manager: Ulf Fjoran. Photography: Odd Geir Saether. Art Director: Grethe Hager. Sound: Kenneth Storm-Hansen, Bjorn Hansen, Asmund Huser. Costumes: Ada Skolmen. Cast: Geir Westby, Gro Fraas, Erik Allum, Amund Berge, Kerstii Allum, Inger-Berit Oland, Susan Troidmyr, Calilla Falk, Gro Jarto, Johan Halsbog.

Cross of Iron

An Avco Embassy release. Executive Producer: Arlene Sellers. Producers: Wolf C. Hartwig, Alex Winitsky. Director: Sam Peckinpah. Screenplay: Julius J. Epstein, Walter Kelley, James Hamilton. Music: Ernest Gold. Editors: Tony Lawson, Herbert Taschner, Murray Jordan. Director of Photography: John Coquillon. Cast: James Coburn, Maximilian Schell, James Mason, David Warner, Klaus Lowitsch, Arthur Brauss.

DO YOU KNOW THIS WOMAN?

Mexico's most famous woman painter, Frida Kahlo, was brilliant, beautiful, flamboyant. Married to Diego Rivera and haunted by childhood illness, she endured constant physical and emotional turmoil. Her pain and passion became the focal point of intensely personal, surrealist paintings. Her art is a powerful testament to unfulfilled womanhood and obsessive love.

This award-winning film is a devastating document narrated by the people who knew her best. Filmed in Mexico, it traces a life which wavered on the cutting edge of art and politics in the 30's. Dying, she had herself wheeled in a protest march against the C.I.A. Andre Breton called her a bomb disguised as a butterfly.

"Mr. and Mrs. Crommie evoke Kahlo's life through still photographs, pictures of her paintings and, on the soundtrack, the recorded recollections of people who knew her in Mexico and this country. The Crommies' achievement is to have produced such an emotionally charged film at such a far remove in time from their subject which is testimony, I suspect, not only to their taste and talent as filmmakers, but also to the vitality of Kahlo and her work... THE LIFE AND DEATH OF FRIDA KAHLO runs only 40 minutes, but it is more affecting than most features."

—VINCENT CANBY, NEW YORK TIMES

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