

## Auf der anderen Seite (The Edge of Heaven) (15)

8<sup>th</sup> March 2010

Director: **Fatih Akin**  
Germany/Turkey/Italy 2007

Running time : 122 minutes

LEADING PLAYERS: **Baki Davrak** (Nejat Aksu), **Nurgül Yesilçay** (Ayten Öztürk aka Gül), **Tuncel Kurtiz** (Ali Aksu), **Hanna Schygulla** (Susanne Staub), **Patrycja Ziolkowska** (Lotte Staub).

SCRIPT: **Fatih Akin**. PHOTOGRAPHY: **Rainer Klausmann**. EDITING: **Andrew Bird**. MUSIC: **Shantel**.

*Note: this review reveals a plot detail some may prefer not to know.*

Emigré Turkish director Fatih Akin's second feature was eagerly awaited by those who appreciated his first: *Head-On*, a hard-hitting study of how a marriage of convenience between a Turkish girl desperate to escape the stifling grip of her traditional-minded immigrant family and self-destructing older guy finally overcomes mutual indifference and neglect to acquire some kind of sacramental force. *The Edge of Heaven* follows a similar West-East trajectory in its characters' movements – indeed it is only in their homecoming to Istanbul that they find peace or clarity (the film's German title means 'On the Other Side') – but the present film is altogether a less gruelling passage than its predecessor.

The film begins with a glimpse of the present, a moment in the narrative that in fact occurs very near the end of the film: Nejat, the film's hero arrives at a petrol station in Turkey and it is clear from his conversation with the *garagiste* that this is a return of sorts. We then flash back to a scene in Bremen where we follow an older man walking down a street selecting a prostitute to sleep with. This, it soon turns out, is the father. The old Turk proposes marriage to this woman on somewhat stark terms, the son is bemused, there are arguments, and in the course of one the woman is killed by the father. He is imprisoned and the son, who has grown to like and respect his stepmother for her sending money home to pay for her daughter's studies, estranged from his own parent determines to trace the woman's daughter in Istanbul.

By now we are hooked by an eventful narrative which is actually a lot less complicated than it sounds, but which is about to get a whole lot more Byzantine in its play with time and place. For, unbeknown to the mother, the daughter, Ayten, has already moved to Germany without residence papers; being somewhat politically active and undesirable at home, she is in fact on

the run from the authorities after a subversive action went wrong. Ah, the fruits of a university education! She seeks help from fellow student Lotte, whose mother views with barely disguised scepticism this new friendship: cue second rift between parent and child, one of the film's many symmetries.

Ayten's claims of asylum are in vain: she is deported back to Turkey and imprisoned for crimes against the state. Lotte travels to Istanbul with the rather hopeless aim of securing her friend's release, and reveal more of this tortuous tale I will not. Suffice it to say that lives change forever, and the most entrenched in their opinions – Nejat, Susanne, Ayten – change the most. We end, as in *Head-On*, in repose.

This is a splendid piece of filmmaking, cleverly written and skilfully acted by its young cast and the mature Hanna Schygulla, former muse of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, a director also drawn to outsiders. What emerges from this very watchable and affecting drama is another view of the immigrant experience from a Turk living in Germany, but this time from multiple perspectives. The immigrant experiences contradictory emotions: love of the homeland, memories (evoked in the opening petrol station scene), traditions and moralities are counterpointed by the need for security economically or otherwise and the desire for comfort. It is this kind of bargain that Nejat's father attempts to strike when he sets the whole drama in motion: a marriage created according to antiquated notions that must survive in a modern liberal society and yet in a sense is only made possible by that society.

**David Clare**