

Richard Jacob - *My Best Fiend* Essay

FMX-342-1 Producing Motion Pictures

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The movie, *My Best Fiend*, is a 1999 documentary film produced by Werner Herzog, a German director. The film documents Herzog's relationship with Klaus Kinski, a German actor and how Kinski acted over the course of their filming relationship. Herzog visits various locations beginning in Munich, Germany where Herzog, as a 13-year-old boy lived with his family in the same boarding house where Kinski, the actor lived. Herzog remembers Kinski would walk around naked and terrorize everybody. Herzog recalls Kinski was full of rage and fury. Herzog would have never guessed he would be working with Kinski later in life. Kinski was a self-taught actor and would eventually work with Herzog on films. Herzog visits a few of the filming locations and interviews a few actors and actresses who worked with Herzog and Kinski on the films. The film is a documentary tribute to Klaus Kinski.

The relationship between Herzog and Kinski was a strange one. On the one hand, Herzog and Kinski were very close, working together on many films. On the other hand, both Herzog and Kinski were at odds; both threatening to kill each other multiple times. The production teams really despised Kinski because Kinski complained constantly and always demanded changes if he was not the center of attention or filmed close up. Kinski would rant and rave on the set for hours; screaming at members of the production crew or the extras. Sometimes, Kinski assaulted the extras in the film. Most of the crew and extras were males and they felt Kinski was too aggressive and diabolical. When filming in Peru, an Indian tribe serving as extras offered to kill Kinski. Herzog declined the offer.

Herzog recalls budget and Kinski being the two biggest problems he encountered while filming. Kinski's ranting (fits) put a strain on the film. Usually, the problems were resolved by Herzog speaking with Kinski. Additionally, Kinski would speak with Herzog about issues the actors were experiencing. Some tactics Herzog deployed was to ask Kinski his opinion. Another time Herzog resorted to showing Kinski a gun and threatening to use it. Herzog meets up with an extra, Jose from one of his films. Jose recalls Kinski being a genius and great actor but, his

ranting fits strained relationships with the production crew and the extras. Contrary to the male point of view, two female actresses shared that Kinski was polite and professional. Eva Mattes, who acted opposite Kinski in the film, *Woyzeck* recalls Kinski emulating great human warmth. And Claudia Cardinale believed Kinski was a warm-hearted, polite, and professional man.

The first scene in the documentary showcases Kinski at one of his Jesus tour rallies performing on stage in front of a live audience. Audiences came to witness Kinski in his raving fits. The first scene of the documentary really showcases the mannerisms and behavior of Kinski depicting him as crazy and unhinged. His facial expressions are that of a deranged and angry individual. In the documentary, Herzog knew Kinski's energy and knew how to evoke it and bring it to life in the films; showcasing Kinski's greatness in front of the camera. The last scene of the documentary is the direct opposite of the first scene. The last scene exposes the kind soul and joy inside Kinski. In the scene, a monarch butterfly will not leave Kinski and stays attached to his hand, head, and shoulder. Herzog comments that he will always keep the memory of Kinski.

The most interesting thing about the documentary was the way the film described and depicted Kinski. The film depicted him as a crazy, raving, mad person who did many outlandish things. But, Kinski was considered and viewed as a great actor if not a genius. And Herzog learned from Kinski. I learned as a director, you can learn from anyone.