

Nachruf auf eine Bestie

("Requiem for a Beast")

W German documentary : 1983 : dir. Rolf Schübel : Oase / ZDF

: 107 min

prod: : scr: Rolf Schübel : dir.ph.: Niels Bolbrinker

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A man behind the monster – Jürgen Bartsch

Source: 14th Internationales Forum

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"A documentary about child-murderer Jürgen Bartsch. By means of tape recordings of Bartsch, who died in 1976 during a castration operation, and through interviews with people who knew him at various stages of his life, this fine film attempts to give "the beast" Bartsch a human face. *** "

14th Internationales Forum des Jungen Films
(1984) programme review:

" "OBITUARY FOR A BEAST" is the story behind the sexual offender, Jürgen Bartsch - one of the most spectacular cases in German criminology. The journeyman butcher had hideously tortured four children, killed them

and dismembered their bodies. As a result he was convicted of murder. In 1976, at the age of thirty, he died on the operating table during the castration which he wanted to have performed on himself. This unusual docu-mentary film records his life based on the statements by those who knew him and his contemporaries as well as on the audible self-portrait of Jürgen Bartsch captured on tape."

No further information currently available. How unlike the approach of 1001 recent television documentaries and studio "debates": on the fate of Myra Hindley, say, the release of the killers of Jason Swift, or other comparable cases that have stewed well in the tabloids. Lust-killers of the adult heterosexual variety remain a highly popular theme for TV movies and police dramas, the prurient interest never blatantly gratified, always cannily titilated. And that voyeuristic subtext is so embedded now that the prospect of any film on a lust-killer of young children will seem quasi-pornographic, however sensitively the subject is approached. Indeed, the more dispassionate it attempts to be, the greater the indignation it will provoke.

Not surprisingly, feature films have a better track record in treating with such uncomfortable subject matter than TV movies and mini-series, for which speechless moral outrage is the only conceivable starting point, but still they shy away from contemplating the implicit motivation. "**ZÄRTLICHKEIT DER WÖLFE**" ('73), for example, although loosely based on the Fritz Haarmann case, succumbed to the fudge of raising the mean age of his victims to late teenagers, and was suffused with an inappropriate air of camp indulgence, while more sombre films such as Fritz Lang's classic "**M - EIN STADT SUCHT EIN MORD**" ('31), Vajda's "**ES GESCHAH AM HELLICHTEN TAG**" ('58, with Gert Frobe) or "**THE OFFENCE**" ('72, with Sean Connery) succeeded only by eradicating the sexual element almost entirely. Of course lust-killings are quite incomprehensible when one removes lust from the equation.

Since the slick term "serial killer" was first coined in the States, and particularly since the debut of Hannibal Lektor, public fascination with the works and pathology of such individuals has if anything intensified. But while "**SILENCE OF THE LAMBS**" was an unusually sophisticated book and film of its kind, even Thomas Harris concerned himself more with the pathology than the tortured psychology of such killers. "Offender profiling" – a fashionable predictive behaviouralist technique used by Harris in his earlier book "Red Dragon" – is concerned more with the *pattern* of criminal lives than the social forces which create such individuals in the first place (the killers in both his books – we are informed *en passant* – were severely maltreated as children, but no matter: they must be destroyed).

All of which makes a clinically detached documentary such as this rather special. Mass murderers like Haarmann in Germany, or Dean Corl in the USA, perpetrated such staggering horrors in expiation of their sex drives that the will to comprehend them is hard to muster, but while comparable cases (to the dismay of tabloid editors everywhere) are thankfully rare, society has an urgent interest in recognising the distress signals such men transmit long before they succumb - without for example conflating it with simple pædophilia, or generating an atmosphere of parental paranoia that is positively harmful to children's social development - and doing so requires a readiness to see even the lust-killers of children as complex human beings, and not mere penny dreadful fiends.

See subject index under **DOCUMENTARIES** for innumerable "shock reports" on this theme, and under **SEX & SEXUALITY** for a sub-section on lust-killers.