



CHESTER FILM SOCIETY PRESENTS:

PARIS, TEXAS

1984 GERMANY/FRANCE 148 MINUTES

Directed by Wim Wenders

Starring Harry Dean Stanton, Natasha Kinski

The man comes walking out of the desert like a Biblical figure, a penitent who has renounced the world. He wears jeans and a baseball cap, the universal costume of America, but the scraggly beard, the deep eye sockets and the tireless lope of his walk tell a story of wandering in the wilderness. What is he looking for? Does he remember?

Wim Wenders' "Paris, Texas" (1984) is the story of loss upon loss. This man, whose name is Travis, was once married and had a little boy. Then that all went wrong, and he lost his wife and child, and for years he wandered. Now he will find his family and lose it again, this time not through madness but through sacrifice. He will give them up out of his love for them.

The movie lacks any of the gimmicks used to pump up emotion and add story interest, because it doesn't need them: It is fascinated by the sadness of its own truth. The screenplay was written by Sam Shepard, that playwright of alienation and rage, and it reflects themes that repeat all through Wenders' career. He is attracted to the road movie, to American myth, to those who stand outside and witness suffering. Travis in "Paris, Texas" is like Damiel, the guardian angel in "Wings of Desire." He loves and cares, he empathizes, but he cannot touch. He does not have that gift.

The movie's story is simply told. Travis (Harry Dean Stanton) asks for water at a backroads gas station, collapses, is cared for at the local hospital. His brother Walt Henderson (Dean Stockwell) comes to fetch him, but when they stop on the road he starts walking away again, down the railroad tracks.

He will not speak. And when he finally does start speaking, it's as if he is haltingly reassembling a self that he lost track of. Walt and his wife Anne (Aurore Clement) live in Los Angeles with Hunter (Hunter Carson), who is Travis' son. We gradually learn pieces of the story: Hunter was left with the Hendersons by Travis' wife Jane (Natassja Kinski), who could no longer care for him, but who sends a check every month from a bank in Houston.

Travis is not insane, not acting out his alienation. He is simply lost in grief, despairing at the way his marriage was joyous for a brief time and then was destroyed by his own drinking and jealousy. He stays for a time with the Hendersons, slowly wins Hunter's trust, walks home with him from school in a sweet little scene where they copy each other's gaits. Then he has a serious conversation with Hunter that leads to them getting into Travis's old Ford pickup and driving to Houston to find Jane.

Wenders is part of that circa-1970 flowering of talent known as the German New Wave (it includes also Herzog, Fassbinder, Schlöndorff, von Trotta). He has always been fascinated by American movies and music; many of his films are set at least partly in the U.S. The music in "Paris, Texas" is by Ry Cooder, and it's lonely and filled with distance (they collaborated again on the Cuban music documentary "The Buena Vista Social Club"). The photography by Robby Muller contains the sense of a far horizon beyond every close shot. The Shepard dialogue lacks all flourish and fanciness, and is about hard truth, long rehearsed in the mind.

Roger Ebert

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PLEASE LEAVE ANY COMMENTS ABOUT THIS FILM ON THE REVERSE OF THIS FORM. MANY THANKS.

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TERRIBLE

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FANTASTIC