

Lost Highway-1997: where nightmares turn to dreams which then revert to nightmares....

I saw this one first in 1999 and was quite intrigued and puzzled; a second viewing in 2006, and some research, helped to clarify what many see as a narrative that makes no sense. On the contrary...

Everybody's on the highway of life and so is Fred Madison (Bill Pullman), a jazz saxophonist at a local club. Fred's life revolves around his jazz music – he plays tenor sax at a local club -- and his wife, the stunning Renee (Patricia Arquette), who he thinks is having an affair. But, Fred's not sure with whom, and he's at a loss about what to do...

His seething jealousy is palpable, however, raging just behind the smooth mask of his handsome face.

The appearance of mysterious video tapes at his doorstep, on successive days, changes everything about their lives: first, just a video of the house front, then a second tape has some clips from inside, and when Fred and Renee see a third video of themselves asleep in bed, it is Renee who demands that they call in the cops. Puzzled, but well meaning, the cops give them some advice, check the house, and as they leave their cards with Fred and Renee, one of the cops says: "It's what we do."

Unhappily for Fred, they do more when, a day or so later, Fred finds another tape with a video of himself, covered with blood, and the dismembered body of Renee thrown about the bedroom... Fred's arrested, tried for murder and sentenced to die – a very quick and compressed action that's done in three or four quick frames, and with no need for much dialog.

Thereafter, the real story begins – and the viewer is then sucked into a bizarre and complex narrative that is so confusing many viewers throw up their hands in despair.

David Lynch is on record as saying that his film art has been much influenced by Francis Bacon, a painter whose work must be seen to be...hmmm...appreciated. No words of mine can effectively describe a Bacon painting: blurred images, raw flesh, body parts, blood galore, contorted faces all form the immediate images. Beyond that, it's up to you to interpret what you see. So, also *Lost Highway*, it seems, which I would characterize as a dynamic – in a literal sense – work of art that must be seen, again and again and again.

As I indicated, most would say that the complete film makes no sense at all, and you'll find many quotes from critics – including Roger Ebert – to that effect. Space, here, is too short to fully discuss this narrative; suffice to say that I disagree with the Eberts of the world on this one.

Because, for me, *Lost Highway* makes *complete* sense when I accept the following premises: (1) Fred is in fact the murderer of his wife; (2) he is, at the very least, temporarily insane, with all the attendant implications of that condition; and (3) he is attempting to rationalize within his mind the unbearable knowledge of what he did.

Hence, from go to whoa for the whole movie, we're inside Fred's fantasy as he attempts to absolve his guilt.

The irony, for Fred – and the viewer – is that we're never absolutely sure if Renee was in fact an unfaithful wife.

The plot, the sequence of events, appears to be non-linear – hence my initial confusion and that of others – and yet it is not. It's perfectly circular from start to finish – from the very first frame to the very last – with the full story unfolding with each bizarre event. However, being so complex and so effectively done, it would be foolhardy for me to attempt a summary. See the movie and you'll know why.

The actors in this tour-de-force are well suited to their roles. As Fred, Bill Pullman has that nice guy look that's perfect for hiding homicidal tendencies; this is still his best effort in serious acting, in my opinion. Patricia Arquette – the wife Renee, suspected of infidelity – appears as the quintessential femme fatale – sexy, voluptuous, devious, untrustworthy; her deadpan throughout is the obvious symbol of her dead love for Fred – or anybody, perhaps. Robert Blake – as The Mystery Man – looks suitably spooky as the visible manifestation of Evil. Robert Loggia does the role of gangster so well, I sometimes wonder about him...(just kidding). And, Balthazar Getty – an actor I'd not seen before – acquits himself well as the confused young lover (and as Bill Pullman's alter ego) playing with fire.

Finally, if you've *not* seen any Lynch movies, well... you're in for a psychological treat unlike anything you've seen before, maybe; but, if you're squeamish, be warned. There are gruesomely bloody scenes, explicit sex scenes, and – for fans of terror – creepy dark corridors, a staple of Lynch's later works. In a very real way, I think, *Lost Highway* is the first of a trilogy of films that has a theme which centers upon the catastrophic effects of jealous rage, and which is expounded upon further with *Mullholland Drive* (2001) and ends with *Inland Empire* (2007).

Highly recommended. Rating: 9

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