



RE-RELEASES

Paris, Texas

Travis Henderson (Harry Dean Stanton) walks out of the desert after four years, to the amazement of his brother, Walt (Dean Stockwell). Reunited with Hunter, his seven-year-old son, Travis decides that they should search for his ex-wife (Nastassja Kinski) so that they can be a family once again. Late, great character actor Stanton took his first, and greatest, leading role in Wim Wenders' moving slice of Americana.

Beautifully shot by Robbie Müller, Sam Shepard's beguilingly simple story is stunningly realised by Wenders, whose stark imagery is accompanied by Ry Cooder's acclaimed score. Winner of the Palme d'Or at the 1984 Cannes Film Festival and the Best Director prize at BAFTA in 1985, *Paris, Texas* is arguably Wenders' greatest achievement.

Kimberley Sheehan, BFI Programmer

A contemporary review

Many of the meanings of *Paris, Texas* can be read out of the title. At once laconic and complexly emblematic, it would seem most immediately to signal another Wenders film set in that ambivalent no-man's-land between the sensibilities of the Old World and of the New. But Wenders has come a long way since he had one of his characters in *In the Course of Time* utter that much-quoted line, 'The Americans have colonised our unconscious'. What we have here – in a faint mirror image of his native country adorned with the emblems of U.S. economic and cultural imperialism – is a land populated by 'aliens' of various colours: Travis, whose maternal grandfather was of Hispanic origin, arrives from a prolonged stay on the other side of the border and first encounters a thickly accented Bernhard Wicki; his sister-in-law is French and his wife of uncertain origin (Nastassja Kinski, almost unrecognisable from her corn-blonde hair and perfect Texas drawl, nevertheless retains her own exotic connotations). Europe becomes, accordingly, the 'other place' which haunts the characters and provides a focus for their fantasies: Walt never found time to visit his wife's homeland, just as Paris, Texas came, in the eyes of Travis' father, to stand in for the romance of Paris, France.

The oddities of Modern America have been more naturally assimilated than in the earlier films, with eccentric secondary characters pared down to two (the 'screaming man' played by Tom Farrell and Viva raving wildly on a TV talk show), while such bizarre details as a huge dinosaur standing guard in front of a roadside diner, or the Statue of Liberty painted on the side of a wall, are kept unemphatically in the background. Even the neon sign of a galloping horse, cited by Sam Shepard as an instance of Wenders' fascination with things American, is elegantly incorporated into the narrative as a time-lapse device: Hunter, *en route* to Houston with Travis, muses that their journey would literally take no time at all if they could travel at the speed of light, and a bridging cut to the illuminated sign obligingly spirits them to their goal.

Paris, Texas is, in fact, marked by Wenders' longstanding concern with the nature of representation and illusion, if less self-consciously so than in his previous work. The hard, bright cinematography, by long-time collaborator Robby Müller, in his first film for Wenders since *The American Friend*, has a similar impenetrability, as if to emphasise the gulf between surface and essence. The characters again live in a world dominated by images; it is not,

one feels, by chance that Walt should be a billboard artist living near Hollywood. There are images that substitute for some absent desideratum: Travis' family snapshots; the plot in Paris (recalling the talismanic photographs of home carried by characters in *Alice in the Cities* and *In the Course of Time*) which he never actually gets to visit and is anyway itself only a vacant lot; and not least the missing Jane, first seen in a blurred home movie prompting Hunter to comment, 'That's not her, it's only her in a movie in a galaxy far, far away'. (The same motif surfaces briefly later when a long-distance phone call from Hunter on his way to Houston is taken by Anne 'far away' in his bedroom decorated with scenes from *Star Wars*.) And images which characters project for others: Travis, aided by the Mexican maid, must rehearse and dress for his role as father, a role light-heartedly endorsed when, in the first scene of father/son reconciliation, Travis and Hunter walk home on opposite sides of the road, each imitating the other.

A similar dynamic of projecting oneself for and on to the Other is suggested in the peepshow scene by the bravura use of the mirror/window between Travis and Jane, and is indexed elsewhere in the dialogue as Travis says of his mother, 'My father had an idea about her – he just saw the idea'. The quest for personal identity is explicitly linked in these ways to that for the integral family, and with an inflection new to Wenders' work. It is significant, for instance, that Travis' odyssey leads him, at least within the time span covered by the film, to Houston and his wife, not to Paris and the fantasy of his own conception: the title here is misleading, no doubt deliberately so. Not that the present ending was a foregone conclusion. According to an interview with Wenders reproduced in the press notes, the character of Jane was initially supplanted by Travis and Walt's father. 'I had already wanted to call John Huston to ask him if he would play the father. At the last minute I didn't do it ... I would have had to drop the idea of Jane. It would have become a role of no importance ... I understood more and more that we needed to ... make her a real character. Everything we had tried before had been a way of avoiding her character. A way of not having to define her, by pushing the responsibility for the story on to someone else'.

There seems in this to be a kind of breakout from the Oedipal deadlock of Wenders' earlier protagonists. Where (with the exception of *The Scarlet Letter*) his women have always finished up marginalised or rejected, here it is the meeting between man and wife that brings about a narrative resolution. Travis' crisis of language, experienced by him as a state of catatonia, just as it was by previous Wenders heroes (Philip Winter in *Alice in the Cities*, Wilhelm in *Wrong Move*, Robert in *In the Course of Time*, Hammett in *Hammett*), as some kind of creative block, is overcome by talking to Jane (making her screen debut in *Wrong Move*, Kinski played the mute Mignon). Questions of family and male/female relations, customarily a blind spot in Wenders' work, become a central focus of concern, even if the stability they offer never actually materialises. Walt's home is built on a hill overlooking the freeway, airport and railroad, with vehicles constantly moving past in the background: the very image of transience. Travis' family, in a typical Wenders trope, inhabited a trailer and their reunion is dominated by the same glaring red that, according to Wenders, was used to connote anxiety and aggression in *The American Friend*. As a resting point from the eternal business of wandering – and a conclusion to the process of narration – this ideal remains as unattainable as Paris itself.

Sheila Johnston, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, August 1984

PARIS, TEXAS

Director: Wim Wenders
©/Presented by: Road Movies Filmproduktion GmbH
Presented by: Argos-Films
In association with: Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Channel Four, Pro-ject
Filmproduktion im Filmverlag der Autoren
Executive Producer: Chris Sievernich
Producers: Don Guest, Anatole Dauman
WDR Commissioning Editor: J. von Mengershausen
Associate Producer: Pascale Dauman
Accountant: Barbara Lucey
Production Co-ordinator: Dianne Lisa Cheek
NY Office Co-ordinator: Lilyan Sievernich
LA Office Co-ordinator: Sarah Fitzsimmons
Production Manager: Karen Koch
Texas Location Manager: Susan Elkins
LA Location Manager: Jim Thompson
Production Assistants: Bonna Newman, Allison Anders, Scott Kirby,
Dean Lent, Patrick Kreuzer
Assistant Director: Claire Denis
Trainee Assistant Director: Michael Helfand
Script Supervisor: Helen Caldwell
Casting Director: Gary Chason
LA Casting Co-ordinator: Sheila Possner
Channel 4 Story Editor: Walter Donahue
Written by: Sam Shepard
Co-screenplay: Wim Wenders [uncredited]
Adaptation by: L.M. Kit Carson
Director of Photography: Robby Müller
Additional 2nd Unit Photography: Martin Schäfer
1st Assistants: Pim Tjujerman, Agnès Godard
Key Grip: Robert Feldman
Best Boy: Arthur Blum
Gaffer: Greg Gardiner
Best Boy: Scott Guthrie
Electrician: Kevin Galbraith
Still Photographer: Robin Holland
Editor: Peter Przygodda
Assistant Editor: Anne Schnee
Art Director: Kate Altman
Assistant Art Director: Lorrie Brown
LA Set Decorator: Anne Kuljian
Property Master: Kim Buckley

Assistant Props (Texas): Craig Busch
Costume Designer: Birgitta Bjerke
Wardrobe Assistant (Texas): Roberta Elkins
Make-up and Hair: Charles Balazs
Music: Ry Cooder
Sound Mixer: Jean Paul Mugel
Sound Processing: Lothar Mankewitz
Boom Man: Douglas Axtell
Re-recording Mixer: Hartmut Eichgrün
Sound Editor: Dominique Auvray
Transportation: Homer Albin, Al Cantu, Lynn Brisbin, Carl Johnson,
Richard Padgett, B.C. Smith, Charlie Griffith, Tom Kelton
Caterer (Texas): Sherry McBride
For: Lotte H. Eisner
With many thanks to: Barbara von Weitershausen

Cast

Harry Dean Stanton (*Travis Anderson*)
Nastassja Kinski (*Jane*)
Dean Stockwell (*Walter R. Anderson*)
Aurore Clément (*Anne Anderson*)
Hunter Carson (*Hunter Anderson*)
Bernhard Wicki (*Dr Ulmer*)
Sam Berry (*gas station attendant*)
Claresie Mobley (*car rental clerk*)
Viva Auder (*woman on TV*)
Socorro Valdez (*Carmelita*)
Edward Fayton (*Hunter's friend*)
Justin Hogg (*Hunter, aged 3*)
Tom Farrell (*screaming man*)
John Lurie (*'Slater'*)
Jeni Vici (*'Stretch'*)
Sally Norvell (*'Nurse Bibs'*)
Sharon Menzel (*comediienne*)
The Mydollz (*rehearsing band*)

German Federal Republic/France/UK 1984©
145 mins

A Curzon release

NEW RELEASES

Hit the Road (Jaddeh Khaki)

Continues from Fri 29 Jul

The Feast

From Fri 19 Aug

Where Is Anne Frank

From Fri 19 Aug

Queen of Glory

From Fri 28 Aug

RE-RELEASES

The Big City (Mahanagar)

Continues from Fri 22 Jul

Paris, Texas

Continues from Fri 29 Jul

The Harder They Come

From Fri 5 Aug (+ intro by season curator and author Lloyd Bradley on Fri
5 Aug 18:15)

Burning an Illusion

From Fri 19 Aug

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goes down.

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