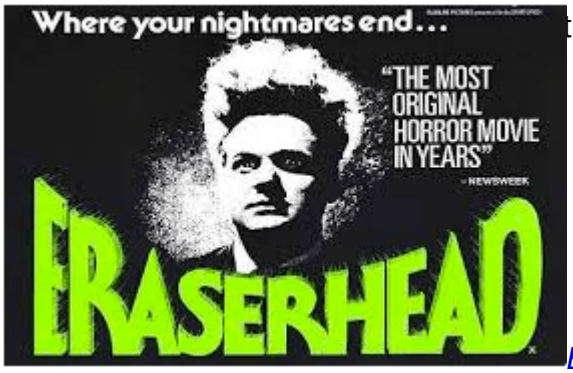


FILM REVIEW: Eraserhead (David Lynch, 1976): USA

Description



the Egyptian Theatre, AFI film festival, Hollywood, Calif. *Eraserhead*, directed by David Lynch, the 2010 AFIfestâ??s guest director, continues to mesmerize audiences with its stark portrayal of the many all too human desires. As NY Timesâ?? Manohla Dargis so eloquently writes â??The black-and-white world of *Eraserhead* disturbs, seduces and even shocks with images that are alternately discomforting, even physically off-putting. It also amuses with scenes of preposterous, macabre comedy, among them a memorable family dinner involving a cooked bird that wiggles obscenely on its plate while it gushes forth a menacing dark liquid.â?• Consequently, Henry Spencer, played by John Nance is informed that he has fathered a child with girlfriend Mary X, played by Charlotte Stewart. However, the child is born as a mutated fetus. The doctors arenâ??t even sure the baby is human any longer. The baby appears with shuffling eyes and a bulbous wet head that looks like a skinned lamb and just lies on a table, cackling and cooing â?? more an emblem of dread than a bundle of joy. Henry and Mary move into Henryâ??s single-room apartment where the babyâ??s constant crying keeps them awake at night. Their existence is dominated by the overwhelming banality of Henryâ??s single apartment and its outlook onto a brick wall. Eventually, Mary walks out, leaving Henry with sole charge of the baby. Henry is left with what is some menâ??s greatest nightmare â?? of being left with the sole responsibility for raising an unwanted child.

Throughout *Eraserhead*, Lynch plays with a good deal of sexual imagery and sexual energy which seems to be the through action of the film. In the opening moments, we see Henry floating through space dreaming and what look like sperm emerging from his mouth. When domestic life with the baby

starts going wrong, Henry is seen pulling sperm out of the sleeping Maryâ??s mouth as though trying to symbolically reverse the pregnancy. The sex in the film seems tinged with disgust â?? Henryâ??s future mother-in-law questions Henry about whether he and Mary have had sexual intercourse and proceeds to come onto Henry by slobbering on his check and neck. Later Henry hooks up with the seductive, attractive woman from across the hallway. However, Henryâ??s bed turns into a glowing swamp. Henryâ??s pick up attempt comes full circle as he sees the woman seducing another man. She teasingly turns to Henry and laughs at him somewhat menacingly. The only happiness Henry seems to find is in his radiator dream-land where a girl with puffy pock-cheeked cabaret-style dancer nervously sings and moves on stage as sperm drop on her. Perhaps as Richard Schieb suggests â??this latter seems to be arguing that masturbation is the only safe form of sex â?? certainly, this would seem to be the case at the climax of the film, which sees Henry going off to join the pure and innocent puff-cheeked girl in radiator dream-land in a blaze of white light that may be the hereafter.â?• And who is the mysterious man depicted at the beginning and at the end of the film? He appears to be â??the man behind the curtainâ?• pulling the lever that controls Henryâ??s fate. Moreover, he quite possibly may represent Henryâ??s bloodline with his disfigured appearance shadowed by the flying sperm-like images. Or, maybe he represents a higher duality of fear and omniscience as Henry, in the opening scene, is seen confessing a wrongdoing and receiving forgiveness. This first scene sets the tone for *Eraserhead*. It is open to your interpretation.

Eraserhead certainly defies any type of classification. Lynch literally seems to have tapped into his subconscious. He uses dreams and dream-like imagery. Overall, *Eraserhead* seems to symbolize industrial dehumanization to a post-holocaust nuclear proliferation era with powerful sexual overtones. Henry lives in the midst of an industrial wasteland. The only views we get of the outside world are of cold, dirty factories. The only greenery we see is in Henryâ??s room consisting of two piles of dirt, one on his dresser and one on his bedside table where branches have sprouted. And, as Scheib so poignantly asks, â??What do the pencil erasers represent â?? do they, as some pedantic academic suggested, symbolically represent the mindâ??s ability to repress or â??eraseâ?? matter?â?• Indeed.

Eraserhead was produced by the American Film Institute (AFI). AFI is known for its Lifetime Achievement Awards and for its production of over 250 short films. *Eraserhead* appeared at the 1976 Chicago International Film Festival, at the Filmex Film Festival in 1977 and at the 1978 Avoriaz Fantastic Film Festival garnering the Antennae II Award. In 2004, The USA National Film Preservation Board named *Eraserhead* to the National Film Registry. It took Mr. Lynch five years to complete it. Other notable films by Mr. Lynch include *Mulholland Drive* (2001), *Blue Velvet* (1986), *Twin Peaks: Firewalk with Me* (1992). Recommended.

Category

1. #AFI
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Tags

1. #AFIFEST
2. American Film Institute
3. Antennae II Award

4. Avoriaz Fantastic Film Festival
5. Blue Velvet
6. Charlotte Stewart
7. Chicago International Film Festival
8. david Lynch
9. Director
10. Eraserhead
11. Film
12. Film Festival
13. Filmex Film Festival
14. Filmmaking
15. John Nance
16. Larry Gleeson
17. Lifetime Achievement Awards
18. Manohla Dargis
19. Mulholland Drive
20. National Film Registry
21. NY Times
22. Producer
23. Richard Schieb
24. Twin Peaks: Firewalk with Me
25. USA National Film Preservation Board

Date Created
October 24, 2016
Author
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