

Two-Lane Blacktop (1971)

Most road films released during the early 70s were about the rebellion between youth and conservative society and yet the film *Two-Lane Blacktop* was less about social criticism and more about individual alienation. Most of *Two-Lane Blacktop* contains rarely any dialogue and plot, focusing more on driving and the cars themselves. The film tells the story of two drifters driving across the country and on their journey they meet up with an older driver who they challenge to a race from the Midwest to Washington D.C. During their travels they pick up a young girl, (actually she hops in their vehicle herself) and she wants to go along for the ride. This film is more similar to *Five Easy Pieces* where it's less about finding liberation and freedom and more about finding yourself. A lot of themes in the film relate back to the 60's European films of Michelangelo Antonioni in which it's less about the plot and more about the alienation of communication between people in a modernist society.

The four main characters are not supposed to have much character development which is why I believe the director chose to not give each character a name and instead call them, The Driver, GTO, The Girl, and The Mechanic. In some ways the cars are the main characters and when the four characters do talk it's usually about the cars and what the cars themselves need. Early in the film when The Girl joins the group there is not one spoken word said directly to her

and when something is said it is directed towards the car instead as The Driver says, “She doesn’t seem to be breathing right.” It’s like the men in this film deliberately treat the women like the cars in the story; an object to possess and hold on to. The under acting and emotion in *Two Lane Blacktop*’s is purposely restrained where it would seem the actors aren’t really trying to act much at all. The acting style reminded me of last year’s *Drive* in which most of that film had long quite moments and when there was some dialog said, there wasn’t much emotion behind the expression. This style of acting also reminded me of the acting in the films of Antonioni and most famously Robert Bresson in which Bresson forbid his actors to show any emotion and eventually the actors are simply speaking the words and performing the actions.

The only real character that forms a sort of personality and also is the most verbal of the four is the character of GTO played by Warren Oates. He’s an interesting redneck who always seems to change his story when he picks up new hitchhikers and likes to lie and fabricate stories on how he won his car and of his background and history. He seems to be such a pathological liar that it’s hard for the audience to really believe anything he says. The Girl becomes a large crucial point in the story in which near the end of the film she becomes sort of a threat to the three men. Like many of the noirs from the 40s these cool, calm, masochistic men seem to be untouchable because of their love for their vehicles like the noir men are untouchable because of their love for their gun. And yet The Girl, like the femme fatale seems to pierce through their tough masculinity and emotionally hurt them with her beauty and sexuality. Even though she seems to be running away from past demons like all the other characters in the film she seems to be the only one that is truly free. She freely hops from one vehicle to another and is allowed to do as she pleases, unlike the three men who are tied down and constrained because of their obsession with their vehicles. At the diner near the end of the film hardly any dialog is really said

except for The Girl saying, "It's no good" and getting up and leaving. She decides to leave with another man completely unaffected unlike the three men she unemotionally tosses aside and forgets about. In the climax of the film, you watch all three men part and go on their own separate journeys, and there is a strange over the shoulder shot of The Driver as the shot begins to slow down and the image fires up like a burn on a film projector. This ending reminds me of what The Mechanic warned The Driver about earlier about the emotional dangers of The Girl saying, "she's going to burn you," which does happen with the burning of the last shot of the frame. These characters will always be lost and disconnected with the world and because of that they will always find themselves unhappy, bitter and alone and will continue driving to a mysterious destination that leads nowhere. Well, at least they have their cars.