



## Mystery Film Weekend XII - "Picnic On Psycho Drive" Film Descriptions

Our theme this year, what I'm calling "Picnic on Psycho Drive," focuses on mysteries of the mind—enduring conundrums that are memorably explored in three compelling films.

In Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), Anthony Perkins gives one of the most celebrated performances in screen history as Norman Bates, a troubled young man who lives with his eccentric mother and runs the seedy Bates Motel. When embezzler and fugitive Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) checks into Unit #1, things go horribly awry, and she is never heard from again. The detective hired to find Marion goes missing himself, leaving Marion's lover and her sister to investigate the mystifying happenings at the Bates Motel. The plot revelations are familiar to even those who have never actually seen the film, but the true power of *Psycho* lies in its chilling inquiry into Norman's disturbed mind. The film both answers and refuses to answer the questions it raises, leaving spectators simultaneously gratified and perplexed. A Hitchcock masterpiece, this atmospheric film has every ingredient that made the director the cinematic paragon that he is.

In the haunting *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), director Peter Weir creates a film of evocative mystery and repressed sexual angst. Set in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Australia in an academy for young ladies, the story chronicles the unfathomable disappearance of several of the students during an outing to nearby Hanging Rock, an imposing stone outcropping in the heart of the vast and bleak Australian outback. The surface mystery—what happened to the picnickers, who go for a hike and vanish forever into the mists swirling about the great rock—overlays the more abiding questions of the film. Weir ponders the repressions of late Victorian sexual mores that govern the prim academy, as well as the uneasy relationship between stuffy British colonial practices and the daunting openness of the Australian world, rife with secrets of its own.

*Mulholland Drive* (2001) throws viewers into a quandary: what is real, what is dreamed, what is conjured by a mind gone unhinged? Director David Lynch presents what at first seems like a fairly straightforward story: sweet, ingenuous Betty (Naomi Watts) arrives in Hollywood to become a movie actress; she befriends a mysterious woman, Rita (Laura Elena Harring) who has survived a car accident but suffers from apparent amnesia. The two play detective to uncover the secrets locked inside Rita's impaired memory, but their journey of discovery leads to increasingly sinister disclosures and more baffling uncertainties. By the film's provocative ending, identities are reversed, moral parameters are redefined, and nothing is as it seems—yet there is a nub there for viewers to chew on. The film is a hypnotic mix of *noir* and dream logic, a cinematic fugue that will linger well after the screen goes dark.