

DARK REFLECTIONS: FANTASY AND DUALITY IN
THE WORK OF DAVID LYNCH

BY

NOLAN BOYD

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

English

May 2014

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Approved By:

Eric Wilson, Ph.D., Advisor

Scott Klein, Ph.D., Chair

Barry Maine, Ph.D.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Eric Wilson for being my guide and my mentor in the creation of this project; to Dr. Mary DeShazer for inspiring my passion for feminism and gender studies; to Drs. Scott Klein and Barry Maine for serving on my thesis committee; to Dr. Todd McGowan, whose scholarship has been like a beacon; and lastly, to David Lynch, without whom this thesis would not be possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iv
INTRODUCTION	v
Chapter I - Light and Shadow: The Cycle of Fantasy in <i>Blue Velvet</i>	1
Chapter II - Dwellers on the Threshold: Doppelgängers and Doorways in <i>Twin Peaks</i> and <i>Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me</i>	21
Chapter III - Jealousy and Psychosis: Split Personalities in <i>Lost Highway</i>	59
Chapter IV - Hollywood Dreams: Desire and Fantasy in <i>Mulholland Drive</i>	79
CONCLUSION	99
REFERENCES	101
CURRICULUM VITAE	104

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the sexual construction of Lacanian fantasy in the work of David Lynch. Primary texts include Lynch's films *Blue Velvet* (1986), *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992), *Lost Highway* (1997), and *Mulholland Drive* (2001), along with David Lynch and Mark Frost's TV show *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991). The thesis builds upon the Lacanian scholarship of Lynch scholar Todd McGowan, examining how fantasy operates and structures the worlds of Lynch's films; the thesis expands upon McGowan's work from a feminist perspective, considering how concerns of gender and sexuality inform the construction of fantasy in Lynch's work. In *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks*, fantasy operates as a necessary element of social structure; the social experience of reality is informed by the existence of fantasy in these texts. *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* turn from the social to the personal, examining how desperate individuals seek escape from their unbearable realities through an escape into fantasy. As this thesis will investigate, although fantasy is a necessary component of the social order, it is inadequate as a means of escape from the troubles of life.

INTRODUCTION

David Lynch is one of the most iconic and easily recognizable of the American filmmakers; his relatively small body of work is indelibly stamped with his unique style, so much so that the term “Lynchian” has evolved to describe the characteristics of his films. Lynch’s work is easily distinguishable from that of any of his contemporaries due to his unique visual and narrative sensibilities. Above all, Lynch is interested in exploring the uncanny; his films disturb and unsettle like few pieces of art can. Lynch achieves this unsettling effect through the use of mise en scene, sound design, acting, and other cinematic tropes, all of which culminate in a pervading sense of atmospheric dread. This establishment of atmosphere is no mere empty stylistic exercise, however, for Lynch utilizes the cinematic form of his films to buttress his investigation into a few key thematic concerns.

Although Lynch’s work varies widely in scope, encompassing everything from surrealist nightmare to Victorian biopic, each of his films evinces a fascination with structural duality. Splitting, reflections, and divisions can be found in all of Lynch’s work, both at the visual and the narrative level. The worlds of his films often divide into light and dark, with benevolent and maleficent characters inhabiting each world in turn. Often, Lynch’s characters will be inherently dualistic, and their narrative arcs revolve around their success or failure at confronting their divided natures. This structural duality serves as a natural buttress for Lynch’s exploration of the uncanny, for the nature of the uncanny can be found in the defamiliarization of the familiar, often through the presentation of the familiar in a new and strange fashion. The uncanny arises when the familiar presents itself in a second form, and the division between these two discrete

entities gives rise to the unsettling presence of the uncanny. Likewise, much of the uncanny in Lynch's work derives from the split between good and evil inherent in communities or even individual characters.

Lynch's concern with duality often coincides with his preoccupation with the division between reality and fantasy, itself a dichotomy. Lynch often employs use of the uncanny in his work to delineate the divide between reality and fantasy and to indicate the permeability of that divide. This manifestation of the fantastic takes different forms in Lynch's work; the surrealist world of *Eraserhead* (1976) seems wholly fantastic, while the fantastic elements at work in *Blue Velvet* (1986) are more subtle. Nevertheless, it is Lynch's preoccupation with fantasy that informs my line of inquiry in this project.

Although all of Lynch's films consider duality and how its organizing principle informs the construction of fantasy, I will be considering the works in which fantasy rises to the forefront as a thematic concern. In the first part of the thesis, I will consider *Blue Velvet* and Lynch's television series *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991), along with its attending feature film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992), as examples of how fantasy structures social life; in the latter half of the thesis, I will turn my attention to Lynch's late period and the films *Lost Highway* (1997) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001), which deal with individual attempts to construct fantasy as an escape from the social realities of life.

Of unparalleled help in structuring my arguments regarding Lynch and fantasy is the work of film scholar Todd McGowan in his book *The Impossible David Lynch*. McGowan reads Lynch's work from a Freudian and Lacanian perspective, and his Lacanian reading greatly informs my own understanding of how fantasy operates within Lynch's work. McGowan emphasizes Lacan's theory that fantasy is constructed around

a principle known as the *objet petit a*, or the impossible object. The *objet petit a* is also identified as the “object-cause of desire,” a person, object, goal, or idea that elicits the desire of a given subject. The *objet petit a* is called “impossible” because it is inherently unattainable; the desiring subject can never access or possess the *objet petit a*. For this reason, the subject creates a fantasy at the center of which lies the *objet petit a* in an attempt to access this impossible object, the idea being that a fantasy could provide the access that is impossible in real life. Nevertheless, the *objet petit a* remains elusive and unattainable, and the fantasy is therefore doomed to failure. Because we cannot face the intrinsic fallibility of our fantasies, we likewise fantasize an external nightmare force that can serve as the scapegoat for the fantasy’s failure. Once the nightmare has raged and been purged, a new fantasy can be generated; in this way, fantasy operates in a never-ending cycle of death and rebirth. McGowan argues that this cycle of fantasy and nightmare buttresses our understanding of life, that we fundamentally structure our experience of life through this fantasmatic cycle. It is fantasy, McGowan suggests, that gives us hope and sustains our dreams; when there is no recourse to fantasy, life becomes singularly unpleasant, stifled, and hopeless.

I will proceed in this thesis using McGowan’s scholarship as a template for my own work. I don’t believe, however, that McGowan goes deep enough in his investigation of the operation of fantasy in Lynch’s work, for I believe that this fantasy is ineluctably sexual in nature. Although McGowan touches on sexual issues in Lynch’s work, he does not consider how issues of sexuality are central to every film and every experience of fantasy in Lynch’s universe. My unique feminist sensibilities therefore bring a newfound focus on the sexual and the feminist to McGowan’s arguments,

extending them. Throughout his career, Lynch has been the target of considerable criticism from feminists who argue that his work is misogynistic and disrespectful of women. My thesis will also serve as a rebuttal against such criticism, for I firmly believe that not only is Lynch not misogynistic, but that he and his work are properly feminist, and that the criticisms that Lynch has received from the feminist community are the result of a fundamental misreading of his work.

In addition to McGowan, there are a handful of other critics whose work will be valuable to my efforts in this project. Martha Nochimson in her book *The Passion of David Lynch: Wild at Heart in Hollywood* examines the complex gender politics at the heart of *Twin Peaks*, and her work is extremely helpful in informing my analysis of *Twin Peaks* protagonist Special Agent Dale Cooper. Slavoj Žižek in *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway* offers a wonderfully in depth reading of *Lost Highway* alongside a detailed consideration of the history of the *femme fatale* that I utilize in my own analysis of the film. Lastly, Greg Olson in his exhaustive book *David Lynch: Beautiful Dark* engages in several passages of close reading which are often enlightening and inspire my own close readings of the films in question. By examining the work of McGowan, Žižek, Nochimson, Olson, and many others, I will synthesize and support my psychoanalytic feminist reading of Lynch and the machinations of fantasy in his work.

I will now briefly consider how my argument will play out in each of my project's four chapters. *Blue Velvet*, David Lynch's fourth film, revolves around the journey of a young man, Jeffrey Beaumont, from innocence to experience as he becomes mired in the lurid and violent mystery that lies beneath the pristine facade of his hometown of

Lumberton. As Jeffrey becomes involved with Sandy, a virginal young ingenue; Dorothy, a tortured nightclub singer; and Frank, the man who holds her in sexual bondage, he is able to discover the dark side of life in Lumberton and, by vanquishing Frank, return to the light.

Light and dark, good and evil, are strangely polarized within the film. On the surface, Lumberton is an almost eerie caricature of the wholesome American town, while Frank and the other elements of his criminal underworld are cartoonishly evil, bizarre, and sadistic. The film hardly seems to have anything to do with real life or to reflect the real world's complex mixture of joy and tragedy. Nevertheless, this separation of light and dark is necessary to examine the mechanisms underlying how both fantasies and nightmares are produced. As McGowan's work suggests, a fantastic and idealized dream or fantasy, like that represented by Lumberton's exaggerated facade, is inherently unsatisfying because it exceeds the bounds of the real and the possible. In order to compensate for the failure of fantasy, it is thus necessary for a nightmare to arise, a terrifying scenario that will then give rise to a new hopeful fantastic dream in a never-ending cycle. By separating light and dark to such a drastic extent, *Blue Velvet* lays bare the mechanism by which this cycle of fantasy functions. Each of the four main characters in the film must deal with his or her own mixture of light and darkness, and each comes to a different resolution, finding peace or despair according to his or her ability to intuit and accept the mechanisms of fantasy.

Twin Peaks, co-created by David Lynch and Mark Frost, is perhaps Lynch's best known work, a quirky and short lived TV show that became a

cultural phenomenon in 1990. Not only does *Twin Peaks* stand at the midpoint of Lynch's career, separating his early work from his later, reality-bending psychodramas, but it is also the fullest expression of his artistic vision and obsessions. With a running time far exceeding that of a feature film, Lynch was able to explore all of the issues that inform his body of work in much greater depth, including his most crystallized and literal focus on duality and dual natures. In *Twin Peaks*, a parallel universe known as the Black Lodge lies adjacent to our world, and the beings that inhabit the Black Lodge can pass back and forth from their realm to ours, taking possession of human beings and using them to carry out their will. Additionally, the spirits of the dead are reflected as evil and twisted doppelgängers within the Lodge. The town of Twin Peaks seems at first like a version of Lumberton writ large, the quirky and humorous townsfolk representing light and the demons of the Black Lodge representing darkness, but a closer reading reveals such a simple dichotomy to be reductive and inaccurate.

Whereas the two sides of Lumberton were diametrically opposed, darkness and light cohabit much more comfortably in *Twin Peaks*. Almost every character is morally ambiguous, with very few characters appearing to be wholly good or wholly evil. Light and dark are mixed in *Twin Peaks*; indeed, as closer examination will reveal, the simultaneous coexistence of joy and tragedy lies at the heart of *Twin Peaks* and particularly at the core of Laura Palmer, its central character. Laura lies at the center of the show; and even though her death is the impetus for the whole plot, her character informs all of the other characters in the show and their struggles. Although *Twin Peaks* features Lynch's most literal

supernatural characters, the division between light and dark in the human heart takes center stage in the show, as we follow Laura, the detective protagonist Dale Cooper, and other characters as they seek to combat the darkness that haunts both the town and their own souls.

Does McGowan's analysis of *Blue Velvet* apply to *Twin Peaks* as well?

Although the world of *Twin Peaks* is not separated into such exaggerated extremes of fantasy and nightmare as that of the earlier work, the show and its follow up film, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, do suggest that McGowan's cycle of fantasy and nightmare is indeed operant, especially considering the ultimate fates of both Dale Cooper and Laura Palmer. A close reading of this marvelously deep and multifaceted text will reveal the mechanisms of the fantasy at work in *Twin Peaks* as well as the issues of duality, sexuality, and the uncanny that permeate and inform the entire show. In addition to the show, I will be considering the film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* as well as the official tie-in book *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer* by Jennifer Lynch.

David Lynch has made four films since the advent of *Twin Peaks* in 1990. Discounting 1999's G rated, Disney produced *The Straight Story*, the other three films represent a distinct artistic change for Lynch. All three films are set in Los Angeles, and all three examine in depth the mechanisms of fantasy that underlay *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks*, plunging their characters into literal fantasies of various natures. Because these films distort the very nature of a linear narrative, they defy easy interpretation; indeed, each viewer's experience is likely to be unique. Nevertheless, close study of these films suggests, at least to my mind,

that each film deals with the attempts of their protagonists to escape their hellish realities through the construction of fantasy. In this project, I will be considering the first two of these three reality-warping films, the first of which is 1997's *Lost Highway*, a dark, violent journey through sexual jealousy, violence, and fevered hallucinations.

Lost Highway deals with a jazz musician named Fred Madison who believes that his wife Renee is cheating on him. Although events are desperately unclear, it appears that Fred murders his wife in a jealous rage and is incarcerated for his crimes. While in jail, he apparently metamorphoses into a young man named Pete Dayton and, after his release, meets a woman named Alice Wakefield who looks just like Renee. I believe that Fred hallucinates his existence as Pete as a means to escape from the guilt he feels over Renee's murder and the terror of his impending execution. Drawing upon the work of Slavoj Zizek and McGowan, I will uncover the mechanisms of Fred's fantasy and why it ultimately proves insufficient.

In *Mulholland Drive*, Lynch improves upon the template set down in *Lost Highway*, examining once again a lonely and desperate character who escapes her torturous existence by creating a fantasy. *Mulholland Drive* is divided into two sections. The first section deals with an aspiring ingénue named Betty who meets and falls in love with a beautiful amnesiac who calls herself Rita. In the second part of the film, Naomi Watts, who plays Betty, now plays a down on her luck actress named Diane, while Laura Harring, who plays Rita, now plays Diane's cruel lover, Camilla. Like *Lost Highway*, the film defies simplistic analysis, and

Lynch refuses to confirm exactly what is happening in the film. Nevertheless, it is clear to me that much like Fred, Diane creates her alter ego, Betty, as an attempt to escape the misery of Camilla's rejection that she experiences in her real life. Whereas Fred's fantasy takes the form of an unstable hallucination, however, Diane's fantasy is a dream, as lyrical and gorgeous as Fred's hallucination is breathless and gritty.

Mulholland Drive is Lynch's only work to deal with queer sexuality and, as in *Lost Highway*, sexuality and desire serve as the lynchpin that structures Diane's fantasy. My analysis of this film will investigate how Diane's fantasy operates within the film, how the film employs the uncanny, the relationship between the uncanny and fantasy, and how sexuality and particularly queer sexuality drives and structures the fantasy.

Viewing all of these works as a whole, it becomes clear that David Lynch views both light and dark as structuring elements of life and that these elements are locked in a cyclical balance. Fantasy, in most cases, is inherently flawed, for it seeks a world that is out of balance, free from darkness; for this reason, a fantasy is doomed to failure, and a nightmare will arise to mask the inefficiency of the fantasy. In this project, I will investigate how fantasy operates in Lynch's work, paying particular attention to how sexuality gives shape and structure to these fantasies. Ultimately, Lynch suggests, although it is foolish to imagine fantasy as a productive avenue to access the *objet petit a*, fantasy itself is a necessary element of life that lends hope and mystery to our experience of the world.

Chapter I - Light and Shadow: The Cycle of Fantasy in *Blue Velvet*

David Lynch established himself as a cult auteur with his first feature *Eraserhead*, won widespread critical acclaim and awards recognition with *The Elephant Man* (1980), and helmed a big budget sci-fi debacle with the critical and commercial failure *Dune* (1984), but it wasn't until he released *Blue Velvet*, his fourth feature film, in 1986 that he firmly established his authorial style and carved out a permanent place for himself in the canon of American cinema. *Blue Velvet* was unlike anything that the cinema going public had seen before. Violent and visionary, perverse and profound, the film scandalized audiences as it probed beneath the placid veneer of suburban America to expose a rotten, corrupt underbelly. Significantly, the film concretized and expanded upon a thematic concern raised in *Eraserhead*: namely, the machinations of fantasy. Although the earlier film is essentially a surreal experience throughout, protagonist Henry Spencer (Jack Nance) inhabits a world clearly structured by desire. He is sexually frustrated and afraid of his mewling, deformed baby, which he sees as an impediment to his achieving sexual and personal satisfaction. Ultimately, he kills the baby and is embraced by the fantastic figure of the Lady in the Radiator (Laurel Near) as he experiences a moment of bliss. Though *Eraserhead* is so surreal as to largely evade the pinpoint machinations of academic analysis, the themes of sexual identity, desire, and fantasy that permeate Lynch's body of work begin to take form in its crucible. As we shall see, *Blue Velvet* expands on these themes, extrapolating the desire structuring Henry's intensely personal fever dream into a social setting.

Henry's journey is a personal one, and his fantasy is a personal fantasy. As we shall see later on, Lynch will return to the construction of personal fantasies in his later

work. But in *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks*, the machinations of fantasy are laid bare as they operate in the social sphere. Crucially, an organizing principle of both duality and sexuality informs the construction of these fantasies. In *Blue Velvet*, the town of Lumberton, seemingly the perfect all American town on its surface, is awash with violence and corruption. This duality between the beauty and order of appearance and the chaos of the hidden center is played out in the film through Lynch's use of a quartet of characters who weave in and out of the story like individual melodic lines, coming together and interacting with one another in various settings and circumstances. By examining these four principal characters and the way that they interact, I will endeavor to elucidate the dualistically structured mechanics of fantasy in *Blue Velvet*, a mechanics that suggests that light and dark, goodness and evil, though diametrically opposed in their epistemology, perhaps must always exist in a state of simultaneity. Additionally, I will examine the extent to which sexual concerns lend structure to the fantasy at play in the film, focusing specifically on the sexual identity of protagonist Jeffrey Beaumont and his journey from adolescent sexual angst to psychosexual maturity.

Before moving on to an analysis of the main characters, a close reading of the film's opening sequence will illuminate the themes of duality at play. The first image in the film is that of a swaying blue curtain; the opening credits unfold over this backdrop while Angelo Badalamenti's main theme for the film plays. The image of the curtain, usually present in Lynch films as red curtains, suggests a veil that will be lifted or a gateway that will be opened to allow the spectator to see what lies behind – red curtains take on this function most literally in Lynch's work in *Twin Peaks*, in which they signify the barrier between the real world and the parallel universe of the Black Lodge. *Blue*

Velvet's curtain certainly evokes the symbolic weight of the gateway, for the curtain slowly dissolves, as the credits end, into the image of a bright blue sky, our first glimpse of the film's world. Additionally, the blue color of the curtain is significant, for Lynch uses the color blue to code for the presence of secrets in his work, a symbology largely established by this film. The blue curtain suggests that there will be hidden secrets that permeate the film, and that these secrets will be related to the existence of a hidden reality that lurks behind or beneath the surface. Even before any characters have been introduced, duality has been suggested as a major theme of the film.

After the curtain fades away, the camera pans down from the sky to reveal a group of scarlet roses growing in front of a gleaming white fence. In the following sequence, we see a group of children crossing the road under the supervision of a crossing guard and a smiling fireman waving to the camera as he rides down the street on his fire truck in slow motion. The town of Lumberton, as we first see it, is redolent of what Martha Nochimson terms "the mass media's infinitely imitable American hometown," a sort of cookie cutter representation of American suburban bliss (99). This blissful façade is far from realistic, however, for the colors seem too perfectly bright, and the fireman who directly engages the camera breaks the fourth wall, drawing attention to the artificiality and performativity of the scene. Betsy Berry explores this artificiality, writing, "The very slow motion in which the typical neighborhood vignettes are shot suggests an unreal, dream-like quality....The resultant image resembles a freeze frame from a psychedelic dream, a nightmarish image of small-town life in America" (84). Indeed, the degree to which this exaggeration of "normality" is taken renders these supposedly bucolic images uncanny and unsettling. As Todd McGowan states, "These

images suggest the kind of perfectly realized fantasy world that one never encounters in reality” (91). This opening segment resembles a fantasy in its uncanniness, suggesting that it is false, artificial, permeable. Lynch seems to be suggesting that this image of small town bliss is a lie, that no existence could possibly be this pure and pristine; the end portion of the opening sequence will bear out this conclusion.

As Tom Beaumont (Jack Harvey) waters his lawn, his wife (Priscilla Pointer) watches a crime film on TV, suggesting again that the criminal or the violent (the film) permeates the supposedly peaceful and edenic (the Beaumont home). As Mr. Beaumont attempts to work a kink out of his hose, he suffers a stroke and collapses to the ground; as he lies on the ground, a dog bites at the water, and a toddler approaches from the neighboring house. The presence of the dog is significant, for, as Mark Allyn Stewart writes, “Dogs are heralds in Lynch films. The appearance or mention of dogs signifies a major event in the story” (108). Crucially, a dog presides over Mr. Beaumont’s collapse, the first inkling that Lynch provides of trouble in the artificially saccharine paradise he has presented up to this point in the film. Mr. Beaumont holds the hose next to his groin, the water shooting out like ejaculate, visually prefiguring in cinematic terms the sexual concerns of the narrative. The baby, an innocent witnessing this pantomime of sexuality, will mirror protagonist Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan) as he moves from innocence to experience, probing the dark, nightmarish underworld of his seemingly peaceful small town. From here, the camera drifts down into the Beaumonts' lawn, separating the blades of grass as it moves, until it reaches a scene of disgusting black beetles writhing in the dirt. The implication is clear: the beetles lurking beneath the

beautiful green lawn symbolize the chaos and evil that underlie the American fantasy of peaceful small town life.

And yet, crucially, neither these repulsive insects nor the unsettlingly jovial fireman represents real life in its complex mixture of joy and tragedy, pleasure and pain, darkness and light; McGowan notes these representational extremes when he describes the film's "light side" and "dark side" as "two different modes of fantasy." Why exaggerate to such an extent? Why does Lumberton have to be a realm of such polar extremes? McGowan suggests that this division allows the viewer to "see [the] logic" of each representation; by separating the world of the film into worlds of light and dark, the mechanisms that drive and structure each become more apparent, and the audience can probe and experience each – the kitschy, uncanny unreality of the fireman and the viscerally disturbing darkness and violence of the insects – in relative hermeneutic isolation (91). Only after life is separated into light and darkness can that light and that darkness, perhaps, exist independently as objects of analysis and scrutiny. Additionally, if Lynch is indeed suggesting that life inherently consists of a mixture of light and dark – that there are always beetles lurking beneath the bright grass – then this dark underbelly of life must necessarily be contrasted with life at its most exaggeratedly pleasant, for only when these two elements exist in equilibrium will the true complexity of life be captured.

What arises, then, is not a picture of life as it truly is, but a picture of life broken in half, pulled apart in opposite directions. Lumberton is not a realistic world, but rather a world in which the machinations of the cycle of fantasy that underlies reality are made plain. We filter our hopes and aspirations for life through fantastic dreams, thus creating our own reality as we perceive it (and crucially not as it actually is, humdrum and

hopeless), but these dreams cannot exist without their dark reflection, the nightmare. Why? Because the dream is unrealistic. We hope for and fantasize the very best for our lives, but because life does contain darkness and disappointment, the nightmare fantasy arises as an external force that can accept the blame of the intrinsic failure of fantasy, thereby maintaining the structural integrity of the fantasy and allowing for the production of a new fantasy in a never-ending cycle. McGowan recognizes this mechanism when he writes, "Though the stabilizing fantasy fails inherently, on its own terms, the existence of the nightmare fantasy enables us to rescue the stabilizing fantasy and explain its failure with reference to an external rather than an internal cause" (93). As McGowan states, our perfect dreams of unsullied bliss are bound to end in disappointment, for the world is not perfect or free of pain. The existence of the nightmare fantasy allows us to explain the failure of the ideal dream without recognizing the flaw inherent to the original optimistic fantasy. As such, the nightmare allows for the production of a new dream, which in turn produces a new nightmare upon its inevitable failure. These two aspects of life are bound together inextricably in a repeating cycle, a motif that Lynch touches on in other works, most notably in *Twin Peaks* and *Lost Highway*. This cyclical structure anticipates the end of the film, which although ostensibly hopeful and a "happy ending," reeks of the saccharine artificiality of the film's opening sequence and also contains a strong note of bittersweet melancholy, suggesting that darkness (along with our dreams of light) can never truly be purged from life. This epistemological ground established, it is clear that *Blue Velvet* views both light and shadow, good and evil, as necessary and, indeed, ineluctable elements of life. By pulling the two apart, *Blue Velvet* allows the audience to not only examine these two facets of life independently, but also to see how each element

informs/produces the other. There is no light without darkness; there is no darkness without light. As Lynch makes clear in his four main characters, light and darkness coexist within us all; learning to find the proper balance between these two forces is, perhaps, the path to peace. A close reading of several scenes will illuminate the manner in which the characters interact with their own forces of light and darkness, finding (or failing to find) a balance between the two in varying degrees.

As the film's protagonist, Jeffrey Beaumont functions on some level as an audience surrogate, probing the dark mysteries of the film and inviting us to journey along with him. As the innocent baby present at Tom Beaumont's stroke suggests, Jeffrey must journey in the film from innocence to experience in his own personal catabasis, plunging deep into the dark underworld of his small town before emerging triumphant at the film's end to a scene of love and happiness. As Olson writes:

The youth needs to become a man, to experience the hot, wet rawness of sex and violence and evil that's hidden within his chaste little town, to be fully conscious that he has the capacity for both light and darkness within his own soul, and to then resolutely choose the righteous path. (223)

Jeffrey's journey is specifically sexual, for his sexual awakening is part and parcel of his entry to the realm of experience; indeed, as *Eraserhead* suggested and Lynch's later works will clarify, the cycle of fantasy that churns beneath Lynch's world is often structured by the sexual identity, desire, and frustration of his characters. Though the fantasy world of *Blue Velvet* is not a personal fantasy such as in *Lost Highway* or *Mulholland Drive*, it is

appropriate that Lynch structures the film, and Jeffrey's own exploration of the light and dark sides of fantasy, around Jeffrey's sexual awakening.

Jeffrey is present in almost every scene, and his encounters with the three other principal characters in the film will inform his personal growth and transformation; as might be expected, Jeffrey must confront not only the darkness of his world but also the darkness within himself in order to reach psychological and spiritual maturity. Jeffrey returns home from college to be with his family after his father's stroke and is drawn in to the mystery at the core of the film after he discovers a human ear in a field. After taking the ear to the police station, Jeffrey decides to pay a visit to Detective Williams' (George Dickerson) house in an effort to learn more about the situation. As Jeffrey walks down the sidewalk, an image of the ear is superimposed over him; the camera zooms in closer and closer until it is literally traversing the fleshy interior of the ear canal. The ear, cut off in an act of violence, is clearly a symbol of the dark, dangerous mystery churning beneath the serene surface of Lumberton; in this scene, the ear takes on the symbolic weight of a gateway through which Jeffrey passes, the gates to Lumberton's underworld. Jeffrey has now officially started his journey, and he will experience much before he is allowed exit through his aural passageway.

Although Jeffrey will certainly become tangled in the violent mystery that produced the ear, he is also clearly a denizen of the film's light world, removed from the pain and sorrow of the underworld until his curiosity compels him to explore it. As he leaves the detective's house, he meets the character who will be his companion on this journey, Detective Williams' daughter Sandy (Laura Dern). Sandy – blonde, angelic, and virginal – seems the most clearly tied of all the characters to the saccharine images of

suburban bliss present in the film's opening sequence. Of all the main characters, she engages the least with Lumberton's seedy criminal underworld, largely keeping her distance while Jeffrey does the snooping. Nevertheless, Sandy has her part to play in Jeffrey's story and her own darkness to confront. Asking, "Are you the one who found the ear?" Sandy makes her entrance into the film by gliding out of the dark, her face softly illuminated against the black backdrop of night. Already she seems mysterious, the shot establishing a clear link between her and the dark hidden world that Jeffrey is poised to discover. As Jeffrey and Sandy walk down the street, Sandy reveals some particulars of the case related to the ear, information that she acquired by listening to her father talk on the phone in his office. She tells him of a singer named Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini) who may be involved in some trouble; when Jeffrey expresses his curiosity, Sandy takes him to Dorothy's apartment building, crossing Lincoln Ave., the street from which Jeffrey's Aunt Barbara (Frances Bay) had previously warned him to stay away. Although Jeffrey will be the one to ultimately get mixed up in Dorothy and her problems, Sandy certainly leads him to Dorothy and her world of violence and sorrow. When Jeffrey later reveals his plan to sneak in to Dorothy's apartment, Sandy, though reluctant, agrees to help him, implicating herself in Jeffrey's exploration of this dark world. Discussing the scene of Sandy's introduction, Michel Chion ponders Sandy's relationship with the darkness in the film:

When Sandy appears...she emerges from the disquieting shade of the leaves and a tremor of wind. The music at this moment is particularly unsettling and then who do we see? An ordinary high-school girl and yet, as she will say a number of times, she is the starting-point for his meeting with [Dorothy]....Sandy and

Dorothy incarnate two sides of one figure, each side endlessly leading to the other as in a Möbius strip. Their worlds are divided according to a traditional scheme: the blonde is associated with conventional life and daytime whereas the brunette belongs to the night and a world of shady, fearful characters. (91)

As Chion rightly notes, Sandy exists in the film as a double of Dorothy, the other lead female character, as each serves as an object of Jeffrey's sexual desire. Sandy and Dorothy are opposites – the virgin and the whore, Eve and Lilith – and yet each contains within her an element of the other; for just as Sandy is tied to the darkness and drawn by her curiosity to the dark mystery, Dorothy, mired in darkness, is desperately seeking the light.

After Jeffrey has stolen the key to Dorothy's apartment, he and Sandy go to the Slow Club to see Dorothy sing. Bathed in blue light, Dorothy sings "Blue Velvet," evoking through the color the secrets that she keeps. The red curtains behind her suggest a gateway from Jeffrey's world into her world; indeed, after Jeffrey and Sandy leave the club, Jeffrey sneaks in to Dorothy's apartment, where he witnesses the malevolence of her dark world firsthand. In the film's most infamous and disturbing scene, Jeffrey is forced to hide in the closet to avoid being detected by Dorothy when she comes home. He makes a noise, so she finds him anyway, holding him at knifepoint and fellating him. When there is a knock at the door, Dorothy orders Jeffrey to be quiet and forces him back in the closet; from this hiding place, Jeffrey will observe the shocking act of violence that occurs next. Frank (Dennis Hopper) enters the room and sexually abuses Dorothy in a bizarre and extremely difficult to watch ritualistic rape. The scene bears obvious resemblance to the Freudian primal scene: the son, experiencing a latent sexual desire for

his mother, witnesses an act of copulation between his parents. The experience is traumatic because the son witnesses the phallic assertion of his father's power firsthand and, cognizant of his father's power, fears castration by the father should the father uncover the son's desire for the mother. In this Oedipal fantasy, Jeffrey is the naive and sexually immature son, the older Dorothy his mother figure, and Frank the obscene and phallic father. But more than merely having an Oedipal relationship with Frank, Jeffrey sees a reflection of himself.

Much as Sandy and Dorothy function as doubles of one another, so too do Jeffrey and Frank evince a strong connection: both are sexually desiring males who act out their desire on Dorothy, using her, albeit in different manners, for their own sexual purposes. Berry examines this relationship between the two, writing:

Jeffrey's first encounter with "double" Frank is full of Freudian implications....In truth, Jeffrey Beaumont is discovering not only the opposing realities of the world around him, but also the two natures which are in opposition within himself. He does not want Dorothy by force...but the part of his nature which is more like Frank must discover her dark secrets. (84-85)

Jeffrey, who desires Dorothy, is shocked and disturbed by the scene of violence he witnesses, not only because the scene is horrific, but because he sees in Frank a reflection of his own dark sexual desires. When Dorothy asks Jeffrey to do as Frank did and hit her, Jeffrey emphatically refuses, afraid of accessing this part of himself. Of course, Jeffrey will eventually acquiesce and hit Dorothy in a later scene, symbolically embracing the darkness within himself, a process that begins in his voyeuristic

observation of the rape. As Jeffrey leaves the apartment, he discovers a photograph of Dorothy's husband and son, revealing that Dorothy's happiness – taken from her by Frank and his dark desires – takes the form of family bliss, linking Dorothy to the light side of Lumberton much as Sandy is linked to the dark. She desires to recover her family and resume her role as wife and mother, free from Frank's brutal influence. Jeffrey will seek to assist her in this endeavor, but before Jeffrey returns to Dorothy, he will reveal what he has learned of the mystery to Sandy.

Jeffrey and Sandy go for a drive and park in front of a church. After Jeffrey reveals what he has learned to Sandy, she responds by telling him of a dream that she had in which the world, dark due to the absence of robins, is illuminated by the light of love upon the robins' return. The hyperbolic image of the "blinding light of love" combines with swelling organ music to evoke the same over the top purity and light of Lumberton's innocent façade, the world that Sandy largely inhabits. Nevertheless, the music itself is beautiful, and Laura Dern's performance of the scene is completely heartfelt. That the scene follows directly after the rape scene suggests an epistemological connection between the two scenes. Indeed, if the rape scene is the film's most unnerving glimpse into Dorothy and Frank's world of darkness and depravity, then this scene suggests itself as its antithesis, a fervent declaration of belief in the goodness and purity of life, or at least of the bright fantasy world that Sandy and the other good people of Lumberton inhabit. This scene is necessary to balance out the horror of the rape scene; the hope that Jeffrey draws from Sandy and her dream will accompany him on his journey into darkness and will manifest again, at the end of the film, as a symbol of Jeffrey's hard

won happiness. Before Jeffrey can attain this happiness, however, he must confront his own darkness.

Even as Jeffrey yearns to help Dorothy, he also enacts his sexual desire upon her much as Frank does. As Colin Odell and Michelle LeBlanc state, Jeffrey “[takes] advantage of Dorothy’s weakness, her need to be loved, and [uses] it for his own sexual needs”; insomuch as Jeffrey’s voyeuristic observation of the rape scene has ignited this sexual infatuation with Dorothy, Odell suggests that Jeffrey has been “contaminated by exposure” (68). This dualistic approach to Dorothy finds its reflection in Frank as Jeffrey’s counterpart; as Jeffrey watches Dorothy perform at the Slow Club, he catches a glimpse of Frank in the audience, rubbing a piece of Dorothy’s blue velvet robe and silently weeping. Although Frank, at every other moment of the film, appears a thorough monster, this scene suggests that his mistreatment of Dorothy is motivated, at least in part, by love. Perhaps Frank dreams of some twisted version of the domestic bliss that Dorothy used to enjoy and to which she so desperately yearns to return; even in this character, who seems so completely evil, light and dark are mixed. When Jeffrey yields to his own dark sexual impulses, he strikes Dorothy while having sex with her. It is at this moment that Jeffrey recognizes and embraces outright the darkness within him, modeling his behavior on that of his deranged “father,” Frank, in abusing and dominating female sexuality. At this point, Jeffrey is aligned with not only Frank’s violent behavior but with the larger patriarchal structure of gender relations that violently oppresses women and that valorizes men as their masters. Dorothy, twisted by her history of abuse and suffering perhaps from Stockholm Syndrome, welcomes the blow.

As Jeffrey leaves the apartment, he encounters Frank and his posse of henchmen; Frank forces Jeffrey and Dorothy to partake in a “joyride,” in which they visit a bizarre locale that is perhaps a brothel presided over by Frank’s memorably strange friend Ben (Dean Stockwell). At the brothel, Dorothy is allowed to see her son; we hear her exclaim off screen, “No! Donny, momma loves you!”, suggesting that her young son views her long absence from him as purposeful abandonment. This causes Dorothy distress, for it represents a further impediment to her recovering the familial bliss she once possessed. After Dorothy reenters the room, Ben performs a karaoke rendition of Roy Orbison’s “In Dreams,” by which Frank is first mesmerized, then disturbed. Although the moment is epistemologically murky, perhaps the song for Frank represents his dreams of a better life with Dorothy, dreams that were perhaps on his mind as he cried while watching Dorothy perform at the Slow Club. Much as Jeffrey is disturbed by the presence of the dark nature within him, Frank is disturbed when confronted with these dreams of happiness, perhaps realizing that he is too far lost within his own darkness to recover such a dream.

After leaving the brothel, Frank takes Jeffrey to a field far from town, where he tells Jeffrey, “You’re like me.” Frank has recognized the similarity between him and Jeffrey; and after Frank punches Jeffrey into unconsciousness, leaving him to awaken alone in the field the next morning, Jeffrey comes to explicitly recognize this affinity as well. After Jeffrey stumbles home, he sits on his bed and recalls his mistreatment of Dorothy and her despair when facing her son’s rejection at the brothel; he weeps as these images come to his mind, sad that he embraced the darkness within himself, now rejecting it and the violence it and Frank symbolize, avowing to himself once again that he will help Dorothy recover her past happiness. As Odell and Le Blanc state, “the

beating marks [Jeffrey's] final initiation into manhood" (66). He has confronted the darkness within himself and has disavowed it, deciding that he will instead combat the forces of evil (i.e. Frank). Because Jeffrey's journey into manhood is, as has already been stipulated, inherently sexual, by rejecting Frank and the darkness he symbolizes, Jeffrey also rejects the violent and oppressive patriarchal system of gender relations for which Frank stands as a hyperbolic signifier. Jeffrey not only rejects his own violence, but he rejects the very notion of male violence enacted upon women and the notion that women should occupy a position of inferior power to men. His sexual maturation complete, Jeffrey is now free to pursue a reciprocal, respectful, and sexually equal relationship with a woman.

When Jeffrey next sees Sandy, the two attend a dance where they kiss and confess their love for one another. Significantly, whereas Jeffrey's sexual relationship with Dorothy seemed based entirely on lust, this moment with Sandy reveals that, his dark sexual urges purged, he is now able to form a loving romantic relationship with a woman. Whether Jeffrey and Sandy's love is mature is debatable - the scene does find them slow dancing with a group of other teenagers in somebody's basement. The key difference, however, lies in Jeffrey himself; he can move forward with Sandy because his experience with Dorothy has led him to a place of adult sexual maturity. Nevertheless, before Jeffrey can enjoy his relationship with Sandy, before he can return from the hell that he has entered, he must purge the darkness from his world so that the cycle of light and dark can continue and a new hopeful dream can be generated. In order to do this, he must eliminate Frank, the chief embodiment of the film's dark and evil energy, and liberate Dorothy from his clutches. Dorothy, however, comes to Jeffrey, appearing naked and

beaten on his front lawn after he and Sandy have left the dance. Jeffrey and Sandy take Dorothy to Sandy's house, where Dorothy makes explicit references to the sexual relationship between her and Jeffrey. Sandy, appalled, begins to cry. Significantly, the naked and bruised Dorothy, now a physical representation of the destructive power of Frank's violence, has entered Sandy's home, the stronghold of Sandy's candy colored domestic bliss. Whereas Jeffrey went willingly into the underworld, the underworld itself has now come to Sandy. Sandy is forced to confront the darkness just as Jeffrey has been forced, and she recognizes that this darkness is partially her own darkness; as Odell and Le Blanc write:

While [Sandy] is appalled at the naked Dorothy vouching for Jeffrey's semen, her shock isn't only at Jeffrey's infidelity...but at the fact that, deep down, she is aware that she was complicit in the relationship....All through the film she subtly steers Jeffrey in the direction of a solution while, for the most part, shying away from confronting the truth directly. For that to happen, the mystery – Dorothy – must come to her. (69)

Much as Jeffrey has his own work to do before he can enjoy peaceful suburban bliss with Sandy, Sandy herself must confront the darkness both her hometown's and her own. Although she is upset by what she sees, she too will play a role in the film's climax, assisting Jeffrey's battle against Frank by attempting to radio her father and, unable to reach him, running to Dorothy's apartment herself. Weeping alone in her room after Jeffrey has gone with Dorothy to the hospital, she asks, "Where is my dream?" Though she forgives Jeffrey for his transgression, his betrayal has hurt her deeply and shaken her faith in the unrealistically saccharine fantasy in which she has been living. She has

looked into the face of darkness only to find her own reflection there; by confronting her own darkness, Sandy has accomplished what Jeffrey had before her, an integration of light and dark in the first step to living a balanced and aware life. As the film later shows, however, Jeffrey and Sandy will retreat back into the fantasy dream world rather than accept the world's balance of light and dark. Before a new dream of hope can be generated, though, Jeffrey and Sandy must work together to destroy the nightmare into which they have now both been plunged.

In the film's climax, Jeffrey goes to Dorothy's apartment in an attempt to save her husband Don (Dick Green) and restore Dorothy to her peaceful domestic bliss. He is unable to achieve this goal, for he finds Don dead alongside Tom Gordon (Fred Pickler), Frank's mole in the police force. Frank appears at the apartment, and Jeffrey hides from him in Dorothy's closet before shooting him dead with Gordon's gun. In this moment, Jeffrey destroys the source of the darkness that has haunted the story. Sandy appears with her father in Dorothy's apartment after Frank's death; just as Dorothy brought the darkness to her in her own home, Sandy here enters the special nucleus of the film's darkness, indicating her new willingness to embrace both the light and dark aspects of life. Jeffrey and Sandy kiss in the hallway outside Dorothy's apartment as the screen fills with white light, a visual trope invoking the attainment of heaven or bliss in Lynch's films.

From this light, we see a close up of Jeffrey's ear, the camera zooming out, indicating that Jeffrey has finally completed his catabasis and emerged from the underworld that he inhabited for so long. In the film's final scene, Jeffrey's family and Sandy's family come together to share a meal. "Mysteries of Love," Jeffrey and Sandy's

love theme, swells on the soundtrack as Jeffrey, Sandy, and Aunt Barbara observe a robin holding a beetle in its mouth. The implication is clear: Sandy's robins have finally arrived and conquered the evil darkness represented by the beetles. Far from being a tidy "happy ending," however, the flow of images in this scene suggests a more ambivalent reading. This is not the world as it really is; rather, Jeffrey and Sandy have returned to the heightened fantasy of suburban bliss that they occupied at the beginning of the film. To emphasize this, Lynch repeats certain images from the opening sequence, including the smiling fireman and the red roses against the white fence. John Alexander examines the artificiality of this peace and happiness, writing:

Somehow "the blinding light of love" Sandy had described earlier has made the picket fence a little too white, the lawn too green and the sky too blue....The scene is as pretty as it is artificial, as artificial as the charade of security and normality which the suburbs proclaim. (108)

This artificiality is to be expected, however, if the film is to adhere to the cycle of light and darkness that Lynch suggests is at work in this world. Now that the darkness has been purged, a new fantasy of bliss can begin; when this fantasy ultimately fails or falls short, a new nightmare will arise to account for its insufficiency. To quote from the shooting script of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, "Everything will proceed cyclically." To make this point clear, Lynch gives the final moment of the film not to Jeffrey and Sandy, but rather to Dorothy. As Dorothy's son walks toward her, she extends her arms for a loving embrace; as she holds her son, however, her look of joy is replaced by a look of worry, and "Mysteries of Love" fades away as we instead hear Dorothy singing the refrain of "Blue Velvet." Dorothy has broken free of the nightmare that caged her, but

she has not been able to return fully to her familial bliss, for her husband is dead. She accepts the bitter and the sweet together, and her joy of the moment is tempered by her grief and her uncertainty for the future. Whereas the film began with a very self-conscious splitting of light and dark through the opening cascade of images, this last scene, for perhaps the only moment in the entire film, shows light and dark come together as one to reveal the simultaneity of their existence outside of the machinations of fantasy. Jeffrey and Sandy may continue to trust in a dream of robins, but Dorothy, who has lived in both the dream and the nightmare, no longer has any such illusions.

Ultimately, each of *Blue Velvet*'s four main characters reaches a different relationship to the duality of light and shadow that exists both around and within them. Frank, too far gone into the darkness, perishes because he has lost his access to the light, his love for Dorothy instead manifesting in terms of dark and violent sexual abuse; and he is unable to maintain a proper balance between these forces. Jeffrey and Sandy have confronted the darkness within themselves and, as a result, have won the right to love; their love is pure rather than the adolescent sexual obsession that Frank and Jeffrey both imposed upon Dorothy. Especially in Jeffrey's case, this confrontation with darkness has resulted in personal growth and maturity, for only by confronting the darkness has Jeffrey been able to actively choose to follow the better angels of his nature rather than his inner demons; Jeffrey and Sandy's love is a reward for this sexual and psychological coming of age. Jeffrey has rejected the patriarchal model of sexuality represented by Frank that harms and oppresses women, opting instead to form a loving and reciprocal relationship with Sandy. Nevertheless, both Jeffrey and Sandy have retreated into a new hopeful dream, living in a fantasy that will necessarily precipitate further trouble down the way.

Only Dorothy, by far the most interesting and psychologically complex character in the film, seems to capture the perfect balance of light and dark, enjoying the love she shares with her son even as she seems to be aware that, unlike in a fantasy, their lives will be far from perfect.

Chapter II - Dwellers on the Threshold: Doppelgängers and Doorways in *Twin Peaks* and

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me

With *Blue Velvet*, Lynch enjoyed popular success and critical attention, both positive and negative. Regardless of the critics' mixed opinions, however, that film firmly established Lynch as a major new voice of American cinema. Lynch's next substantial project, however, would not be a film but a TV show. Lynch collaborated with TV writer Mark Frost to co-create *Twin Peaks*, a murder mystery set in the titular small Northwest town where everybody's hiding a secret and nothing is as it seems. *Twin Peaks* debuted in April of 1990 to nearly 35 million viewers, and a cultural phenomenon was born quite literally overnight. But when the show refused to answer the central question, made popular by ABC's marketing, of "Who killed Laura Palmer?" in the first season finale, fans were angered. ABC forced Lynch and Frost to reveal Laura's (Sheryl Lee) killer halfway through the second season, a creative disaster which led to ever declining viewership. Just as quickly as *Twin Peaks* had emerged, it was summarily canceled, its last episode airing in June of 1991. Not content to abandon *Twin Peaks* so suddenly, David Lynch directed a prequel film, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, which debuted in 1992 to extremely negative reviews. The film was the final entry in the story of the little town with the mysterious secrets; and Lynch, exhausted by the experience, would take a five year break from movie making before returning in 1997 with *Lost Highway*.

On its face, *Twin Peaks* revolved around the investigation into the murder of local homecoming queen Laura Palmer, whose corpse is discovered at the beginning of the pilot episode. Really though, the narrative of *Twin Peaks* was tripartite. The story of the

investigation served as a framing device that allowed the show to explore the town, its strange inhabitants, and their various schemings and goings on. And at the center of it all was Laura's story, revealed piece by piece in the show and explicitly explored in the film. Her story would prove to be Lynch's greatest dirge, a lament of violence that explored the evil forces that could taint and drown a blooming, radiant innocent.

To examine the beginning of this story, it is necessary to consider *Twin Peaks*' direct debt to *Blue Velvet*. *Twin Peaks* seems very much like Lumberton — in the Northwest this time rather than in the Southeast, but still a small town, idyllic on the surface and yet teeming with hidden evil, that depends upon lumber for its chief industry. *Twin Peaks*, it seems, will be a more in depth examination of the themes already on display in *Blue Velvet*; considering this pre-established epistemological framework, it will then be helpful to investigate the extent to which *Twin Peaks*, as *Blue Velvet* before it, explores sexual identity, hidden secrets, and the cycle of light and dark that informed the construction of fantasy in the earlier film.

Although *Twin Peaks* shares many notable similarities with *Blue Velvet*, it is also important to note how the two works differ. Whereas in *Blue Velvet*, the worlds of the beautiful fantasy and the dark nightmare, both equally and purposefully artificial, are largely separated, the world of *Twin Peaks* is one in which, as in real life, light and dark cohabit much more freely. The characters in *Twin Peaks*, even those who seem to clearly fall into good or evil camps, seem much more like real, complex people than the largely cartoonish characters of *Blue Velvet*; it is telling that Dorothy, as the only character to truly reach an equilibrium of light and dark, was by far the most interesting character in the film. The good characters of *Twin Peaks* have flaws and weaknesses, and the dark or

evil characters often undergo positive character transformation or otherwise engender some measure of empathy from the audience. *Blue Velvet* wasn't trying to accurately represent the real world; it split the world into opposing halves to make its philosophical/psychological point. *Twin Peaks* collapses that opposition, and the result, if less easily reducible, is, to my mind at least, infinitely more interesting. Once again, sexuality is key to understanding the operation of fantasy in Lynch's work. Whereas *Blue Velvet* took the form of a sexual journey from adolescent naïveté to adult experience, *Twin Peaks*' consideration of sexuality is a bit more complicated. Once again, Lynch utilizes his narrative to attack the patriarchal system of power that holds women in socio-sexual bondage; the character of Laura Palmer is, even more so than Dorothy, Lynch's great example of a woman suffering under the patriarchy. In this chapter, I will explore how Lynch uses the show to indict patriarchal social structures, examine how the show's construction of fantasy relates to these sexual politics, and consider how the figure of protagonist FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) suggests a new and ethical blueprint of masculine identity.

Academic analysis of *Twin Peaks* is rendered difficult due to the enormous cast of characters and the myriad, sprawling plots that parallel and intersect one another over the course of its thirty episodes. A full analysis of every plot line and every character would be an exhaustive effort, and one that I don't particularly even consider to be necessary. No matter how interesting the town's quirky inhabitants are, *Twin Peaks* remains a story centered principally around two characters: Dale Cooper, the intrepid detective protagonist, and Laura Palmer, the show's absent center. I will of course consider other characters in my analysis, but it seems a wise decision to ground my exploration of *Twin*

Peaks in its two most memorable and important characters. I will additionally undertake close readings of several important passages in the show in order to elucidate the cinematic mechanics that underpin the telling of this vast story.

I will begin at the beginning — the opening credits. As the slow, dreamy opening theme begins to play, we see a series of images showing the town's woodland setting and the sharpening of saw blades in the Packard saw mill, erupting in fountains of red-orange sparks, suggesting, via Lynch's fire imagery, that danger hides beneath the placid façade of this small town. After some more saw sharpening comes the iconic image of the Welcome to Twin Peaks sign planted by the side of the road, framed by the image of twin mountains in the background. Already, the name of the town seems feminine, suggesting a woman's breasts. Even in the name of the show, of the town, duality emerges as a structuring principle, emphasizing the dual nature of life in Twin Peaks and the secrets that lie hidden in the community. Then an image of Snoqualmie Falls (rechristened Whitetail Falls in the show), the flow of water further redolent of feminine, menstrual imagery. The camera drifts lazily downriver, carrying us into the town of Twin Peaks.

The pilot episode (written by Mark Frost and David Lynch, directed by David Lynch, numbered as Episode 0 in the episode count) opens in the water, where the credits leave off. We see two ducks on water; a dissolve reveals them to be swimming in front of a large house on the edge of the shore. Another dissolve takes us inside the house, showing us a black lamp in the shape of two greyhounds. The camera pans left, and we see Josie Packard (Joan Chen), reflected in a mirror, applying red lipstick. Duality has already surfaced in the show's structure — two ducks, two greyhounds, and now a reflection. The camera cuts from Josie in the mirror to a scene of Pete Martell (Jack

Nance) telling his wife Catherine (Piper Laurie) that he is “gone fishing.” The camera cuts back to Josie, who looks up from the mirror upon hearing the door close, and the camera lingers for several seconds on her face, inviting the audience to once again contemplate her beauty, her exoticism, and her mystery. A cut to outside; Pete walking on the shore. He sees an object wrapped in plastic washed up under a giant log and goes to investigate. He sees that it’s a human body and telephones the sheriff’s office, giving us the immortal line, “She’s dead. Wrapped in plastic.” Sheriff Harry S. Truman (Michael Ontkean), local doctor Will Hayward (Warren Frost), and sheriff’s deputy Andy Brennan (Harry Goaz) arrive on the scene. Sheriff Truman and Dr. Hayward roll the body over and part the plastic, revealing the dead face of Laura Palmer — the birth of a mystery. Olson examines the moment:

The dead visage of Laura Palmer is one of *Twin Peaks*’ iconic images. Lynch, the better to imprint her terrible beauty on our senses, gives us a huge close-up of the closed eyes, grey-ivory cheeks, chill blue lips, glistening grits of pale sand sprinkling her forehead and water-darkened blond hair. With her face-framing penumbra of water-beaded plastic, she’s a Madonna of the Far Shore who will lure many travelers. (273)

Indeed, the image would go on to become iconic, gracing posters and the covers of magazines. The image, beautiful in its composition and yet horrifying in the violence it represents, serves as a signifier for the whole show, indicating for the first time *Twin Peaks*’ unique blend of beauty and horror. Already, in this opening sequence of the first episode, Lynch has indicated the importance of duality to the construction of the show and presented the viewer with the horrifying yet beautiful image of the victim of sexual

violence. As we shall see, sexuality and duality will continue to play an integral role in the show's consideration and construction of fantasy.

Now that Laura has been properly introduced to the series, she will haunt every moment of the show to follow with the ghost of her absence. Her death ripples throughout the town like a stone thrown in water; indeed, no matter how vast the cast of characters that populate Twin Peaks, Laura lies at the center, at least for the audience, for it is through her and the investigation into her murder that we are afforded access to the town. As Michel Chion states, "In her death Laura seems to authorise everything, generously to let it all sprout from the landscape which her body has become" (118). Because the show begins with her death, however, Laura will remain a center that is inherently absent. We will hear her voice on audio tape, we will see her recorded on video tape and even once in a flashback, as well as in dreams, but she will never be wholly present, at least not until the film. Almost as an acknowledgement of this simultaneous omnipresence and non-presence, Laura's framed photograph presides over the end credits of all but a small handful of episodes.

Because Laura animates both the desire of the spectator and of the characters to solve the mystery of her death yet is also forever absent, she functions as the *objet petit a*, what Lacan terms the "object-cause of desire," that one thing that gives rise to and structures desire and the fantasy that arises as a possible solution to that desire. Laura is certainly the *objet petit a* for the viewing audience; we yearn to understand her as a subject, to intuit the contours of her own desire, and yet she remains out of reach, for she is dead, and whatever subjectivity she once possessed has been obliterated by her murder. And because of this perceived lack, we grieve her, as surely as do the characters in the

show; one is reminded of Kristeva's revulsion upon seeing the corpse, not because the corpse is disgusting in and of itself, but because the erasure of being, for which the corpse stands as a signifier, is the ultimate horror, and thus the corpse the ultimate object. It is a location of fear, horror, and sadness; but the beauty that Lynch makes us feel so achingly, still so delicately preserved in Laura's ice blue lips and the twinkling golden grains of sand across her face, keeps us yearning, hoping that through our investigation of her death, we might be able to restore her, somehow, to life.

The issue of fantasy arises now that we understand Laura to be established as the *objet petit a*, for fantasy acts as a false conduit that seems to offer access to the impossible object. Although there are certainly elements of *Twin Peaks* which one might label "fantastic" (demons, parallel dimensions, psychic visions), the real fantasy at work in the show is closer in nature to the fantasy that structures real life. As *Blue Velvet* made clear, we all create fantasies out of our desire (specifically for the *objet petit a*), and when those fantasies are not born out, we create nightmares to mask and explain their inherent insufficiency. In *Blue Velvet*, it can be surmised that because the fantasy world resembled so strongly a candy colored, exaggerated representation of 1950s suburban bliss, the *objet petit a* giving rise to this fantasy is precisely that, an innocence and bliss that, due to the darkness inherent in real life, is never attainable. *Blue Velvet* presented a world in which the *objet petit a* had in fact been attained through fantasy; the price to pay for such unreal happiness is, of course, the unreal horror of Frank and Dorothy's shadow world.

In *Twin Peaks*, Laura serves as the *objet petit a* specifically because of the image she presented to the world, that of the wholesome, radiant homecoming queen. In this

capacity, Laura becomes a signifier for exactly the dream of American bliss that pervaded the light world of *Blue Velvet*. The people in the town of Twin Peaks, dreaming of such a happy, bucolic life, filtered their dreams through Laura. But as her murder reveals, such dreams are inherently false — fantasy rather than reality. Laura can still function as the *objet petit a* in death, a martyr on the altar of *Leave it to Beaver* and *Ozzie and Harriet* Americana. And yet there is the nightmare to consider, the nightmare that took Laura's life, the shadow self of the fantasy that arises to explain its failure. And in *Twin Peaks*, this nightmare is great and terrible indeed.

Although the nature of the evil in the woods surrounding Twin Peaks is explained slowly and piecemeal over the course of the show, it is eventually revealed that demonic otherworldly spirits walk the earth in and around the town. As the mythology of the show establishes, there are two separate realms that parallel our own, one a place of goodness and peace, called the White Lodge, and the other its evil counterpart, the Black Lodge. Spirits from both of these realms can access our world for various purposes and take control of human hosts, and portals to both realms exist in the near vicinity of Twin Peaks. BOB (Frank Silva), a demon from the Black Lodge, is revealed early in the show to be Laura's true killer; the mystery that remains — the answer to the question "Who killed Laura Palmer?" — is the identity of BOB's host. In a most horrifying turn of events, the host is revealed to be Leland Palmer (Ray Wise), Laura's father. The dark secret at the heart of *Twin Peaks* is one of incestuous rape and murder.

I will discuss the relationship between Laura and her father more at length when I turn to considering the film. For now, though, I would like to examine the main narrative thrust of the series — the investigation into Laura Palmer's murder and the subsequent

quest for the mysteries of the Black Lodge — through the lens of the show’s protagonist, Special Agent Dale Cooper. For as much as *Twin Peaks* is Laura’s story, it is also the story of the man who endeavors to elucidate her mysteries and who, as the film will reveal, will stand by her side as they enter the great unknown. Cooper’s first appearance in the pilot stands as one of *Twin Peaks*’ most iconic scenes; as Cooper drives into the town, he records a tape for his forever offscreen assistant Diane, his manner of speech revealing much about his character and personality. Cooper mentions the exact time of the recording, the precise coordinates of Twin Peaks, the temperature and the weather, the milage of his car, the gas level, and the price of his lunch as well as what he ate. This meticulous attention to detail indicates the fastidiousness of Cooper’s personality, hinting to the audience that he will be an extremely perceptive, as well as eccentric, detective. Additionally, Cooper rhapsodizes over the beauty of the trees, thereby subverting our expectations of how a typical TV detective should behave — somber, grim, no nonsense. We are reminded, through Cooper’s simultaneous professionalism and childlike wonder that the world of *Twin Peaks* is both horrifying and beautiful. Just as we regard Laura’s corpse, terrible in its dead beauty, Lynch and Frost want the audience to see this dream world that they have created in its confluence of horror and wonder, the dream and the nightmare fused together in a neverending cycle of fantasy. As Cooper will say much later in Episode 25, on the trail of the Black Lodge, “I have no idea where this will lead us. But I have a definite feeling it will be a place both wonderful and strange.” And so is Twin Peaks.

Cooper’s capacity for wonder aside, he certainly seems initially like a super sleuth in the Holmesian vein, spotting even the smallest details such as the image of James

Hurley's (James Marshall) bike reflected in Laura's eye in the picnic video. Yet as Olson points out, Cooper balances this attention to detail with a keen sense of intuition; even with very little evidence, he is able to intuit that neither Bobby Briggs (Dana Ashbrook) nor James Hurley played a part in Laura's murder. Cooper is willing to trust his instincts to an unusual extent. As Olson writes, "[Cooper] harmonizes the aggressive masculine thrust of...the active pursuit of clues and suspects, with a receptive feminine sensitivity to currents of emotion and intuition" (281). Cooper's trust in his instinct, as Olson highlights, raises a stark feminine counterpoint to the traditionally masculine figure of the penetrating and probing detective. As we have already seen, Twin Peaks is a town dominated by feminine energy, signified by the breast-like mountains and the flow of water. In order to solve Laura's murder, Cooper will have to trust in his instinct and align his own feminine instinct with the town's feminine energy.

As the show continues, Cooper's feminine intuition reveals itself even more explicitly. In a delightfully odd scene in Episode 2, "Zen, or the Skill to Catch a Killer," (written by Mark Frost and David Lynch, directed by David Lynch) Cooper throws rocks at a bottle while Sheriff Truman reads names of various townspeople aloud. The closer the rock lands to the bottle, the premise goes, the more likely the person named is to be involved with Laura's murder. Cooper claims that the idea for this exercise came to him in a dream proceeding from his study of Tibetan culture and philosophy. In short, this would never happen on *Law & Order*.

This same episode gives us what is likely the most famous scene of the entire show, Cooper's dream sequence in which MIKE (Al Strobel), BOB, the Red Room, and the Man from Another Place (Michael J. Anderson) are introduced. The dream sequence

not only highlights Cooper's feminine trust in intuitive processes of information gathering, thereby once again undermining the traditional patriarchal representation of the detective as a man of probing investigative power, but also introduces the Red Room as a place where feminine energy holds unique influence. As Cooper falls asleep, a menacing drone appears on the soundtrack. Cooper appears, visibly aged, sitting in a chair in a room lined with red curtains, the floor bearing the same black and white herringbone pattern that adorned the entryway of Henry Spencer's apartment building in Lynch's first feature film *Eraserhead*. In the corner of the room, a dwarf in a red suit, credited as the Man from Another Place, shakes and wriggles. We see Laura's mother Sarah Palmer (Grace Zabriskie) descending the stairs, an image of BOB crouched at the foot of Laura's bed, the bloody crime scene, Laura's corpse, a series of black and white flashing lights. And then we see MIKE, who recites a cryptic poem: "Through the darkness of future past, / The magician longs to see. / One chants out between two worlds / Fire, walk with me." MIKE goes on to reveal that he and a group of his compatriots used to live above a convenience store. He states that he had a tattoo on his left shoulder that marked him as evil, but when he "saw the face of God," he cut off his arm (It is later revealed the MIKE and BOB were former partners and that MIKE is the more powerful of the two spirits). BOB appears and swears that he will kill again. We then return to the Red Room. Laura Palmer sits in a chair opposite Agent Cooper. The dwarf claps his hands, turns around, and says "Let's rock." He goes on to say many strange and cryptic things, including, of Laura, "She's filled with secrets." Music begins to play — Angelo Badalamenti's "Dance of the Dream Man" — and the dwarf rises and begins to dance while a strobe light flashes. Laura walks to Agent Cooper, kisses him on the lips, and

whispers the name of her killer into his ear. Then Cooper wakes up, having forgotten the name of the killer, but filled with the knowledge that the information remains locked in his subconscious.

This dream sequence stands out as one of the most iconic, bizarre, and composed scenes in all of Lynch's oeuvre. It serves as a proper introduction to the Lodge spirits, and ultimately provides the solution to Laura's murder, for Cooper will only uncover the murderer's identity by remembering, in Episode 16, Laura's whispered message: "My father killed me." The dream stands as perhaps the best example of Cooper's feminine receptivity; he literally receives the answer to the show's central question, transmitted directly from the murdered young woman herself. His only task now is to remember that answer. Due to the dwarf's cryptic statements and the strangeness of communication in the Red Room — the dwarf and Laura's dialogue and movements were recorded backwards and then reversed — Martha Nochimson identifies the Red Room, utilizing the terminology of Mikhail Bakhtin, as a carnivalesque space, one that defies conventional structure and creates new methods and possibilities of communication between individuals. Nochimson continues her analysis, writing, "Through Cooper, the spectator leaps without fear to identify with the urgency that the detective should consult with the body, dreams, and feminine experience in order to see" (79). Tellingly, the show's other seer is a woman, the Log Lady, real name Margaret Lanterman (Catherine E. Coulson). The Log Lady carries a log that she believes houses the spirit of her dead husband and claims to receive information from the log that only she can hear. Though Cooper is at first wary of her, he grows to accept her and her visionary capacities, welcoming her as an ally. By allying himself with *Twin Peaks*' ultimate symbol of

feminine receptivity, Cooper is able to fully embrace his own receptive capabilities. Of Cooper's alliance and acceptance of the feminine, Nochimson writes that it "[makes] him a worthy antagonist for BOB and [defines] both Cooper's heroism and BOB's villainy. Cooper values feminine experience, BOB devours it" (87). Although there is more to be said about the dream sequence — specifically how its imagery evokes the lexicon of psychosexual symbology — I believe that this discussion will be better framed if I now take a moment to consider BOB outright before returning to the dream.

As Nochimson states, BOB serves as the narrative counterpoint to Agent Cooper, the nefarious antagonist to Cooper's heroic protagonist. BOB, who rapes and kills women, manifests as a sort of unbounded masculine sexual energy, eager to enact itself upon women at their expense. But BOB is not primarily a murderer; his chief impulse is not to kill, but rather to rape, or at the very least to terrorize and enjoy sexual intercourse. He only kills his first victim, Teresa Banks (Pamela Gidley), a young woman with whom Leland has been having an affair, after she uncovers Leland's identity and threatens to blackmail him. BOB has been molesting Laura since she was twelve years old, yet he only kills her when he reads her suspicions of Leland's identity as his host in her secret diary. Clearly, BOB fears exposure and is willing to kill to maintain the secrecy of his identity. Considering BOB's desire to maintain his secrecy and his power to violate social taboos such as rape and incest, McGowan writes:

[BOB] occupies a position outside the system of signification and its rules. This is the position of the exceptional signifier...what psychoanalysis calls the phallus.

The phallus, according to Lacan, "can play its role only when veiled." Any

publicity threatens the potency of the phallus because its power is illusory. Its posture of autonomy masks its dependence on the societal Other. (142)

BOB, then, is the phallus, a terrifying and limitless expression of male sexuality and aggressiveness that seeks to dominate and destroy the feminine. He is a disruptive and dangerous force; critically, as Laura's murderer, BOB enacts his disruptive phallic role as the force that destabilizes Twin Peaks' fantasy. Laura remains the *objet petit a*, but no one in the town can deny her death, can deny that an act of horrific violence has violated the sanctity of the blissful small town American dream that they had cultivated, that Laura, in her radiance, had allowed them to cultivate. Nochimson explicitly acknowledges this aspect of BOB when she too identifies him as phallic in nature and calls him "the annihilator of meaning" (88).

If BOB is the phallus, then Cooper's unique femininity arises as the only means to combat such a force. The conventional phallic detective could have no hope of uncovering or battling BOB; only Cooper, with his dreams, visions, and intuition, seems up to the task. As Nochimson writes:

Receptivity is a value in this context, gaining a real place for women and a transformed relationship between the seeker and the feminine. Reality in *Twin Peaks* is dependent on a heterogeneous balancing of phallic force with feminine, labial receptivity. (88)

Nochimson's words bring us back to Cooper's dream. The Red Room vibrates with sexual symbology. As Nochimson writes, "As a space in which the ordinary appearances that mask the sexual energies at the core of our values and priorities are made strange, the Red Room engages us in revealing carnivalizations" (89). Nochimson emphasizes

that the carnivalesque nature of the Red Room brings forth and reconfigures the collective lexicon of psychosexual symbology that underlies our world, heightening and emphasizing the power of these symbols. To examine just some: Laura's dress has a high slit and a plunging neckline, both shapes reflecting the female genitalia. The gently rippling red curtains lining the room mark the space as a uterine conclave, appropriate given its role as the locus of Cooper's reception of secret knowledge. The Man from Another Place, small, red, and wriggling, is clearly phallic, highlighting his relationship with BOB as an evil denizen of the Black Lodge (I will examine the relationship between BOB and the MFAP more in depth in my discussion of the film). Nochimson links the strangeness of language in the Red Room with the pervasive sexual imagery:

These comic sexual images, in which sex organs speak, involve speech that is materially distorted and gesture that is untranslatable into logos....In seeking knowledge, Cooper must immerse himself in plasticity in tension with logos, that is, in the tension between the masculine and the feminine. (89)

Ultimately, as illustrated by this famous dream sequence and by several other prominent scenes which I will not investigate in depth in the issue of brevity, Cooper proves himself to be a most unconventional, and uniquely feminine, detective. As we shall see, however, it is perhaps Cooper's betrayal of his femininity that leads to his ultimate downfall.

After Cooper uncovers Leland's identity as BOB's human host in Episode 16, he arrests and incarcerates him. BOB taunts Cooper and the others before forcing Leland to commit suicide by banging his head against the door. Following Leland's demise, two new plotlines arise to keep Cooper in town. First, Cooper is framed for smuggling

cocaine by the nefarious Jean Renault (Michael Parks), seeking revenge for the death of his brothers Jacques (Walter Olkewicz) and Bernard (Clay Wilcox). Cooper is cleared of all charges and manages to kill Renault with the help of transgender DEA agent Denise Bryson (David Duchovny). Far more insidious than Jean Renault, however, is Cooper's former partner and mentor, Windom Earle (Kenneth Welsh), who has escaped from a mental institution and made his way to Twin Peaks in order to locate the Black Lodge and harness its infernal power. Earle, a master chess player, engages Cooper in a game of chess in which every piece lost represents a life that Earle will take. Nochimson discusses this plotline at length, crediting Mark Frost for encouraging the development of Windom Earle as an antagonist who would engage Cooper on a rational, masculine level while David Lynch was unavailable to work on the series (75-77). These changes, she argues, had the effect of nullifying the show's unique feminine energy, reducing it to a conventional masculine detective story and robbing Cooper of his unique feminine receptivity. As Nochimson writes, "In the later episodes, the seeker regresses into a stereotypical hero....The traditional conquest of Earle — not the desire to see — becomes the desire of the series" (93). Ultimately, Earle kidnaps Annie Blackburn (Heather Graham), Norma Jennings's (Peggy Lipton) younger sister and an ex-nun who arrives in Twin Peaks late in the series and forges a romantic relationship with Agent Cooper, using her fear to open the gateway to the Black Lodge. Cooper is forced to pursue them, now written into a conventional grail quest in which he, the phallic hero, seeks to vanquish the villain and recover the sacred feminine object; even the entrance to the Black Lodge, Glastonbury Grove, is named for the supposed burial place of King Arthur. Cooper has lost his receptivity, his unique feminine insight, and only disaster can follow.

David Lynch returned to direct to the final episode of the show and, horrified at Cooper's situation, liberally rewrote key sections of the episode to reintroduce the feminine. Whereas the original screenplay did not include either the Log Lady or Sarah Palmer, Lynch made scenes for them in the finished episode. The section inside the Black Lodge was completely thrown out and reworked from scratch. It was too late to save Cooper from his ultimate fate, but Lynch reconfigures the episode so that "if [Cooper] falls at the end of the series, [he] does not do so because of the perils of the subconscious...but because of the failure of his original visionary ability to lose control and make contact with feminine experience" (Nochimson 92).

In the final episode, Cooper enters the Lodge at Glastonbury Grove, red curtains materializing in the air to mark the gateway between worlds. As he enters the familiar Red Room, the Man from Another Place appears and dances while a strobe light flashes and a singer (Jimmy Scott) sings a song, "Sycamore Trees," written by David Lynch for the episode, that includes the lyrics "And I'll see you, and you'll see me...I'll see you in the trees." Cooper has entered the heart of the mystery surrounding the town, this place both mysterious and feminine, but something is wrong. He stares blankly ahead as the lights flash over his face; he has lost the power to see, dependent upon his feminine receptivity. The Man from Another Place stares at him evilly. He says, "This is the waiting room," suggesting that the Red Room belongs to neither the Black Lodge nor the White Lodge, but rather serves as an entryway to both realms; this theory is supported by the appearance of the Giant (Carel Struycken), a helpful spirit who has appeared to Cooper on multiple occasions and aided him in solving Laura's murder. The Man from Another Place intones the evil invocation, "Fire walk with me," and there is a shot of

billowing flames. Strobe lights begin to flash, and a woman's scream is heard. Now, it seems, we are truly in the Black Lodge.

Cooper encounters horrifying doppelgängers of Laura and Leland. Windom Earle appears and makes a deal with Cooper: if Cooper gives Earle his soul, then Earle will let Annie live. Cooper agrees, but BOB appears and stops the proceedings, saying, "He can't ask for your soul. I will take his." BOB then kills Windom Earle and commands Cooper to leave. A doppelgänger of Cooper appears and chases Cooper through the Lodge, catching him as they reach the entrance. Cooper and Annie fall out through the red curtains back into the real world, Annie is taken to the hospital, and Cooper awakens in his room at the Great Northern. In the final scene, Cooper rams his head into his bathroom mirror as BOB's face is shown in the reflection. He laughs maniacally and asks repeatedly, mockingly, "How's Annie?" The unthinkable has happened. Cooper has been possessed by BOB. Evil has won.

In order to understand what has happened, it is worth examining a moment from an earlier episode. When Cooper asks Truman and his deputies if any of them has heard of the White Lodge, the Native American Deputy Hawk (Michael Horse) responds:

My people believe that the White Lodge is a place where the spirits that rule man and nature reside. There is also a lagened of a place called the Black Lodge. The shadow self of the White Lodge. Legend says that every spirit must pass through there on the way to perfection. There, you will meet your own shadow self. My people call it The Dweller on the Threshold. But it is said that if you confront the Black Lodge with imperfect courage, it will utterly annihilate your soul.

The implication, then, is clear: Cooper is unable to approach the Black Lodge and face his doppelgänger with courage because he has lost his feminine receptivity. In falling back into the role of the phallic hero, Cooper has lost his ability to read the carnivalesque codes of the Lodge. His quest for Annie renders him no longer worthy of moving through the Lodge. As a result, Cooper remains trapped in the Lodge (as the movie will reveal), while the doppelgänger is free to roam the earth as BOB's newest vessel.

Of course, the series did not necessarily have to end this way. If ABC had renewed *Twin Peaks* for a third season, it seems likely that Cooper would be liberated from the Lodge and BOB thrown back into his demonic realm. But the show was canceled, and this is the ending we have; as such, it is the bleakest ending in all of Lynch's oeuvre. As Nochimson emphasizes, the ending in itself is not even traditionally Lynchian:

If the final episode redeems our connection to the subconscious, at the same time it cannot reverse the un-Lynchian intimations...that BOB is the greatest force in Twin Peaks. Earle's abduction of Annie has forced Cooper into a position in which BOB has overcome the heart of Lynchian heroism....BOB's position at the end of the series violates Lynch's cosmology by representing the border as a portal of infection instead of as the porthole of reality. (97-98)

Stymied by the collaborative nature of television and the outside forces that scripted Cooper into the position of a questing phallic hero, Lynch could not completely redeem his creation in one episode. BOB is allowed his phallic victory because Cooper has lost his access to the feminine forces that would have been able to counter it, but this explanation makes the moment no less heartbreaking. Diane Stevenson sees the ending

as similar to the ending of *Blue Velvet* in that there is a collapse of the “normal” and the “abnormal”: “In *Twin Peaks* the abnormal wins out but it stakes its claim at the very heart of the normal, in the body and soul of Agent Cooper, so that in the end normal and abnormal are seen to merge indissolubly” (74). Indeed, Cooper’s bleeding, maniacal face delivers the same message that Dorothy Vallens’ look of worry does in the final scene of *Blue Velvet* — that darkness and light, the horrifying and the beautiful, are mixed together in life in equal measure — but how much more horrifying this moment, and how deep our despair at being plunged, seemingly without recourse, into the interminable darkness. Perhaps in an attempt to counteract the bleak finality of this ending, the ending of the film, as we shall see, will serve as its light, hopeful inverse.

Although *Twin Peaks* was canceled by ABC after its second season aired, David Lynch wasn’t quite ready to leave his creation behind. In 1992, he released the feature film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, which detailed the seven last days in the life of Laura Palmer prior to the beginning of the show. Although fans certainly were hoping for a sequel to resolve the show’s cliffhanger ending, Lynch wanted to return to Laura’s story, saying:

At the end of the series, I felt sad. I couldn’t get myself to leave the world of Twin Peaks. I was in love with the character of Laura Palmer and her contradictions: radiant on the surface but dying inside. I wanted to see her live, move and talk. I was in love with that world and I hadn’t finished with it.

(Rodley 184)

Rather than continue the story of the show, Lynch recognized that *Twin Peaks* always had been Laura’s story. He was not content to leave her the absent presence, a

mysterious cipher that structured the town's desire; Lynch wanted to show Laura as a subject, and as such she is the protagonist of the film. Of course, Laura still functions as the *objet petit a*, but *Fire Walk with Me* affords us the unique perspective of experiencing the world of the film through the impossible object as subject. McGowan writes, "From this perspective, we grasp the speculative identity between subject and object....Laura is a fully realized subject in the film insofar as we see the hole inside her. At the core of her subjectivity is a fundamental emptiness" (130-131). Because Laura has structured our desire for so long throughout the show, there is great pleasure in seeing her as a subject. In telling Laura's story, Lynch rescues Laura from objectification, giving her life, personhood, where before she was merely a symbol, a dream, an enigmatic memory in the collective mind of her deluded, corrupt small town. Even as a subject, though, Laura remains as shifting and elusive in life as she was in death.

As much as Laura embodied so many different aspects of femininity in death, she also presents as a fractured, polyvalent subject in life; as Chion writes, she "combines all women in the one image," embodying simultaneously schoolgirl innocence, motherly affection, licentious promiscuity, disoriented chaos, and the deep, inexpressible woundedness of the victim of sexual abuse (156). She is so many women at once that whatever original subjectivity existed in Laura has disappeared, destroyed by the expectations placed upon her by the town as the object-cause of their desire and by the systematic sexual abuse that she has endured since the age of twelve. In truth, there is no Laura — there is merely the homecoming queen, the affectionate friend, the victim, the prostitute. Laura has lost herself; as McGowan states, "Her subjectivity is an emptiness that remains irreducible to any identity" (132). Throughout the film, Laura shifts from

one identity to another, sometimes even within the space of a single conversation, gliding on the surface of the void that lies at her core. She is lost, adrift, unsure even whether she wants to be good or bad, the virgin or the whore. Laura's lookalike cousin Maddy (Sheryl Lee) may have played the virgin to Laura's whore during the show, but the opposition is not so reducible as that, for Laura is both virgin and whore in equal measure; she is Sandy and Dorothy made one.

Because Laura cannot easily fit into any of the categories of identity provided for her by the town, she acts as a disruptive force. By refusing to be boxed in to either of the oppositional identities of the virgin and the whore, she represents a threat to the dominant patriarchal forces that, by means of this mechanism, oppress and silence women. Laura is not a virgin, and Laura is not a whore — she is a woman, a subject, but one whose core subjectivity has been destroyed by external forces. As such, she can only shift fluidly between all the categories of femininity available to her, trying each one on only to discard it moments later. Although she is a victim of sexual abuse, the damage that she has received from the patriarchy in the most literal sense (her father) has unhinged and obliterated her subjectivity, thus leaving in its wake a chimera, an unpredictable and subversive force that threatens and destabilizes the patriarchal order. By being able to incarnate both the virgin and whore simultaneously, Laura destabilizes the binary that holds both categories of identity in opposition; as McGowan writes, “This is precisely the recognition that patriarchal ideology will not allow and that the patriarchal subject cannot tolerate” (135). That such a subversive figure as Laura ultimately is destroyed by the patriarchal authority she destabilizes points to the pervasive and insidious power that the patriarchy wields in our culture.

I will return to Laura shortly, but in order to understand exactly how fantasy operates in the world of *Twin Peaks*, it is absolutely necessary to examine the opening portion of the film, which takes us to a town called Deer Meadow where, as we shall see, access to fantasy is sorely lacking. The opening credits unfold against a shifting blue background — the color blue, as we have already seen, coding for the secrets and mysteries into which we are about to be initiated — as a mournful jazz tune plays on a muted trumpet. As the credits come to a close, the camera zooms out to reveal that the blue background is in fact the static of a television set. An axe plunges through the TV in a shower of sparks as a woman screams, a scene that we will later learn is BOB's murder of Teresa Banks. The message implied by the destruction of the TV is far from subtle; David Lynch will be working from without the censorious restrictions of broadcast television, and this is a whole new *Twin Peaks*. We then see a body wrapped in plastic floating down a river with a subtitle identifying the corpse as Teresa Banks. And so begins the investigation into her murder.

In this segment of the film, Agents Chester Desmond (Chris Isaak) and Sam Stanley (Keifer Sutherland) of the FBI investigate Teresa's murder at the behest of regional bureau chief Gordon Cole (David Lynch). Agents Desmond and Stanley travel to the town of Deer Meadow, which in many ways seems to be *Twin Peaks*' dark shadow. The sheriff (Gary Bullock) and his deputy (Rick Aiello) are unfriendly and combative, there's a trashy trailer park instead of the opulent Great Northern Hotel, the coffee is disgusting, and the diner is presided over by an old, snaggletoothed hag named Irene (Sandra Kinder) who bears absolutely no resemblance to the angelic Norma. Ultimately, Agent Stanley takes Teresa's body to the lab to do tests, while Agent

Desmond returns to Teresa's trailer park. While there, he spots a ring, identified from photographs as belonging to Teresa Banks, bearing the owl in flight symbol of the Black Lodge — the same symbol discovered at Owl Cave in the show — on a mound of dirt under a trailer; when he touches the ring, he disappears.

What does this strange prologue have to do with Twin Peaks? Teresa, of course, as we already know was BOB's first victim. But there's more to Teresa's story than that. The FBI investigation into her death yields few promising clues, and the lead investigator goes missing; the case has the FBI hopelessly stymied. As Nochimson writes, "The film actively distances us from identification with the FBI sleuths....[and] implicitly makes the point that it must progress with no customary heroic hand to shield or avenge either Teresa Banks or Laura Palmer" (174). Unlike the show, this will not be the detectives' story, Lynch seems to suggest. The FBI is stuck, and Laura is on her own. The opposition of Deer Meadow and Twin Peaks also serves as promising epistemological ground. Teresa herself, as the victim, should be an important figure, but, as Sheriff Cable says in the film, "Banks was a drifter; nobody knew her." Chion writes, "If Laura's death gives rise to a surfeit of feelings and testimonials, Teresa's does not even begin to generate an image of her. She died unknown, in total indifference, and now she is gone" (148). Laura was an icon of her community, so much so that she served, as an *objet petit a*, as a signifier for the small town bliss to which the community wished to attain. Teresa Banks, on the other hand, is a nobody, not important at all to life in Deer Meadow, mourned by no one.

Teresa, of course, is still an *objet petit a* for the story, if not for the people of Deer Meadow, for her death structures the film's prologue and the investigation into her death;

it is still the goal of Agents Desmond and Stanley to unravel her mysteries. Whereas Laura will be made present throughout the film, however, Teresa remains conspicuously absent; we learn virtually nothing about this girl who fades into anonymity the second she dies. Teresa is not able to serve as the *objet petit a* for the community of Deer Meadow, and the result is a world without fantasy. As McGowan writes, “Lynch constructs a world of desire in which every image and situation seems threatening because the characters (and we as spectators) see it without any fantasmatic depth” (137). In Twin Peaks, the element of the town that does seem idyllic is able to exist because the community dreams it that way; their fantasy becomes the town’s surface, even if that surface hides evil underneath. In that manner, the bucolic and the violent, the light and the dark, are able to coexist. In Deer Meadow, however, the people have no dream; this, the film suggests, is what occurs in the absence of fantasy. Deer Meadow is a thoroughly unpleasant place, where people seem to have given up on life. Perhaps, the film is suggesting, even though a fantasy must always exceed the limits of reality, thereby leading to disappointment, such a hopeful belief is necessary to maintain happiness and equilibrium in the world; the cycle of light and dark, dream and nightmare, is a necessary and proper element of life. In a place like Deer Meadow, the cycle is not turning, and the result is mean, hostile, and depressing.

After Agent Cooper travels to Deer Meadow to look into Agent Desmond’s disappearance, we are finally taken back to the town of Twin Peaks, the familiar opening theme playing as Laura walks to school and then snorts cocaine in the bathroom, tellingly painted from floor to ceiling in blue. Her central duality established, so begins Laura’s journey toward an inevitable conclusion. Whereas *Twin Peaks* hinted at the despair of

Laura's life, the film plunges the viewer deep into her nightmare, with many scenes extremely difficult to watch. Laura is essentially an innocent who has been victimized and corrupted by forces outside her control; indeed, those external forces will provide her with the means to determine her ultimate fate.

As we have already seen, Laura is a subject without subjectivity; the sexual abuse that she has suffered since the age of twelve has corrupted her innocence, with the result that she incarnates both the virgin and the whore simultaneously. As revealed in Jennifer Lynch's *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer*, Laura embraces her dark sexual side as an attempted defense mechanism against BOB. In one passage, Laura goes to the tree in the woods where BOB routinely molests her and masturbates under it:

I showed him I wasn't afraid. I touched myself under his tree. I called to him and made him the fool....If BOB wants nasty, all I need is a little time. *I can be the bad girl he wants....*This used to seem frightening to me. This place, the slightest thought of touching myself, and teasing myself, frightened me. No more. No, this place I visited is not what it seemed. I see now that it is a place of darkness, but I love it. *I welcome it.* I will not fight it, even when it slips deep inside and cuts me. I have found light and pleasure inside this horror. I am not done with my plan. I'll be back, BOB. I'll be back to open and close around you like you thought I never would. (61-62)

In the next entry, Laura writes, "I was going to stop being hurt and taunted by this man....I will get him back. There's no fun in a game of torture if the victim is screaming for more" (63). As the diary details, Laura descends into a spiral of self-loathing depravity, hoping that her increasingly extreme sexuality can protect her from BOB's

abuse. Unfortunately, BOB continues his visits. Laura expresses her desperation with her situation in a heartbreaking late entry in the diary in which she explicitly acknowledges her lack of a subjective identity and the void at her core:

Dear Diary, I just reread yesterday's entry, and I suddenly feel very embarrassed about being alive. The girl who received this diary on her twelfth birthday has been dead for years, and I who took her place have done nothing but make a mockery of the dreams she once had. I'm sixteen years old, I'm a cocaine addict, a prostitute who fucks her father's employers, not to mention half the fucking town, and the only difference from last week is that now I'm getting paid for it. My life is whatever the other person in the room wants it to be. Therefore, when I am alone, my life is nothing. (167)

Laura has been destroyed, and even Laura herself is aware of this fact. As the film shows, however, BOB is no longer content with simply raping her. As Laura tells Harold (Lenny von Dohlen), "He says he wants to be me or he'll kill me." Later, we hear BOB's voice whispering to a dazed Laura, "I want to taste through your mouth." The implication is clear: BOB no longer merely wants to rape Laura; he wants to possess her. Laura's fate is a foregone conclusion; even she is aware that she will not escape death. In Episode 16 of the show, "Arbitrary Law," (written by Mark Frost, Harley Peyton, and Robert Engels, directed by Tim Hunter) Donna (Lara Flynn Boyle (show), Moira Kelly (film)) receives two pages from Laura's secret diary, including an entry from the last day of her life (this scene creates a continuity error with the film, which depicts Laura giving her diary to Harold several days before her death, but I defer to the canonicity of the show on this issue), which reads, "Tonight is the night that I die. I know I have to

because it's the only way to keep BOB away from me. The only way to tear him out from inside. I know he wants me; I can feel his fire. But if I die, he can't hurt me anymore." This entry bears out Dr. Jacoby's (Russ Tamblyn) earlier theory that Laura "allowed herself to be killed." Laura chooses to die rather than to become BOB's next vessel, and the film reveals the process that leads to this decision.

Although Laura ostensibly wrote her suspicions about Leland's identity as BOB's host in the pages of her secret diary that BOB tears out (presented as missing pages in *The Secret Diary*), her suspicions are born out when Mrs. Tremond (Frances Bay) and her grandson Pierre (Austin Jack Lynch (show), Jonathan J. Leppell (film)), two spirits from the Black Lodge, give her a photograph of an open door and tell her to hang it on her wall. Pierre then says, "The man behind the mask is looking for the book with the pages torn out. He is going toward the hiding place. He is under the fan now." Laura runs home and encounters BOB in her bedroom. When she runs outside, she sees Leland exiting the house. She breaks down in tears in a moment of horrifying realization and repeats the phrase "It's not him" over and over again.

Before she goes to sleep that night, Laura hangs the picture of the door on her wall. In her dream, she enters the photograph, which gives rise to a series of rooms that turn into the Red Room. In the room, she sees Agent Cooper and the Man from Another Place. The MFAP says, "Do you know who I am? I am the arm." This statement highly suggests that the MFAP is the evil part of MIKE's identity that he cast off when he amputated his arm. The MFAP holds up Teresa's ring and offers it to the camera; Agent Cooper tells Laura, "Don't take the ring." Laura then has a vision of Annie Blackburn, her face bloody, lying beside her in bed. Annie says, "My name is Annie. I've been with

Dale and Laura. The good Dale is in the Lodge, and he can't leave. Write it in your diary." Annie's words confirm Agent Cooper's fate at the end of the series, trapped in the Black Lodge while his BOB-possessed doppelgänger roams free.

We have already seen that the Man from Another Place has a special connection with Teresa's ring. Now that we know that he is MIKE's missing arm, however, the meaning behind the ring becomes more clear. McGowan analyzes the MFAP's ontology as the arm:

According to Lacan's understanding of subjectivization, part of the body detaches itself as a result of the body's submission to the signifier, which renders the body incomplete. The signifier imposes itself on the subject as a cut on the body, and this detached body part becomes the libido, the source of the drive in the subject....In this light, we can understand the Man from Another Place occupying the position of the libido....The drive that the Man from Another Place institutes is the death drive, a drive that continually returns to and repeats the experience of loss. (146)

That the MFAP is the evil part of MIKE that he cast off supports this reading. Tired of raping and terrorizing with BOB, MIKE casts out the evil part of himself which manifests itself as a separate, incarnate entity, the incarnation of MIKE's abandoned libido. It has already been established that MIKE, and by extension now the MFAP as well, is the only person of whom BOB is afraid. That BOB and MIKE/the MFAP should be thus opposed to one another makes sense when read in terms of the opposition of the phallus and the death drive. McGowan writes:

The phallus represents an attempt to short-circuit the drive, to obtain enjoyment without suffering from the absence that characterizes the drive....The phallus never successfully possesses the privileged object, but merely engages in an endless pursuit of this object, a pursuit that results in the satisfaction of the drive....The phallus attempts to preserve its connection to the object and to guard against loss, but the impossibility of possessing the object leads phallic authority to acts of destructiveness, acts that end up serving the death drive. (147-148)

BOB, perhaps ironically, is associated with life in opposition to the death drive. BOB wants not only to enjoy Laura sexually but to actually inhabit and possess her, thereby attaining an ultimate degree of possession of the *objet petit a*. The death drive, in the form of the MFAP, however, will prove the undoing of his plans. In a scene in which MIKE accosts Leland and Laura while they are driving, MIKE accuses BOB of “stealing all the corn.” At the end of the film, it is revealed that the Black Lodge spirits consume a substance called garmonbozia, which is identified in a subtitle as “pain and sorrow”; tellingly, garmonbozia takes the physical form of creamed corn. MIKE and the MFAP are angry at BOB for enjoying without restraint, for hoarding all the garmonbozia for himself. The death drive demands an end to this unrestrained phallic enjoyment, an enjoyment without loss. The scene of Laura’s murder will highlight her connection to the death drive.

Before her death, Laura is raped once again by BOB. While he is on top of her, she takes his face in her hands and asks repeatedly, “Who are you?” When BOB transforms into Leland, Laura screams in terror; her worst fears have been confirmed. On the last night of her life, she joins Leo Johnson, Jacques Renault, and Ronette Pulaski

(Phoebe Augustine) for a drug fueled orgy at Jacques' cabin. BOB, inhabiting Leland, follows her there and knocks out Jacques when he steps outside. Leo, seeing Jacques' unconscious body, flees the scene, leaving Ronette and Laura, who are both tied up, behind. Leland enters the cabin and kidnaps the two girls, and so begins perhaps the scene of Laura's death. Leland pushes the two girls in front of him like dogs on a leash as they scream and an unexplained light, as if from a flashlight, moves across them. Leland takes them to the abandoned train car uncovered in the pilot as the crime scene. BOB holds a mirror under Laura's face, where her reflection is replaced by his, indicating his desire to possess her. Ronette mutters a prayer, and an angel materializes inside the train car; suddenly Ronette's hands are unbound. MIKE, desperate to stop BOB, pries open the train car door. Leland knocks Ronette unconscious and pushes her out of the door; before it closes, MIKE throws the ring into the train car.

Laura, perhaps intuiting what the ring symbolizes, slips it on her finger, as BOB/Leland howls "No! Don't make me do this!" She has now wedded herself to the death drive. As such, she cannot be possessed by BOB; instead, she has to die. As McGowan writes, "In the act of taking the ring, the subject affirms and embraces absence....Through this act, [Laura] breaks the hold that phallic authority has over her and frees herself as a subject" (152-153). Because Laura has accepted death over life, she has saved herself from possession by BOB, which would be a fate worse than death. The murder itself is glimpsed only briefly, sparingly illuminated by a strobe light, a technique that, as Mark Allyn Stewart writes, functions in Lynch films to "[illustrate] an event that cannot be fully looked upon or fully understood because of its evil or confusing nature" (110). There is almost a sense of relief that comes with Laura's death because her

suffering has ended. BOB wraps her in plastic, carries her to the water, and sets her adrift; she washes up on the shore next to the Martells' house where she will be discovered in the pilot episode.

BOB then enters the Red Room at Glastonbury Grove, where he is greeted by MIKE and the Man from Another Place. They admonish him: "BOB, I want all my garmonbozia." BOB heals the wound that Leland has suffered in the stomach and splashes the blood onto the floor, where it disappears and then turns into creamed corn, consumed by the MFAP. There is a profound sense of satisfaction in this scene. As Olson writes, "BOB...has been, at least for the moment, subdued....Lynch leaves us with the feeling that a hard-won measure of justice had been attained" (391-392). We derive pleasure from seeing the death drive assert its dominance over the phallus, for even death itself is a preferable alternative to the rampant and endless suffering unleashed upon the world by BOB. In the final scene of the film, we are back in the Red Room. Laura sits, while Agent Cooper stands next to her with a hand on her shoulder. Earlier in the film, an angel disappeared from a picture on Laura's wall as she looked to it for guidance, indicating the depth of her despair. Now, just as in the train car, an angel appears to Laura, the bright light that emanates from her bathing and embracing Laura. Laura weeps from a profound sense of relief, smiling through her tears. As the screen fades to white, it is implied, she and Agent Cooper ascend together to the White Lodge. The scene is profoundly cathartic; not only has Laura, who had endured so much suffering, found peace in death, but Agent Cooper, who suffered such a cruel fate in the final episode of the show, is also redeemed, able to welcome Laura into the afterlife and stand by her side as they enter heaven. Laura, for the first time, is dressed not as a schoolgirl or

a hooker, but as a woman. Her smiling face is frozen against the white light as the end credits roll. To borrow the language of Lynch's earlier film *Eraserhead*, she is in heaven, and everything is fine.

Now that we have witnessed the totality of Laura's journey and observed her heroic choice to put on the ring in the last portion of the film, I would like to take the opportunity to address the arguments of certain critics regarding the show's treatment of women and gender issues. Several feminist critics have offered negative critiques of the show, critiques with which I disagree vehemently. I will provide a few examples here for illustrative purposes. Diana Hume George offers a particularly scathing response to the series. At one point, George chastens the audience for "[getting] off on the sexually tortured, brutally murdered, mutilated body of an adolescent girl" (110). Another substantive argument of George's piece has to do with BOB's possession of Leland. George writes:

I find that far from holding responsible for their actions the men who abuse and kill under BOB's influence, *Twin Peaks* lets them off the hook by reverting to a simplistic displacement to the supernatural....scapegoating offenders whose punishment casts off the guilt that belongs to an entire cultural ethos. (117-118)

One last invective that George levels against the show is its portrayal of women as simultaneously light and dark: "[Dorothy] became the dark whore half of Everywoman, whose Other is the innocent madonna. This is the major source of doubling in *Twin Peaks*: it breaks women in half" (116).

Sue Lafky offers a critique of BOB similar to George's argument, writing, "While there is a recognition of wrongdoing in *Twin Peaks*, a recognition of patriarchy's

complicity in this wrongdoing is absent” (15). My final example is that of Laura Plummer, who offers her critique of the series by faulting Lynch and Frost for portraying Laura with a lack of agency:

Laura’s transgressions of social law...originate in the abuse of her father. That is, Laura Palmer is merely reactive; she has no agency....She is never removed from her representation as object of desire and violence, never permitted the position of sexual subject. (309-310)

I will now take the opportunity to respond to these critiques.

A sentiment that George expressed and that runs throughout all three of these pieces is the idea that the depiction of violence against women, in and of itself, is tantamount to misogyny. This is a belief that I do not share. In *Twin Peaks*, Lynch is doing something very similar to what he did in *Blue Velvet* in depicting the horrific abuse of women at the hands of men. The abuse is so extreme and the male forces enacting it are so horrifically repugnant, that there is no way that the texts could possibly be read as endorsing this kind of behavior. By depicting the mistreatment of women, Lynch is also decrying it. Not only is Frank seen as an evil monster, but Jeffrey has to actively choose to reject the dark side of his personality that is like Frank and willing to mistreat Dorothy. In *Twin Peaks*, women are battered, demeaned, and murdered, and never once does the show endorse this abuse or mistreatment.

As far as Lafky and George’s argument that Leland’s possession of BOB exculpates the patriarchy from wrongdoing is concerned, I will have to disagree again. There can be no question that Leland is innocent of his crimes; on that point, the show is very clear. Leland is not aware when BOB has taken active control of him, and he has no

memory of the actions that he commits under BOB's influence. In that way, perhaps, BOB serves as a cover-up of the incestuous abuse that Leland inflicts upon Laura. The street, however, runs both ways, for Laura is just as ignorant of the incest that is occurring as Leland is; Laura only discovers that Leland is BOB's host very shortly before her death. The reason BOB inhabits Leland specifically seems largely due to the fact that incest is society's greatest taboo; by forcing his host to commit incest, BOB demonstrates his transgressive phallic power to violate and undermine structure. Specifically because BOB is a representative of phallic power, his possession of Leland does not, in fact, excuse the patriarchy from blame in Laura's abuse, as BOB is an incarnate representation of patriarchal forces. Leland himself may be blameless in the crimes inflicted upon his daughter, but the patriarchy is clearly implicated.

Laura Plummer's argument is the most confusing for me, because she claims that not only does Laura not possess agency, but that she is never permitted to exist as a sexual subject. For what other reason does *Fire Walk with Me* exist if not to grant Laura the subjectivity that she necessarily lacked in the show? Perhaps Plummer was not considering the film in her analysis, but such an analysis is then inherently incomplete. McGowan actually responds to Plummer's critique in his own work, writing, "What Plummer fails to see is the radicality of Laura's gesture at the end of the film. Laura defies the phallic power of BOB in a way that no other character in the film does" (152). By putting on Teresa's ring, Laura actively chooses death over possession; she is willing to sacrifice her life in order to oppose the phallic force of the patriarchy that BOB incarnates. Such a woman, to my mind, not only possesses agency, but is a heroine.

Ultimately, *Twin Peaks* rewrites the rules of gender relations in a way that many people misunderstand. George claims that the show “breaks women in half,” and yet are we not all, as people, complex combinations of light and dark forces? Don’t we all have both innocent and devious aspects to our personality? As has already been shown, that the female characters of *Twin Peaks*, both Laura and her inheritors, are able to evince both light and dark elements of their personalities undermines the virgin/whore dichotomy that categorizes women as necessarily one or the other. Laura and the other women of *Twin Peaks* are not virgins or whores; they are complex people, and their refusal to fit into the virgin/whore dichotomy destabilizes the patriarchal forces that seek to confine them to a false semantic prison. Nochimson perhaps says it best when she writes, “*Twin Peaks*...alters the conventional structure of gender....Through the representation of Cooper, Margaret, and Laura on the one hand and BOB on the other, *Twin Peaks* significantly transforms the pervasive phallocentrism of American screen fiction” (88). I agree with Nochimson’s assessment. *Twin Peaks* not only showed the devastating effect of misogynistic abuse, it also drastically rewrote the detective story in a manner that values feminine experience and receptivity. I could not disagree more with those critics who label *Twin Peaks* misogynistic; to me, the show and the film are feminist texts.

Ultimately, *Twin Peaks* was a bit of a failed experiment. While Lynch had infinitely more time to explore his obsessions in the format of a continuing story, it’s hard not to think that too many cooks spoiled the pot. The show went hopelessly off track in the second half of Season Two, and the cliffhanger ending of the last episode was not only a betrayal of every fan who was invested in Agent Cooper’s journey, it was a

betrayal, as Nochimson mentions, of Lynchian cosmology itself. The film does much to rectify the shortcomings of the series, breathing life into Laura who had previously only been allowed to exist in a state of absent presence. By making Laura into a subject, Lynch refuses to allow the patriarchy to dominate Laura's story. She was a beautiful girl who bore more suffering than any human should ever have to endure at the hands of phallic forces, and only in death is she able to find peace. It's far from an optimistic assessment of the way men dominate women in our world, but the prescience of its warning is important. We must never allow a woman to be subjected to this type of systematic abuse; we must fight to change the system so that death is no longer the only option of resistance available to a victimized woman.

Even in death, Laura allows us to dream through her, to construct a fantasy around her; indeed, as the film shows, such fantasy, as a component of the never-ending cycle of fantasy and nightmare, death and rebirth, is a proper and necessary element of life. Without recourse to fantasy, we become like the denizens of Deer Meadow — without hope, without spark, without any real sense of life. But pinning such responsibility on one person is revealed to be destructive. Laura is expected to be so many women at once that she loses her true self; even when she is presented as a subject, there is nothing but a void at her core. She has been crushed under the weight of the town's collective dream, a long history of sexual abuse, and the secrets that she keeps. We must be ever vigilant, Lynch suggests, that our fantasies do not portend violence or suffering for our fellow man. Only perhaps when we, like Dorothy in the last scene of *Blue Velvet*, become cognizant of the forever revolving cycle of fantasy and nightmare and learn to accept the light and the darkness in equal measure will we truly appreciate

the beauty of the wind and the trees and be equipped to fight against the nightmare when it does, inevitably, arise.

Chapter III - Jealousy and Psychosis: Split Personalities in *Lost Highway*

Following the critical drubbing and commercial failure of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, David Lynch relaxed his schedule, not releasing another feature film for five years. As of the present moment, in 2014, Lynch has directed four feature films since the conclusion of his epic *Twin Peaks* saga in 1992. The second of these four, 1999's G-rated, Disney produced *The Straight Story*, is a lovely and moving tale of an old man who travels from Iowa to Wisconsin on a lawn mower to visit his dying brother. *The Straight Story* is a marvelous film, and worthy of consideration in its own right, but because of its radical stylistic and structural dissimilarity from the rest of Lynch's oeuvre — ironic, considering that it is the most straightforward and simplistic of Lynch's films, as the title suggests — I will not examine it in this thesis. The other three films that Lynch has released in his late period are *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive*, and *Inland Empire* (2006), the first two of which I will now examine in the coming chapters.

I believe that these three films constitute a thematic trilogy in that all three are set in Los Angeles, all three concern filmmaking (pornography in *Lost Highway*, conventional Hollywood filmmaking in the other two), and all three feature protagonists who create fantasies in order to escape the hell of their unbearable realities. Additionally all three films twist and distort the conventions of narrative; indeed, they are so opaque and convoluted as to render one definitive reading impossible. Considering Lynch's previous work, however, I believe that a psychoanalytic reading arises as the most fruitful manner in which to approach these films; the concern with fantasy established in *Blue Velvet*, *Twin Peaks*, and other films of Lynch's early period continues, but with a

renewed focus on personal, rather than social, fantasy that last surfaced so clearly only in Lynch's first feature film, *Eraserhead*.

Indeed, *Lost Highway* has more in common, to my mind, with *Eraserhead* than with *Blue Velvet* or *Twin Peaks*. *Eraserhead* was a surreal nightmare, an outlandish and grotesque meditation on male anxiety regarding sex and parenthood, the plot of which culminates with protagonist Henry Spencer (Jack Nance) achieving transcendence by murdering his hideously deformed baby. Fred Madison (Bill Pullman), the protagonist of *Lost Highway*, seems to have much in common with Henry. Although Fred is childless, he stands out as Lynch's only significant other neurotic and sexually constipated male protagonist (Frederick Treves (Anthony Hopkins) of *The Elephant Man*, could serve as a less sexually focused but equally conflicted third example). Fred is consumed with desire for his wife Renee (Patricia Arquette), desiring to possess her completely much as Frank desired to possess and control Dorothy in *Blue Velvet*. For Fred, Renee is the *objet petit a*, the object-cause of his desire. In order to possess her, Fred, as we shall see, constructs an endless series of fantasies that, no matter how seductive they may seem, will never be able to give Fred what he wants. In my analysis, I will examine how Fred constructs and loses himself in these fantasies and how sexuality lends animus and structure to Fred's endeavors. *Lost Highway* is very much Fred's story, in more ways than one. As previously mentioned, the film is so audaciously twisted and confusing as to deny the possibility of any one definitive reading, but it certainly seems like the entire story is taking place in Fred's mind. If this is true, then we no longer have recourse to any concrete sense of the real, for even the beginning portion of the film involving Fred and opposed to the clearly fantasmatic later section concerning Pete Dayton (Balthazar Getty)

is its own sort of fantasy. Close reading of several scenes will serve to clarify the film's murky ontological mysteries and iron out a few of its kinks.

The opening credits unfold over the image of a road rushing toward the camera at breakneck speed, while the galloping beat of David Bowie's "I'm Deranged" plays and the names of the actors fly at the screen in large block letters. Immediately, the rushing road recalls Lynch's earlier film *Wild at Heart* (1990), a road film that played as relentlessly frenetic in its pulsing breathlessness. The rhythm of the opening credits suggests that a similar out of control freneticism will be present in this film as well. In the opening scene, Fred Madison, disheveled and wearing an expression of disgust, smokes a cigarette. His intercom buzzes. When he answers, he hears a man's voice say, "Dick Laurent is dead." He hears the sound of a car's tires screeching and police sirens which begin to diminish in volume. When he reaches the front of the house and looks out the window, no one is there. And so begins the film, with a man and a mystery.

As the end of the film will reveal, it is Fred himself who speaks these words into the intercom, thereby establishing what appears to be a time loop. Time, as we have seen, can be fluid in Lynch's universe; the power of the Black Lodge in *Twin Peaks* rendered the future and the past simultaneous, so that Annie could appear to Laura in her dream and Dale Cooper's image could be frozen on the video camera in *Fire Walk with Me*. But if we accept that the world of *Lost Highway* is purely mental, then the message appears as a message from Fred to himself, a clue to follow, a hint that, as his confusion in the opening scene makes clear, he cannot take. This perpetual confusion, we shall see, will keep Fred trapped in a horrible cycle of jealousy and desire.

Jealousy seems to be Fred's largest problem and his driving force; indeed, Anne Jerslev describes the film as "a kind of imaginary journey into the very essence of jealousy, from the point of view of a male character" (156). A saxophonist, Fred performs at the Luna Lounge; when his performance is over, he calls his house to make sure that his wife Renee is home, as she said she would be. She doesn't answer. But when Fred returns home, he finds her asleep in bed. He clearly harbors suspicions regarding her whereabouts. Fred and Renee's house is spare and minimalist, gray and dark. Fred and Renee speak to each other in near whispers, and the air is heavy with unspoken tension between them. Michel Chion comments on the stilted, slow dialogue, writing, "Several times in *Lost Highway*, one is struck by the open, ambiguous, undecidable nature of the dialogue....Rather than a 'double meaning,' it has what might be called one meaning less" (195). As Chion notes, the dialogue between Fred and Renee is flat, inert, and fails to communicate very much. McGowan elaborates on this tendency toward flatness:

Lynch gives Fred's world a sense of the unknown....The entire depiction of Fred's world leaves the spectator without any sense of time or place....There is a sense of emptiness here, which Lynch establishes through the use of a minimalist décor and subdued lighting in Fred's house. This emptiness provides the space for desire....Lynch creates a sense of flatness in that world. Everything seems to be taking place on the surface, without any depth....Where we would expect to find depth, we find only a void. (156-157)

McGowan's comments surely call to mind the town of Deer Meadow in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*. The constipated dialogue, the unpleasant tension, the overwhelming sense

of dusky inertia — it seems that we're back in Deer Meadow all over again. Through the use of these cinematic tropes, Lynch is indicating that Fred and Renee live in the world of desire, the world without access to fantasy, even if it is itself, as it appears to be in this film, not the “real” world. Fred is consumed with desire for his wife's sexuality, but his desire has not yet erupted into the realm of fantasy, although it will later on.

Fred and Renee's sexual problems become very clear during an awkward sex scene. As Fred pumps away on top of Renee, she lies lifeless on her back, not actively participating in the sex act. After Fred reaches orgasm rather quickly, Renee pats his back with her hand and, humiliatingly, whispers “It's okay.” Try as Fred might, he cannot arouse Renee's desire; it remains elusive; as McGowan writes, “[Renee] seems to have...some hidden kernel of excessive enjoyment that Fred can't access” (157). Their physical congress remains just as awkward and stilted as their conversation. Fred is clearly suffering in this atmosphere of intense and unrelieved pressure; as Frida Beckman writes, “Renee remains a mystery to her husband, and his desire becomes unbearable. Her enigmatic sexuality threatens to undo the male subject” (32). After this shameful sexual failure, the film provides clues that point to Fred's world beginning to unravel, culminating in his eventual transformation into another person altogether.

After Fred awakens from post-coital slumber, he looks at Renee and sees the face of the Mystery Man (Robert Blake) superimposed on her own. The moment is horrifying, but when Fred looks again, Renee's face is her own. Things become even more confusing after Fred meets the Mystery Man in person. Fred and Renee attend a party hosted by Andy (Michael Masee), the man whom Fred suspects of being Renee's paramour. When Renee sends Fred to the bar for drinks, Fred is approached by the

Mystery Man; their conversation constitutes one of the most chilling moments in all of Lynch's work. The Mystery Man is bizarre in appearance: he wears white makeup and lipstick, he has no eyebrows, and he never blinks. The Mystery Man tells Fred that they've met before at Fred's house and that, as a matter of fact, he's there "right now." Fred, of course, is incredulous, so the Mystery Man hands Fred a cell phone and tells him to call the house. After Fred makes the call, the Mystery Man picks up the phone inside the house. After Fred asks how he got there, the Mystery Man replies, "You invited me. It is not my custom to go where I am not wanted." When Fred asks Andy who the Mystery Man is, Andy replies that he's a friend of Dick Laurent.

At first glance, the Mystery Man appears to be similar to BOB and the other spirits of the Black Lodge. Like them, he is bizarre, sinister, and appears to possess supernatural powers. The mention of Fred's "invitation" to the Mystery Man recalls Leland's dying confession to Agent Cooper when he tells how he invited BOB into him when he was a child. But if the entire film is, indeed, taking place within the mind of its protagonist, then the Mystery Man, rather than being an external, demonic force like BOB, must be some manifestation of Fred's psyche. The Mystery Man's ontology becomes clearer when considered alongside his production of the videotapes that Fred and Renee have been receiving.

The main conflict in this first part of the film revolves around a series of videotapes that someone anonymously leaves at Fred and Renee's doorstep. The first tape shows merely a shot of the outside of Fred and Renee's house, and Renee opines that the tape must be from a real estate agent. The second tape, however, is more sinister, and goes inside the house to show an image of Fred and Renee sleeping in bed. It is after

Fred and Renee have received this second tape that Fred meets the Mystery Man at Andy's party. When Fred and Renee arrive home from the party, we see a light briefly flash inside their house. Fred enters the house to investigate; while inside, he appears to see something and reacts with a worried expression. After Renee enters the house as well, Fred, wearing all black like the Mystery Man, wanders the dark corridors of his house, eventually coming face to face with a reflection of himself. While Renee calls for Fred in the bedroom, in the living room, the shadows of two people walking move across the walls. Fred walks straight into the camera, and everything dissolves to black. As Eric G. Wilson writes, "He has clearly merged with the presence in his house, lost his identity in a dark urge to control and kill" (120). Indeed, it seems likely that at this moment, Fred murders his wife.

The following morning, Fred receives a third tape, which enters the house as before and shows Fred in the bedroom, raging over the dismembered body of Renee. Late in the film, the Mystery Man is shown with a video camera, indicating that he is the source of these tapes. Taking that in mind, the nature of the Mystery Man and the tapes becomes more clear. McGowan identifies the Mystery Man as a representative of Fred's superego, stoked into action by Fred's suspicion of Renee: "Fred's suspicion indicates a failure on his part to sustain desire's question, and it is this failure that provides a burst of energy to the superego, resulting in the videotape at the door" (160). If the Mystery Man is indeed Fred's superego, then the tapes that he sends are clearly reminders to Fred's psyche of the crime he has committed. The superego insists that Fred not only face what he has done, but in fact seems to advocate for the crime itself as the enforcer of a twisted morality, for "morality aims, in short, at arresting the disturbance that desire causes"

(McGowan 163). Fred's suspicion of Renee has constituted a betrayal of his desire, and the superego insists that the source of this desire, Renee, the *objet petit a*, be destroyed.

Of course, because it is Renee's ontology as a desiring subject rather than her mere corporeal existence that stokes Fred's desire, he cannot find satisfaction, even though he takes Renee's body apart in an attempt to find her special desiring essence. Fred is arrested for the crime of killing his wife (arrested *again*, if we are to believe that the "real life" Fred is hallucinating the entire film from his prison cell) and sentenced to death. In prison, Fred begins to experience terrible headaches and eventually thrashes on the floor of his cell as he transforms into a young man named Pete Dayton. Mystified, the prison officials are forced to let Pete go, and he returns home to his parents' house. For many viewers, Fred's transformation into Pete is the most confusing aspect of an already baffling film. When read through a psychoanalytic lens, however, the implication is clear.

If Fred is already in a fantasy when he receives the Mystery Man's tape showing him kill Renee — a crime that he ostensibly committed in "real life" and from which he is now trying to escape by escaping to a fantasy in which Renee, maddeningly, remains elusive for him — then clearly his fantasmatic efforts have not been sufficient. In order to flee from the truth of his actions, in order to possess the female object that he desires, Fred must become someone else. As Slavoj Žižek writes, the story at this point, "shifts into psychotic hallucination in which the hero reconstructs the parameters of the Oedipal triangle that again make him potent" (15). As Žižek's comments note, the world that Fred creates for himself as Pete Dayton represents a new narrative configuration in which he becomes a more potent, younger man, and Renee is reborn as a sexually aggressive

and available blonde named Alice Wakefield (also played by Patricia Arquette). It is through its portrayal of the relationship between Pete and Alice that the film ultimately makes its point regarding the failure of fantasy.

Before I examine Pete's world, however, I would like to examine the gender politics of the film more in depth. As it was in *Blue Velvet* with Jeffrey, Fred/Pete's journey through the film is a specifically sexual one; Jeffrey and Fred, however, reach very different conclusions regarding women and themselves as desiring subjects. In *Blue Velvet*, Jeffrey is able to overcome his darker impulses — those that drive him to attempt to dominate and possess Dorothy much as Frank does — to form a stable, loving, reciprocal, and respectful relationship with Sandy. In *Blue Velvet*, the male drive to oppress, abuse, and possess women is represented as intrinsically adolescent, an underdeveloped and immature masculine psychic state that Jeffrey is able to transcend but that Frank is unable to escape. It is my opinion that Lynch effects a similar representation of male sexuality in *Lost Highway* through the character of Fred. Whereas Jeffrey is able to attain psychosexual maturity, Fred is like Frank, desperate to control and dominate female sexuality and to become the sole object of female desire. This drive toward sexual domination fuels Fred's every action and grants structure and animus to the endless cycle of fantasy that he seems doomed to repeat. Through Fred, Lynch is revisiting a message that he expressed in both *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* — namely, that male attempts to dominate female sexuality are fatally flawed and morally bankrupt and can only in either in frustration (for Fred, Frank) or tragedy (for Laura Palmer).

Clearly, such a message is inherently feminist. We can see from these three works that Lynch is interested in advocating for a new masculinity, one that respects and

cherishes female sexuality rather than attempting to dominate it, one that is open, like Agent Cooper, to feminine forces of receptivity. Fred, in his spectacular failure, tells us just as much about Lynch's thesis of masculinity, if not more, than does Jeffrey in his success. One issue, however, arises as potentially more problematic and less reducible as far as *Lost Highway*'s gender politics are concerned, and that is the film's portrayal of Renee/Alice. As is revealed later in the film, she is cold, devious, promiscuous, even depraved; not only is she cheating on Fred with Andy, she acts in pornographic snuff films produced by the sinister crime boss Mr. Eddy (Robert Loggia). In *Twin Peaks*, we came to understand Laura's out of control sexuality as a defense mechanism for and reaction against her years of suffering sexual abuse, but Laura was allowed to exist as a subject within *Fire Walk with Me* and *The Secret Diary*. Renee is afforded no such subjectivity; whether she is Renee or Alice, she exists as nothing other than an object of desire within the psychotopography of Fred's mind. Her only seeming moment of true agency, aside from Alice's relentless pursuit of Pete, is revealed to be her participation in pornographic films, traditionally associated with the domination and degradation of women. Those who label Lynch a misogynist surely seize on this character, even more than on the victimized Dorothy, as a retrograde and offensive portrayal of a woman. Indeed, on a surface level, Renee appears to incarnate a horrible stereotype of bitchy, manipulative female sexuality. I would like to propose, however, that much deeper currents are running in this film that redeem its portrayal of this character.

To start, there is the fact that Renee only exists as an object and is never granted subjectivity. This objectification is made necessary by the structure of the film as a male sexual fantasy. Because the entire film is filtered through the prism of Fred's psyche, the

real Renee becomes Renee the *objet petit a*. It is only because Renee exists as an object within this fantasy that Lynch is able to portray the fallacy of Fred's fantasy of sexual domination; to this end, Lynch employs Renee's objectification toward a feminist end. Also important is the degree to which Renee incarnates a new variation of the *femme fatale*. With *Lost Highway*, Lynch is clearly working within the framework of *film noir* as never before, even as he pushed *film noir* to its boundaries and into new and unprecedented territory through the film's convolutions of narrative. But narrative innovations are not the only fresh perspective that *Lost Highway* brings to the tradition of *film noir*, for Renee is a *femme fatale* unlike any who have preceded her. Before I discuss Renee's unique ontology as a *femme fatale*, however, it is necessary to examine her narrative double Alice Wakefield and the role that she plays in the life of Fred's newly created alternate persona Pete Dayton.

The world of Pete Dayton is as different from that of Fred Madison on a cinematic level as it is on a narrative level. Instead of the cramped, dark atmosphere of Fred and Renee's house, Pete's world is defined by ample sunshine and bright, green grass. In an explicit visual echo of *Blue Velvet*, Lynch shows Pete in his backyard on a lounge chair with a white picket fence behind him. The presence of the fence and Pete's position being identical to that of Jeffrey at the end of *Blue Velvet* serve as indications that Pete is living in a world of fantasy, similar to the fantasy of suburban bliss and calm into which Jeffrey and Sandy retreated following the end of their dark ordeal. Whereas Fred and Renee's world of desire was cold and uncomfortable, Pete's fantasy world brims with the light and color of conventional filmmaking, which is itself a fantasy. This opposition between Fred's world and Pete's world creates a very different sort of binary

than what existed in *Blue Velvet*. In the earlier film, the world was divided into a happy fantasy and its nightmarish shadow self that, as we have seen, is necessary to fuel the construction of such a fantasy. Perhaps the only glimpse of the Real — reality as sustained by fantasy — in the film comes at the end when we see Dorothy's worried expression. *Lost Highway*, however, is much more interested in a depiction of the Real.

In *Lost Highway*, the cycle of fantasy and nightmare depicted in *Blue Velvet* is fully present in the Pete Dayton fantasy, which loses its beautiful charm and becomes increasingly nightmarish as it begins to disintegrate due to fantasy's inherent insufficiency to access the impossible object. What the film provides us in the Fred/Renee section is what Žižek terms the "pure real"; Žižek writes:

By [the] direct confrontation of the reality of desire with fantasy, Lynch DECOMPOSES the ordinary "sense of reality" sustained by fantasy into, on the one side, pure, aseptic reality and, on the other side, fantasy: reality and fantasy no longer relate vertically (fantasy beneath reality, sustaining it), but horizontally (side by side). (21)

In the metaphor that Žižek employs, our sense of reality that is informed by fantasy is normally buoyed up and supported by the cycle of fantasy and nightmare churning away beneath it. Because the fantasy is present, our "pure reality" is transformed, made bearable, by the fantasy. In *Lost Highway*, however, "pure reality," without access to fantasy, is what we see in the Fred/Renee section of the film. Fred and Renee's world is the same sad world occupied by the denizens of Deer Meadow; it is reality without recourse to fantasy. It is because Fred is mired in this drab and inert world of desire that

he creates the fantasy of Pete as a means of escape; as we shall see, however, Fred's fantasy, as all fantasy, is doomed to failure.

When Pete first meets Alice, she's in the car of local mob boss Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent, a powerful and tyrannical man who, in an earlier scene, chases a tailgating car off the road, beats the driver, and yells at him to follow the rules of the road. Mr. Eddy's unbounded masculine power and his possession of the impossible object mark him as a phallic figure. Additionally, as an older male in possession of the female object of desire, he incarnates the role of the Oedipal father; when he threatens Pete with his gun after he suspects the liaison occurring between Pete and Alice, the scene plays as almost a literal illustration of the Freudian threat of castration. When Mr. Eddy runs a tailgating driver off the road, beats him, and yells at him to follow the rules of the road, he is seen in all of his terrible and ridiculous glory as the enforcer not only of driving rules, but of structural rules. The power of the father seeks to keep the figure of the son in bondage, bound by the rules he must follow; the ultimate transgression of these rules, of course, would be to kill the father and steal the female object of desire.

In this fantasy, Alice is everything that Renee is not. Completely uninhibited, she comes to Pete and engages him in a torrid affair; and of course this is how Fred would re-imagine Renee. Fred, who desired Renee's desire, imagines Alice as desiring Pete. Of course, Mr. Eddy arises as the obvious impediment to Pete and Alice's relationship. As McGowan writes, "Though the father does prohibit Peter from enjoying Alice, his fantasized existence does at least allow for the possibility of Alice's enjoyment" (170). Because "[fantasy] always structures enjoyment as something prohibited," Mr. Eddy's existence in the fantasy is necessary; only by fantasizing the phallic father can Fred re-

form Renee into the desiring Alice (McGowan 170). For a time, Pete is able to enjoy Alice and bask in her desire, but Mr. Eddy remains a constant threat. In a chilling scene, Mr. Eddy has the Mystery Man speak to Pete in a scene that plays similarly to the party scene earlier in the film, with the Mystery Man telling Pete that they have met before at Pete's house and seemingly threatening Pete with violence. Though the psychoanalytic epistemology of the scene is murky, it makes sense that the superego would ally with the father within the fantasy; while the father seeks to thwart the subject's pursuit of the impossible object, the superego seeks the same end by urging the subject to give up the fantasy, as has already been demonstrated through the Mystery Man's production of the Renee murder tape. In this way, it is not surprising that the Mystery Man should be, as he was described earlier, "a friend of Dick Laurent."

Fearful of Mr. Eddy, Pete and Alice concoct a plan to rob Andy, who makes pornographic films for Mr. Eddy, and flee the country. When Pete enters Andy's house, he sees a projection on the wall of Alice being penetrated from behind in one of Mr. Eddy's porn films, which clearly upsets him. After Pete accidentally kills Andy, he sees a picture of both Renee and Alice standing with Andy and Mr. Eddy. After this, Pete's nose begins to bleed, and he wanders down the hallway of Andy's house, which has suddenly become a hallway in a hotel. Amid pounding music and flashing blue light, he opens a door and sees Renee, being penetrated like Alice, who asks mockingly, "Did you want to talk to me? Did you want to ask me why?" In this entire sequence, it is clear that the fantasy is beginning to disintegrate. The porn film disturbs Pete enough that he begins to cry; he is faced with what Fred only suspected: proof that he does not have a monopoly on Alice's sexuality. The picture of Renee and Alice shows that reality is

beginning to intrude even more violently on the fantasy (there have been earlier instances, such as when Pete hears Fred's saxophone music on the garage radio, gets a headache, and changes the station). Pete's body again responds physically to this intrusion, his nose hemorrhaging blood as he staggers down the hallway. Because he is so close to obtaining the impossible object, the fantasy that depends upon the unattainability of said object is beginning to fall apart. As McGowan writes, "when nothing stands in the way of this enjoyment and the fantasy can no longer keep it at a safe distance, Alice/Renee — the difference is evaporating — becomes unbearable for Peter, just as Renee was unbearable for Fred" (171). The final scene that Pete shares with Alice will complete the disintegration of the fantasy that we see progressing in this scene.

Pete and Alice drive to a cabin in the desert, a cabin that Fred saw previously in a vision prior to his transformation, where Alice claims that a man will give them money and passports. They make love wildly, illuminated by the car headlights, while the same music that we heard earlier during Fred and Renee's sex scene plays. Pete tells Alice, "I want you"; she responds, "You'll never have me," and walks into the cabin. When Pete stands up, he is no longer Pete, but once again Fred. The fantasy has imploded completely. Pete has violated the structural integrity of the fantasy by possessing, in this moment, the impossible object. Because the entire fantasy is structured around the unattainability of this object, Pete reverts into Fred when he finally gains possession of Alice, who disappears. Inside the cabin, there is only the Mystery Man, armed with his video camera, who brusquely disparages Fred's questions about Alice, saying "Her name is Renee. If she told you her name is Alice, she's lying. And your name. What the fuck is your name?" Again, the Mystery Man's actions can be read as the effort of the

superego to convince Fred to abandon his fantasy of Alice and to recognize himself as Fred rather than Pete.

Now that Alice has revealed herself, through her rejection of Pete, as the impossible object, Renee/Alice's ontology as a revolutionary *femme fatale* becomes more clear. The *femme fatale*, of course, is one of the most enduring figures of *film noir*. *Film noir* can be broadly divided into two distinct camps: the classic *noir* of Old Hollywood and the neo-*noir* that arose in the 1980s. In all of her incarnations, the *femme fatale* of *film noir* possesses certain traits: she is sexual, she frustrates the male character's plans even as she arouses his desire, she wields agency. Slavoj Žižek examines the identifying characteristics of these two portrayals, writing, "In classic *noir*, the *femme fatale* is punished at the level of explicit narrative line; she is destroyed for being assertive and undermining the male patriarchal dominance, for presenting a threat to it" (9). A fitting example of this sort of narrative punishment can be found in Robert Aldrich's classic *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), in which the *femme fatale* is incinerated in a beachside shack after her curiosity compels her to open a box containing an unspecified nuclear horror (incidentally, the burning shack bears more than a slight resemblance to the Mystery Man's exploding cabin in the desert). The classic *femme fatale* is a subversive woman because she wields sexual power, but she is ultimately domesticated or destroyed at the end of the story, allowing for patriarchal forces to resume their pride of place. The neo-*noir femme fatale*, on the other hand, is more overtly sexual and, as Žižek notes, is allowed to triumph on the narrative level: "The neo-*noir* of the 90s and 90s...openly, at the very level of explicit narrative, allows the *femme fatale* to triumph...in social reality itself" (9). In Lawrence Kasdan's *Body Heat* (1981), for example, Kathleen Turner's

character successfully dupes William Hurt's character and is left alone at the end of the film to enjoy her newfound riches on an anonymous tropical beach. As Žižek notes, however, even the sexually liberated neo-*noir femme fatale* is still a male fantasy:

The *femme fatale* remains a male fantasy...of encountering a perfect Subject in the guise of the absolutely corrupted woman who fully knows and wills what she is doing....This direct transgression, this direct staging of underlying perverse fantasies, renders innocuous their subversive impact, and provides a new confirmation of the old Freudian thesis that perversion is not subversion. (12)

The *femme fatale* of neo-*noir* is so hyperbolically sexual, so over the top in her forthright wickedness and lewd behavior, that she fails to serve as a subversive figure. The great triumph of *Lost Highway* regarding Renee/Alice is its ability to make her subversive, to transcend the limitations both of the classic *noir* that preceded it and of its neo-*noir* contemporaries.

If *Lost Highway* is innovative in its portrayal of the *femme fatale*, it owes its success to the structure of its narrative; Beckman recognizes this when she writes, "The narrative instability of the [film] offers gaps and contradictions through which the epistemological binding between the *femme fatale* and the narrative can be reconsidered" (32). Specifically because Renee does not exist as a subject, she avoids the trap into which the majority of neo-*noir femmes fatales* — who in their single-minded wickedness play at subjectivity even as their flatness of motive and purpose betray their lack of it — fall. The film owns Renee's artificiality, for she is purposefully presented as an object of Fred's psychological obsession rather than as a subject in her own right. Žižek's analysis of *femmes fatales* suggests that a truly subversive *femme fatale*, on the level of social

reality, would be a woman who not only is sexually liberated but who also possesses a complex subjectivity that the majority of neo-noir *femmes fatales*, as cartoonish caricatures, lack. Renee, however, does not exist at the level of social reality but rather at the level of Fred's psychology; she is able to wield subversive power even without the narrative foundation of subjectivity for support. Renee can be a caricature, as she eventually does become, and still frustrate the structure of male sexual desire.

In this manner Renee reads as a hybrid of both the classic and the neo-noir *femme fatale*. Like her neo-noir sisters, Renee is sexually uninhibited, especially as Alice; but like her classic *noir* predecessors — the titular characters of Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940) and Otto Preminger's *Laura* (1944) come to mind — she is also able to haunt the story like an ever-present specter. As Žižek writes of the classic *femme fatale*:

Her image survives her physical destruction as the element which effectively dominates the scene. Therein, in the way that the texture of the film belies and subverts its explicit narrative line, resides the subversive character of the *noir* films. (9)

Renee combines the uninhibited sexual power of the neo-noir *femme fatale* with the omnipresent psychological presence of her classic counterpart; at one moment in the film, Pete even sees Alice's face floating in the air in front of him as the room spins round and round. She haunts him, she eludes him, and she refuses to be conquered. She finally reveals herself to both Pete and the audience as the unattainable object when she whispers, "You'll never have me." And this moment reads not so much a betrayal as merely an elusion, a slipping away. She may not be a subject in her own right, but she knows enough about her existence as an object to know that to seek to dominate and

possess her is a futile quest. Indeed, it seems as though Lynch is offering a warning to the masculine psyche regarding the objectification of women. Objectify at your own peril, it seems to say, for you can never truly engage in a reciprocal and fulfilling relationship with a woman, like that between Jeffrey and Sandy in *Blue Velvet*, unless you acknowledge her as a discrete subject. It is because Fred cannot learn this lesson, because he continues to monopolize and control Renee's desire, that he is destined for failure, to ride the lost highway forever in a never-ending cycle of doomed fantasy.

After Alice's disappearance, one loose end remains for Fred, however, and that is Mr. Eddy. Fred goes to the Lost Highway Hotel, where he finds Mr. Eddy having sex with Renee, who is apparently alive again. After Renee leaves, Fred kidnaps Mr. Eddy and takes him to the Mystery Man's cabin, where Fred and the Mystery Man collaborate to kill him. Before Mr. Eddy dies, the Mystery Man shows him a video of Mr. Eddy groping Renee while they watch a pornographic snuff film in which Renee participated. Mr. Eddy has to die because, as a remnant of the Pete/Alice fantasy, he is no longer needed; Fred no longer needs the external force of the father, because by retreating from the fantasy, he has internalized the edicts of the superego. Additionally, Fred's murder of the film's most phallic figure makes perfect sense when considering Fred's previous emasculated impotence. Fred desires nothing more than to become phallic himself and in so doing become the object of Renee's feminine desire; as Tom O'Connor writes, "Fred must kill Dick Laurent to reconstruct the nostalgic fantasy that Renee can still be his lost phallic signifier" (19). It is Fred's desire to communicate this message to himself — that the father no longer has access to Renee's enjoyment — that establishes the film's "time loop."

Fred drives to his house and speaks the words “Dick Laurent is dead” into his intercom before fleeing into the desert pursued by the police. Unfortunately, as the film has just shown us, this message will do little to assuage Fred’s suspicion and jealousy. In the last shot of the film, Fred in his car begins to thrash and smoke, changing once again into Pete or some other fantasy version of himself. The implication is clear: Fred is trapped in “a never-ending journey of despair, forever accelerating but never escaping its confines” (Odell & LeBlanc 125). Fred seems condemned to live out fantasy after fantasy, chasing Renee’s desire in an eternally futile pursuit.

Chapter IV - Hollywood Dreams: Desire and Fantasy in *Mulholland Drive*

After David Lynch completed work on *The Straight Story*, he turned his attention back to the realm of TV. Eager to produce a new hit TV show in the vein of *Twin Peaks*, Lynch filmed the pilot episode for a new project called *Mulholland Drive*.

Unfortunately, ABC passed on the pilot, and the project was shelved. After Lynch acquired outside funding, however, he was able to return to the work, film additional scenes, and release it as a standalone film. *Mulholland Drive* rather explicitly builds on groundwork that Lynch laid in *Lost Highway*, as it is every bit as twisted, convoluted, and confusing on a narrative level as its predecessor. *Mulholland Drive* also cements Lynch's turn away from the examination of social fantasy visible in *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* in favor of an exploration of fantasy as an attempt at personal escapism. Like Fred in *Lost Highway*, Diane Selwyn (Naomi Watts) is consumed by desire for the object of her affection, enacts violence upon that object, and then escapes into fantasy in an attempt to recover what eluded her in life. In many ways, *Mulholland Drive* plays as a tighter, brighter, more lyrical and elegant exploration of these central themes that were previously on display in *Lost Highway*; there are, however, some important differences between the two films, particularly regarding gender, for while *Lost Highway* proceeds from a male perspective, *Mulholland Drive* is constructed through a female point of view and is also Lynch's only film to include LGBT characters (not including the transgender DEA agent Denise Bryson in *Twin Peaks*). As we shall see, this newfound focus on the feminine and the queer informs this film's unique construction of fantasy.

After an abstract opening scene showing several couples dancing the jitterbug against a purple background, a beautiful, young blonde woman approaches the camera

and smiles warmly. The image dissolves to a close up of a bed, the wrinkled sheets the color of dried blood. On the soundtrack, we hear labored breathing, and the camera zooms in to a pillow until all we see is blackness. Then Angelo Badalamenti's main theme for the film begins to play as we see a car making its way slowly around the sinuous curves of Mulholland Drive, in Los Angeles. Already, before the opening credits have even rolled, Lynch has provided the viewer with a fairly straightforward clue as to what is happening. The dissolve from the beaming blonde woman to the "first person" shot of the bed suggests that we are seeing the bed through her eyes; the zoom into the pillow seems a clear indication that what we are about to see is a dream, the dream of the woman with labored breathing. Although the film is open to multiple interpretations at the narrative level due to its intentionally elusive and unconventional structure, the mechanics of fantasy seem much simpler and more concrete than in *Lost Highway*, as these opening shots indicate. *Lost Highway* raised multiple unanswerable questions: Is the entire film taking place in Fred's mind? Only the section regarding Pete? Is Fred doomed to live out the cycle of fantasy forever? etc. Fred's ontology was murky from the start, if indeed the entire film did take place in a psychological realm as I posit; the entire endeavor is difficult to wrap one's mind around. But all of us are familiar with the mechanics of the dream, and *Mulholland Drive* suggests a clear divide between a fantasy dream world and the reality of the dreamer.

Because *Mulholland Drive* opens with its fantasy rather than introducing it later, and because this fantasy only arises toward the end of the actual story, which we are later able to see in flashbacks, a brief plot summary will be useful to provide us with background information that will indicate exactly how and why this fantasy comes into

being. As I interpret the film, Diane Selwyn is the dreamer, the woman whom we see at the end of the jitterbug contest and who sinks into the pillow in the opening shots. Diane, a struggling actress, has been rejected by her lover Camilla Rhodes (Laura Elena Harring), a successful movie star, who announces her engagement to director Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux). Humiliated and enraged, Diane hires a hit man (Mark Pellegrino) to kill Camilla. After the deed is done, Diane falls asleep, as we see in the opening shots, and dreams a dream that makes up the first two thirds of the film, in which she is transmogrified into a hopeful young ingénue named Betty Elms (also Naomi Watts), and Camilla becomes a helpless amnesiac who takes the name Rita (also Laura Elena Harring). Much like Fred, Diane creates a new world in which both she and the woman she loves are someone else. Unfortunately for Diane, however, she suffers from the same ignorance as Fred: namely, ignorance of the knowledge that such a fantasy as theirs are is doomed to failure, for such a fantasy's existence depends upon the impossibility of possessing the *objet petit a* for which both subjects yearn. Close reading of several key scenes will illuminate exactly how Diane's fantasy operates.

As the fantasy begins, we see a car carrying the woman who will later call herself Rita driving up Mulholland Drive. It is suggested through a series of scenes later in the film that this woman is an actress, likely attached to a film called *The Sylvia North Story* being directed by Adam Kesher, who is the target of a shadowy Hollywood mob who wants her out of the picture. She survives an assassination attempt by her driver after a carful of teenagers crashes into her limo; her memory gone, stumbles down into LA and takes refuge in an apartment being vacated by a woman named Ruth (Maya Bond). It is in this apartment that she will take the name Rita from a poster for Charles Vidor's *Gilda*

(1946), starring Rita Hayworth, and meet Betty Elms, Ruth's niece, newly arrived in Los Angeles. Because Rita is played by Laura Elena Harring, it is clear that she is Diane's re-conception of Camilla Rhodes, but she is also *not* Camilla Rhodes, for there is another woman (Melissa George) who incarnates this character in the fantasy. In the fantasy, Camilla Rhodes is an actress who has the support of the mob; when the Castigliane brothers (Angelo Badalamenti and Dan Hedaya) meet with Adam Kesher, they insist that he cast Camilla in his film, stating, "This is the girl." We see Melissa George later in the film playing a nameless woman who kisses Camilla in front of Diane at the party at which Camilla and Adam announce their engagement, suggesting that Camilla is continuing her lesbian affairs even though she has ended things with Diane. Why then is this woman given the name Camilla Rhodes inside the fantasy rather than Laura Harring?

Diane clearly believes that she is a more talented actress than Camilla, a fact reflected by Rita's obvious ineptitude when she and Betty run lines together in a later scene. This fact established, it is only logical that in Diane's fantasy, Camilla is only able to achieve the success she does via the support of a mob conspiracy. But again, Camilla looks a little different in the dream from her appearance in the real world. On one level, Diane imagines Melissa George as Camilla because she has a psychological need to punish the woman who dared to flaunt her affection with Camilla in front of Diane at the party; Diane makes Melissa George into a talentless hack in the fantasy just as she punishes Adam Kesher, who stole Camilla away from her, by making him live through the day from hell and, via the mob conspiracy, robbing him of his creative freedom, the worst possible injury one can inflict upon an artist. But another reason for the Camilla/Rita split lies in Camilla's nature as Diane's *objet petit a*. As McGowan writes,

“The *objet petit a* is the remainder that the process of signification leaves behind, and as such, it always escapes the province of the signifier (and the name)” (207). The name “Camilla Rhodes,” as it is attached to Melissa George, serves as a signifier for the emotions of jealousy and hatred that, by this time, Diane holds for the real life Camilla Rhodes. The element of Camilla that Diane desires, however — her “thingness” as an object of desire — manifests in the fantasy independent not only of the name “Camilla” but of all names, as an amnesiac. As such, Diane is able to recover Camilla as an object of desire separate from all of the emotional baggage with which the real life figure is saddled; as McGowan writes, Rita is “fantasy’s attempt to deliver the impossible object in a pure form, free of any pathological taint” (208). With Rita, Diane, as Betty, has a chance to start fresh with a woman whose mind is literally a blank slate; the success and subsequent failure of this relationship will be key in revealing the limits of fantasy.

When Betty Elms makes her first appearance in the film, she is arriving at LAX, bathed in bright sunlight as dreamy music swells on the soundtrack, and bidding goodbye to an old couple (Jeanne Bates and Dan Birnbaum) whom she met on her flight. Skinny, beautiful, and golden haired, she instantly reminds us of a classic Hitchcock blonde, though her warm, earnest naïveté reads more Grace Kelly or Tippi Hedren than the ice cold manipulations of Kim Novak or Janet Leigh. If anything, Betty, in both her purity and her curiosity regarding Rita’s mysterious situation, recalls Sandy Williams from *Blue Velvet*, a good girl who is nonetheless intrigued by the darkness of mystery. After Betty and the old couple part ways in separate taxis, we are treated to a brief scene of the old couple smiling demonically and leaning their heads together as if they shared some terrible secret. When we consider that Betty is Diane’s dream persona, the old couple’s

actions become clear. Betty ostensibly met the old couple on the flight that took her to Los Angeles; as such, the old couple are privy to the knowledge of Betty's point of departure — that is, the real world of Diane. They smile conspiratorially because they know the truth of Diane's life and that this fantasy is doomed to failure; like the terrifying bum behind Winkie's Diner whom we have seen in an earlier scene, they are subversive figures who hold the promise of the real within the fantasy, and like the bum, we will see them again in a very horrifying capacity. First though, Betty and Rita's Hollywood mystery has to begin.

Betty meets Rita in her aunt's apartment, where Rita reveals that she has been injured in an accident and has lost her memory. When the women open Rita's purse in search of answers, they find multiple stacks of hundred dollar bills and a mysterious blue key. Of course, the presence of a key begs the question, "What does it open?" Once again, blue becomes Lynch's color of secrets, of mysteries. As we see later, when Diane pays the hit man (this money is likely the blueprint for Rita's copious wads of cash), the hit man promises to leave Diane a blue key in a specific place once he has completed the hit. After Diane wakes up, we see the blue key on her table, indicating that the hit has already been carried out. Because the blue key is loaded with symbolic weight as a signifier of Camilla's death, it becomes refashioned in the dream as a key that will literally "unlock" the portal between fantasy and reality and lead to the fantasy's destruction, as we shall see later. The key thus becomes connected to the bum and the old couple as part of an uncanny constellation of sinister forces that represent the intrusion of the real into the fantasy. Before the key will find its lock, however, Betty and Rita will attempt to figure out the mystery of Rita's identity.

Intrigued by the beautiful amnesiac who is now sharing her home, Betty takes the lead in the women's endeavor to figure out who Rita really is, encouraging Rita to let her call the police station to enquire about Rita's accident and, when Rita remembers the name Diane Selwyn, resolving to track down Diane and pay a visit to her apartment. This urge to sleuth seems counterintuitive, for of course Rita is really Camilla, and any revelation of this secret would undo the fabric of the fantasy that Diane has created; Betty seems to be working against herself. On the other hand, however, this attempt to uncover Rita's identity also seems like an effort to "solve the mystery" that Rita represents and, by so doing, establish power over and stake a claim to Rita. Camilla, as the *objet petit a*, becomes transformed in the fantasy into a walking mystery, a mystery that Betty is uniquely positioned to solve. Whereas Camilla was always out of Diane's reach, Rita becomes possessable and enjoyable inasmuch as Betty can work to solve her mystery. McGowan echoes this sentiment when he writes, "A sense of mystery obscures and provides respite from desire's constitutive impossibility....[Fantasy] creates a sense of mystery...in order to obscure the necessary deadlock that animates all desire" (200). Rita, as a mystery, is still out of reach, but there is the sense that, whereas Diane was always unable to bridge the gulf separating her from Camilla, Rita's mystery can be *solved*. Nevertheless, any solution of this mystery will, of course, necessitate the death of the fantasy. Again, we see the inadequacy of the construction of fantasy as a means to possess the impossible object; any attainment of the *objet petit a* is impossible (for more than a brief moment, at any rate), for the existence of the fantasy depends upon its unattainability. McGowan echoes this sentiment when he perceptively notes, "Fantasy holds the key to its own traversal because the logic of the fantasy itself pushes the subject

to the point of its dissolution” (212). There is undeniable pleasure for Betty in her attempt to solve Rita’s mystery, as it provides her with the illusion of holding power over and possessing the impossible object. Betty’s endeavors, however, are destined to end in failure, for the very snooping that allows her to hold power over Rita will activate the dissolution of the fantasy.

We receive another early clue regarding the tenuous nature of Diane’s fantasy when Betty and Rita are paid a visit by a mysterious woman named Louise Bonner (Lee Grant) who, tellingly, wears a blue cloak. When Betty answers the door, Louise baldly states, “Someone is in trouble,” and asks Betty’s name. When Betty tells her her name is Betty, Louise replies, “No it’s not. That’s not what she said. Someone is in trouble; something bad is happening!” Louise, dressed in blue garments that mirror the color of the mysterious blue key, appears to be a seer or prophetess; she is a messenger of the real, who attempts to reveal the truth to Betty through her cryptic words. Betty, however, is incapable or unwilling to recognize the truth that Louise speaks, that her name really isn’t Betty and that much trouble and many bad things fill her waking life. Despite Louise’s warnings, Betty will have to come to these realizations in her own time. Before Betty and Rita venture to Diane’s apartment and make the horrifying discovery that will lead to the collapse of Diane’s fantasy, however, Betty will travel to a movie studio to audition for a film and, in the process, will finally cross paths with Adam Kesher, whose subplot has been unfolding in parallel to Betty and Rita’s story throughout the film.

Betty’s audition stands out as one of the most memorable scenes in the entire film and is often cited as a crucial scene in academic analyses of the film. In the scene, Betty arrives at a big movie studio for an audition that her aunt has set up for her. The scene

that she will be performing is the same scene that we have already seen her act out with Rita, in which a young woman confronts her secret lover, who also happens to be her father's best friend. In the earlier scene, while Rita read her lines flatly in a way that obviously indicated that she had no acting talent, Betty's acting appeared rather conventional, and the scene played as a standard, combative confrontation. When it comes time for the actual audition, however, the scene unfolds very differently. As the audition begins, Betty's scene partner Woody Katz (Chad Everett) draws her in close, saying, "Now we're going to play this nice and close, just like in the movies." Already, a difference has been established from the earlier reading of the scene, in which Betty and Rita stood far away from each other at opposite ends of the kitchen. When Betty speaks the first line of the scene — "You're still here." — her voice is as we have never heard it before, low, throaty, and dramatic; indeed, as we shall see, it is Diane's voice. Betty's performance throughout the scene is whispered and sexual, imbuing the rather rote dialogue with charged sexual dramatic tension. When Woody's hand hovers near Betty's backside, she places her hand on his and guides it to her flesh before kissing him with an open mouth. When she venomously whispers her final lines — "I hate you. I hate us both." — she shudders and sheds real tears. This is Betty as we have never seen her before; clearly, some important change has happened in this scene.

We have received no indication up to this point in the film that Betty is capable, even in the realm of performance, of exceeding the boundaries of her innocent, naïve personality. And although the sexual and wounded face that Betty presents in this scene is couched within the artifice of performance, it certainly suggests hidden depths within the actress herself to which we have not yet been privy. In many ways, the scene reads

not merely as a revelation but rather as a betrayal of character, for Betty immediately returns to her sunny, chipper persona when the audition ends. In that way, the scene reads as a very calculated message that this woman is more than she seems on the surface; McGowan picks up on this theme when, noting Betty's simultaneous innocence and sexuality, he writes, "Betty occupies subject positions that are contradictory and mutually exclusive. This is only possible because she represents a fantasized version of Diane. The distortion of the fantasy allows Betty to be all things" (207). As McGowan writes, Betty "accomplishes the impossible"; because Betty is a fantasmatic creation of Diane's imagination, she can be whoever Diane wants her to be, by turns innocent and experienced in equal measure (207). Lynch cements the psychological duality at play in this scene through cinematic allusion to Hitchcock. As I've mentioned, Betty is physically every inch a Hitchcock blonde, and her naïveté calls Tippi Hedren most to mind of all Hitchcock's leading ladies. But, as George Toles notes, the gray suit that Betty wears in the audition scene seems a calculated homage to the gray suit worn by Kim Novak in *Vertigo* (1958), in which Novak's character impersonates another, more innocent woman (5). Through this use of allusion, Lynch is suggesting to the viewer that the Betty we've seen until now is perhaps just a façade for a more experienced, more sexual persona that has yet to surface; as we will see when the story returns to Diane's reality, this is indeed the case.

Beyond citing Hitchcock, however, Lynch is also citing himself; the scene bears strong similarities to the "verbal rape" scene in Lynch's earlier film *Wild at Heart*, in which Bobby Peru (Willem Dafoe) held Lula Fortune (Laura Dern) in a tight embrace and would not let her go until she spoke the words "Fuck me." In that scene, Lula

obviously becomes aroused by the repulsive Bobby in spite of herself and, when he leaves, weeps alone in shame. At first glance, Betty's audition scene seems almost like the inverse of the scene from *Wild at Heart*, for Betty matches Woody's sleaziness and takes it a step further, taking control of the situation. Nevertheless, Betty's tears when she professes her hate for both Woody's character and herself seem all too real to suggest a true victory on Betty's part. As Olson writes, "In Lynch's world, profane, base animal urges can be dangerous, possessing forces, and need to be carefully controlled"; Olson also cites the shooting script, in which it is specified that "Betty cries 'because she's ashamed of how the sex of the scene took her over'" (542). Although Betty's sexual display proved her acting ability in the moment, it was still principally a reaction to Woody's initial sleazy, sexual acting choices. Viewing the situation from Diane's perspective, we can understand Betty's emotional response. Yes, Betty is a fantasmatic figure and as such is capable of stretching to fill whatever capacity Diane needs her to fill, but it is important to note just how different Betty is, in her natural presentation, from the miserable, broken Diane that we see later in the film. If Betty is Diane's fantasy persona, then the implication is that Diane wishes she could break free from the morass of sexual self-loathing and degradation into which she has fallen and become happy and carefree. If Betty cries real tears in the audition scene, then perhaps it is because, on a subconscious level, her sexual display reminds Diane of her execrable situation and the pain of the real breaks through, momentarily, into the fantasy.

Betty/Diane's emotional distress aside, the audition is a smash success, with everyone in the room clearly in awe of Betty's talent. Impressed, casting director Linney James (Rita Taggart) takes Betty across the street to meet Adam Kesher and possibly

audition for a role in his film *The Sylvia North Story*. Unbeknownst to Linney and Betty, however, Adam has already been bullied into casting Camilla Rhodes as the lead in his film, so Betty, although she is talented, is never even afforded a chance at this big time project due to the conspiratorial machinations of the Hollywood mob. When Betty walks into the soundstage, Adam turns around in his chair and they lock eyes in a visual exchange rendered in extreme close up for maximum effect. Here, Lynch is once again citing himself, for the exchange of the gaze closely mirrors that between Pete and Alice upon their first meeting in *Lost Highway*. For Pete and Alice, this visual foreplay served as a gateway to their destiny; for Betty, however, there can be no progress, for the diabolical machinations of the shadowy Hollywood power players have closed off any chance she might have had at collaborating with Adam and attaining stardom and success. Betty, remembering her promise to Rita to pay a visit to Diane's apartment, runs off, the promise of the lingering gaze with Adam eternally unfulfilled and unfulfillable.

When Betty and Rita arrive at Diane's apartment and no one answers their knock on the door, Betty breaks in through a window and unlocks the door from the inside. Inside, Betty and Rita find the corpse of Diane Selwyn (Lyssie Powell) in an advanced state of decomposition lying on the same bed with red sheets from the opening shots of the film. As the two women run outside, their image begins to blur and sway back and forth. Why is Diane's corpse present in her apartment if this is indeed Diane's dream? On one level, it stands to reason that Diane would have to "kill" herself in order to be reborn within the dream as Betty; on the other hand, the corpse could also represent Diane's suicidal impulses to which she eventually yields at the end of the film. At any rate, Diane's corpse is something that Betty is manifestly *not* supposed to see; McGowan

identifies the corpse as “the fantasy’s point of origin, which is a traumatic point of non-sense that does not fit within the fantasy structure” (211). Diane’s corpse is a violent intrusion of the real into the fantasy, and the blurred images of Betty and Diane as they run from the apartment suggest that the very fabric of the fantasy is beginning to be torn asunder. Again, Kristeva’s consideration of the corpse is germane. For Kristeva, the corpse is the signifier for death, which is the negation of being. As such, the corpse becomes the chief symbol for what Kristeva terms the abject, or that which incites repulsion and is thus necessarily expelled from the social order, often to return to haunt the subject in strange and uncanny altered forms. Diane’s corpse clearly fulfills the role of the abject within the fantasy, for it is both hidden away and also terribly disruptive in its power. For Diane, her real life has become a sort of waking death, a death to which the dream of Betty serves as counterpoint, as life. This intrusion of the abject not only injects the real into the fantasy but also taints Diane’s dream of a new life with the stench of the grave; as we shall see, the encounter with the corpse marks the beginning of the end for the fantasy and sets the stage for the plot elements that immediately follow.

That night, Rita, who imagines she must be in some danger and needs to alter her appearance, begins to cut her hair; Betty lovingly convinces her to let her do it, and soon enough, Rita is wearing a blonde wig that makes her hair look just like Betty’s. Although the allusion may be unintentional, the moment recalls the scene in Barbet Schroeder’s *Single White Female* (1992) in which the mentally disturbed Hedy (Jennifer Jason Leigh), obsessed with her roommate Allie (Bridget Fonda), cuts and colors her hair to look exactly like Allie’s. Here, however, it is Betty who transforms Rita to look like her. It appears that Betty is attempting not only to possess Rita but to consume her, to absorb

and dominate her identity totally. Surprisingly, perhaps, to viewers of *Lost Highway*, Betty actually succeeds in attaining the impossible object, for she makes love with Rita directly after the wig scene. Even as the fantasy crumbles around her, Betty is able to enjoy a moment of pure sexual and emotional connection with the *objet petit a* in a way that Pete, as a result of Alice's icy elusiveness, is never able to do.

That Betty and Rita become lovers (the real life Camilla is bisexual, Diane is either lesbian or bisexual) represents a first for Lynch, who has never before explored queer sexuality in his films. And yet, the special flavor of Betty's attempted dominance of Rita could not exist between a man and a woman. Fred wanted to possess Renee, but the same sex relationship between Betty and Rita allows for an extension of this paradigm: Betty wants to *become* Rita, or at the very least to meld with her. This yearning for total possession and control calls to mind the more pernicious desires of BOB in *Twin Peaks* who wanted not only to rape Laura Palmer but to inhabit her body as well. The lengths to which Betty is willing to go to assert sexual and psychological dominance over Rita only reinforces our perception of Diane's misery and desperation. But why is Betty/Diane allowed such access to her *objet petit a*? She certainly enjoys more access to Rita than Pete does to Alice. The answer, McGowan suggests, lies in the difference between male and female fantasy. As McGowan writes, "The enjoyment of a male fantasy remains a potential enjoyment....The male fantasy holds back....A female fantasy, on the other hand, goes too far. It is a fantasy of giving oneself entirely to the love object" (212). Following McGowan's theory, there is a key difference between how male and female fantasy structures operate: male desire is constructed around the lack of something not present, while female desire is constructed around the loss of something

that was present but is no longer. Fred may be endlessly chasing Renee down the lost highway, but for Diane, such endless pursuit is not an option, for her fantasy does not chase Camilla but rather mourns Camilla's loss; indeed, that Diane only experiences this fantasy after Camilla has already died suggests this paradigm of mourning. Of course, Fred kills Renee prior to his retreat into fantasy, but Fred kills Renee *in search of the objet petit a*, in order to fulfill his desire; Fred has never enjoyed Renee's desire, has never possessed her. Diane has already shared a fulfilling relationship with Camilla, has enjoyed access to her *objet petit a*, before Camilla ends their relationship; and she kills Camilla not in search of something, not to fulfill her desire, but rather in an attempt to destroy her desire, believing that with the object of her now unfulfillable desire eradicated, she will have respite from the torment of her desire. Of course, her plan does not work, and she remains consumed by desire; as such, the dream of Betty arises as an attempt not to chase what she never possessed, à la Fred, but to return to the happiness that she once enjoyed. And although Diane is doomed to failure by the nature of fantasy, Lynch is kind enough to let her have the love scene with Rita, to experience, for one brief moment, the bliss to which she longs to return.

In the wake of the sex scene, Lynch makes another important cinematic allusion. As both women sleep, Rita's face points straight up while behind her, Betty's face is on its side, turned toward the camera. This arrangement is a near perfect echo of a famous shot in Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966), a film about two women staying alone on an island whose personas begin to meld (coincidentally, Bibi Andersson, who plays the more psychologically domineering of the two women, bears more than a passing resemblance to Naomi Watts); the allusion acknowledges *Mulholland Drive*'s explicit

debt to *Persona* and emphasizes yet again the extent to which Betty seeks to subsume Rita's psyche within her own, to "eat" her personhood. Unfortunately for Betty, her encounter with the real in the form of Diane's corpse and her brief access to and enjoyment of the *objet petit a* both signal that the fantasy will soon come to an end. Rita speaks the word "silencio" aloud in her sleep and, after waking, insists that Betty accompany her somewhere even though it's 2:00 in the morning. For the first time in the film, Rita asserts her agency and occupies a position of power in relation to Betty; the power dynamic between the cruel Camilla and the needy, dependent Diane is beginning to bleed into the fantasy. Diane and the bewigged Rita take a ghostly taxi drive through the night and arrive at a back alley club called Silencio; it is in this club that the fantasy will fall apart and the truth will be revealed.

Club Silencio's name is written in blue neon tubes above a shiny blue door, indicating that this club will be a place where secrets are revealed. Inside, on a stage draped with red curtains, a man who is not named in the film but who in the credits is given the deliciously strange moniker of Bondar (Richard Green) speaks in English, Spanish, and French as slinky, hypnotic jazz music plays. His words — "No hay banda; there is no band." Bondar emphasizes that all of the sound heard in the club is a tape recording, that musicians who appear to be playing their instruments are in fact merely miming along to the recording. We see a woman with blue hair (Cori Glazer) watching the performance from a box to the side of the stage. Bondar raises his hands, and the club fills with flashes of blue light as Betty begins to convulse; he then smiles demonically as he disappears in a puff of blue smoke, and blue light, similar to that that appeared to

Laura Palmer in her bedroom and to Fred Madison in his prison cell, washes over the room in shifting, aquatic patterns.

Although Bondar's performance is mysterious, the meaning is clear: the façade of surface events that we think we perceive is merely an illusion that masks the reality, the truth, underneath. Bondar's utilization of multiple languages reinforces this point, for it demonstrates the instability of the process of signification; as McGowan writes, "By showing the emcee speaking in different languages, the film suggests the unimportance of the signifiers themselves relative to what they cannot capture — the absence of the impossible object" (213). No matter what form Diane's fantasy takes, it will never be able to recapture in any permanent way the bliss that she shared with Camilla. Bondar functions much like Louise as an emissary of the real; but whereas Betty was not primed to receive Louise's message, the fantasy is now in a state of rapid decomposition, and Betty's convulsions point to her beginning, on some level, to recognize the horrible secret that her world is merely an illusion, an escapist fantasy for Diane.

After Bondar disappears from the stage, Cookie (Geno Silva), whom we have already seen as the manager of the downtown hotel where Adam hid after being kicked out of his house by his wife Lorraine (Lori Huerling), walks onstage and, in Spanish, introduces a singer named Rebekah Del Rio (Herself). Del Rio approaches the microphone and sings an a cappella Spanish language version of Roy Orbison's "Crying," her voice rich and beautiful. During Del Rio's performance, Betty and Rita both begin to cry. Partway through the performance, Del Rio collapses, but her voice continues to sing, revealing that it is yet another recording. As Cookie and another man drag Del Rio off stage, Betty wipes her eyes and opens her purse to find a mysterious

blue box. In this half of the scene, Del Rio's song functions as a lament for the loss of the impossible object; while Bondar has forced Betty to confront that her entire reality is an illusion, Del Rio's song allows her to grieve its loss and the impossibility of fantasy to deliver the impossible object. After the performance is over, Betty finds the blue box, the object that will serve as the gateway between the dream and reality.

When the women return home, Betty actually vanishes, unable to face the truth, leaving Rita to unlock the blue box with the blue key. The camera zooms inside, and in a series of images, we witness Betty's world being replaced with that of Diane, who wakes from her dream and into her miserable life. In this section of the film, we see the events that led to Diane's decision to have Camilla killed in a series of temporally disjointed scenes. Although the dream of Betty was certainly strange in its own way, this temporal disjunction seems far more dreamlike and disorienting than the relative cinematic realism of Betty's section of the film. Noting this seeming contradiction, McGowan writes:

This sense of reality results from the film's fantasmatic dimension rather than its realism....*Mulholland Drive* underlines the link between [fantasy and reality], depicting fantasy's role in providing reality with the structure that it has. (196)

Indeed, Fred's fantasy of Pete also played by the rules of realism until it too began to disintegrate. Fantasy in this sense is not necessarily so "fantastic"; in fact, it is due to fantasy that our perception of reality is able to retain its structure. When we have no access to fantasy at all, we are stuck in the constipated worlds of Deer Meadow or of Fred and Renee. But this is not Diane's world. Whereas the denizens of Deer Meadow perhaps don't even dream of fantasy, Diane has already retreated into the fantasy and has experienced its insufficiency. Fred's response to this failure was to dive into a new

fantasy in a never ending cycle, chasing the *objet petit a* that he can never quite obtain. But perhaps because Diane is a woman and her feminine fantasy is constructed around the experience of possession and subsequent loss of the *objet petit a* rather than around its permanent unattainability, this cyclical flight into fantasy is not an option for her. She has learned what Fred has not: namely, that fantasy is an empty promise. Diane's sense of reality can no longer be supported by the cycle of fantasy and nightmare; she is thrust into the wholly unfantasmatic social reality represented by Deer Meadow. But because she has tasted fantasy, which the people of Deer Meadow have never experienced, this reality becomes untenable for her and transforms into a nightmare. As Justus Nieland writes, "Diane's fall from fantasy into reality is experienced as a personal tragedy. Or better, she suffers personhood *as* tragedy" (99). Life itself, supposedly at its most prosaic, becomes a nightmare, and the time skips and hallucinations with which Lynch fills this segment of the film reflect Diane's tortured subjective perception of reality.

At the end of the film, we see the bum behind Winkie's, perhaps the film's most concrete symbol of desire's false promise and the ugly face of truth, playing with the blue box. He puts the box in a paper bag and places it on the ground; from the moth of the box issue forth tiny versions of the old couple that accompanied Betty at the airport. Their knowing, uncanny smiles in the car suggested that they knew Diane's secret then, and now they will return as dark messengers of the real to torment Diane with the truth of the situation from which she has attempted to flee. As a persistent and invasive knocking sounds at Diane's door, they creep under the door and grow to full size as they laugh and charge at Diane. Screaming, Diane runs into her bedroom and puts an end to her suffering by shooting herself in the face. Plumes of smoke rise around Diane's bed as

blue light flashes; we are then shown an image of Betty and the blonde wigged Rita's smiling faces superimposed over the skyline of the city, a haunting reminder of Diane's all too fleeting dream of happiness. Appropriately, the film ends in Club Silencio, its dark heart. Blue light washes over the stage, as the woman with blue hair speaks the final word of the film: "Silencio." Olson identifies her as "an archetypal sphinx figure" and "a wise watcher, an embodiment of enigma, a knower of some ultimate meaning that is beyond human understanding" (582). Her blue hair suggests her knowledge of the film's terrible secret: that fantasy can never serve as a means of accessing the impossible object; Her final pronouncement of "silencio" not only brings silence to the end of Diane's story, but perhaps serves as the death knell of fantasy, Lynch's final word on the mad folly that both Fred and Diane have pursued to their ultimate destruction.

CONCLUSION

The horrible finality of Diane's suicide in *Mulholland Drive* is Lynch's ultimate and terrible pronouncement on the foolishness of utilizing fantasy as an escape from reality, and yet, it seems, Lynch also advocates for the necessity of fantasy to live a proper and balanced life. Fred and Diane attempt to substitute fantasy for reality, but, as *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* suggest, the proper place of fantasy is just out of reach, sustaining our dreams and desires as it gives shape and structure to our perception of the world. Without access to fantasy, Lynch suggests, we become like the citizens of Deer Meadow: hollow, purposeless, stuck. As Lynch has revealed time and again in his work, fantasy is ultimately unable to provide the glorious dreams that it promises, so a nightmare force must arise to compensate for the failure of fantasy and allow for the generation of a new fantasy in a never-ending cycle. Nevertheless, the fantasy remains, elusive, beautiful, and hypnotic.

As we have also seen in Lynch's work, sexuality often structures his characters' experience of fantasy, with the characters' desire taking the form of explicitly sexual desire. Throughout *Blue Velvet*, *Twin Peaks*, and *Lost Highway*, Lynch utilizes this focus on the sexual to advocate for a new form of masculinity, one that valorizes the experience of women and embraces the feminine as a necessary, stabilizing component of life. In *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* and *Mulholland Drive*, Lynch gives femininity the center stage, exploring in the earlier film the devastating consequences of sexual abuse and in the latter the unique contours of female fantasy. Although I have not examined all of Lynch's work in this thesis, these works combine with the rest of his artistic corpus to make a grand feminist statement, one that upbraids the patriarchy for its loutish treatment

of women and that mourns the disastrous results of this mistreatment. Although it has been eight years since the release of Lynch's last feature film, one can only speculate that any future projects from the director will continue the focus on fantasy and sexuality that permeates his entire body of work.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, John. *The Films of David Lynch*. London: Charles Letts & Limited, 1993. Print.
- Beckman, Frida. "From Irony to Narrative Crisis: Reconsidering the Femme Fatale in the Films of David Lynch." *Cinema Journal* 52.1 (2012): 25-44. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 26 Feb. 2014.
- Berry, Betsy. "Forever, in My Dreams: Generic Conventions and the Subversive Imagination in Blue Velvet." *Literature Film Quarterly* 16.2 (1988): 82-90. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 9 May 2013.
- Blue Velvet*. Dir. David Lynch. Perf. Isabella Rossellini, Kyle MacLachlan, and Dennis Hopper. De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, 1986. DVD.
- Chion, Michel. *David Lynch*. Trans. Robert Julian. 2nd ed. London: British Film Institute, 2006. Print.
- George, Diana H. "Lynching Women: A Feminist Reading of Twin Peaks." *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*. Ed. David Lavery. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1995. 109-19. Print.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway*. Seattle: Walter Chapin Simpson Center for the Humanities, 2000. Print.
- Jerslev, Anne. "Beyond Boundaries: David Lynch's Lost Highway." *The Cinema of David Lynch: American Dreams, Nightmare Visions*. Ed. Erica Sheen and Annette Davison. London: Wallflower, 2004. 151-64. Print.
- Lafky, Sue. "Gender, Power, and Culture in the Televisual World of Twin Peaks: A Feminist Critique." *Journal of Film and Video* 51.3/4 (1999/2000): 5-19. *JSTOR*.

Web. 11 Feb. 2014.

Lost Highway. Dir. David Lynch. Perf. Bill Pullman, Patricia Arquette, and Balthazar Getty. October Films, 1997. DVD.

Lynch, David, and Mark Frost, prods. *Twin Peaks*. 1990 - 1991. Television.

Lynch, Jennifer. *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer*. New York: Pocket, 1990. Print.

McGowan, Todd. *The Impossible David Lynch*. New York: Columbia UP, 2007. Print.

Mulholland Drive. Dir. David Lynch. Perf. Naomi Watts, Laura Elena Harring, and Justin Theroux. Universal Pictures, 2001. DVD.

Nieland, Justus. *David Lynch*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 2012. Print.

Nochimson, Martha P. *The Passion of David Lynch: Wild at Heart in Hollywood*. Austin: University of Texas, 1997. Print.

O'Connor, Tom. "The Pitfalls of Media "Representations": David Lynch's Lost Highway." *Journal of Film and Video* 57.3 (2005): 14-30. JSTOR. Web. 26 Feb. 2014.

Odell, Colin, and Michelle LeBlanc. *David Lynch*. Kamera, 2007. Web. 9 May 2013.

Olson, Greg. *David Lynch: Beautiful Dark*. Lanham: Scarecrow, 2008. Print.

Plummer, Laura. "'I'm Not Laura Palmer': David Lynch's Fractured Fairy Tale." *Literature Film Quarterly* 25.4 (1997): 307-14. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 11 Feb. 2014.

Rodley, Chris, ed. *Lynch on Lynch*. 2nd ed. New York: Faber and Faber, 2005. Print.

Stevenson, Diane. "Family Romance, Family Violence, and the Fantastic in Twin Peaks." *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*. Ed. David Lavery. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1995. 70-81. Print.

Stewart, Mark A. *David Lynch Decoded*. Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2007. Print.

Toles, George. "Auditioning Betty in Mulholland Drive." *Film Quarterly* 58.1 (2004): 2-13. *JSTOR*. Web. 12 Mar. 2014.

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me. Dir. David Lynch. Perf. Sheryl Lee and Ray Wise. New Line Cinema, 1992. DVD.

Wilson, Eric G. *The Strange World of David Lynch: Transcendental Irony from Eraserhead to Mulholland Dr.* New York: Continuum, 2007. Print.

CURRICULUM VITAE

- Education
 - Wake Forest University, MA English, 2014
 - Davidson College, BA English/Spanish, 2012
 - The McCallie School, Cum Laude, 2008
- Honors
 - Full Merit Scholarship – Wake Forest University
 - National Merit Scholar
 - National AP Scholar
 - National Honor Society
 - Cum Laude Society