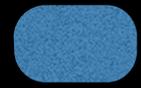


GREAT FILM MAKERS



THE FILMS  
OF

# DAVID LYNCH

JOHN  
ALEXANDER



# The Films of David Lynch

by

John Alexander

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## *Note*

With the exception of *Eraserhead*, David Lynch's feature films have been shot in Panavision (2.35:1 ratio). Television and video screenings have been reduced to the 1.33:1 ratio which means the viewer sees just over half of the intended film. A special wide-screen VHS-video edition of *Wild at Heart* has been released in the UK, supplementary to the standard 1.33:1 issue. *Wild at Heart* is a case in point as the wide-screen format is composed to the advantage of the convertible front seat shots, the motel bedroom shots and the open highway shots. The 1.33:1 issue 'scans' which makes redundant these carefully considered compositions. Similarly, *Blue Velvet*, *Dune* and *The Elephant Man* contain much side-line detail which disappears in the VHS-video releases or television screenings.

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# FOREWORD

To date books on Lynch include Anne Jerslev's *David Lynch i vore øjne* (1991) (*David Lynch in our eye*), and Robert Fischer's *David Lynch: Die dunkle Seite der Seele* (1992) (*The dark side of the soul*) from Denmark and Germany respectively.

Anne Jerslev's book applies the writings of the feminist theorist, Julia Kristeva, and her concept of 'abjection' to Lynch's films. *Wild at Heart* she describes as a post modern melodrama. Robert Fischer's book is more encyclopaedic in scope, rather than critical, with detailed production information and a comprehensive lexicon section which evaluates Lynch's films, videos and record productions, under entries from the 'Abstrakt' to 'Zucker'.

My approach has been to examine the contrast between Lynch as 'story-teller' and Lynch as 'painter'. The Hollywood film's preoccupation with narrative should contradict Lynch's preoccupation with the image, yet, the commercial failure of *Dune* notwithstanding, Lynch has so successfully integrated his personal vision into the commercial mainstream, that he has entered the most 'mainstream' of visual media, the television drama.



# INTRODUCTION

## *1 Secrets, Desire and Retribution*

The film credits of *Eraserhead* describe her as 'the beautiful girl across the hall.' In the middle of the night she knocks on the door of Henry Spencer. She has come to seduce him. She and Henry embrace on top of the bed which dominates Henry's dark, claustrophobic room. Together they sink slowly into a pool of liquid in the middle of the mattress, and disappear. All that remains is her black hair which floats on the surface of the white pool.

In *Blue Velvet* a young man watches a woman disrobe from behind the jalousie of a wardrobe door. She discovers him and seduces him at knife point, cutting his cheek open with the point of the blade.

In the Lynch world desire induces suffering; pleasure releases demons of the spirit from which there is no respite. Lula in *Wild at Heart*, Laura in *Twin Peaks*, Dorothy in *Blue Velvet*, fall victim to sexual psychopaths and must pay a fearful price. John Merrick, the deformed 'elephant man', having found a moment of tenderness with a kindly actress, is humiliated by a twisted soul who initiates him into the shadow side of perverse desire. For Lynch desire is a key to unlocking a door into the darker regions of the human spirit.

Fear has many guises in the Lynch film - the psychopath, sexuality, chaos, disorder, even the body itself, instill fear, contrasted against an idyll of the contented family and the harmony of a small town.

'In a large city I realised there was a large amount of fear. Coming from the Northwest, it kind of hits you like a train,' says Lynch.

Otherwise, he claims, his childhood was like a 1950's magazine advertisement where a 'well-dressed woman bringing a pie out of the oven... a couple smiling, walking together up to their house with a picket fence.'

'We are children of the city', said French director Jean-Jacques Bèneix describing the new wave of filmmakers of the 1980's. Lynch 'is a small-town American boy.'

Lynch says his films both reveal and hide his fears, but he avoids self-analysis and intellectualising. 'It's better not to know so much, in a way, about what things mean or how they might be interpreted, or you'll be too afraid to let it keep happening.'

Psychology, says Lynch, 'destroys the mystery, this kind of magical quality. It can be reduced to certain neuroses or certain things, and since it is now named and defined, it's lost its mystery and the potential for a vast, infinite experience.'

The overhanging threat in the Lynch world is loss of control, upheaval, chaos. The 'worst possible' scenarios of David Lynch describe the hapless protagonist at the mercy of forces he is powerless to contain. Henry Spencer in *Eraserhead* is left with a deformed monstrosity that holds him captive in his own room. John Merrick (*The Elephant Man*) swoons away at Victoria station. Having endured a lifetime of brutal subjugation, he is suddenly without Master. Fate abandons him, then delivers him into the benign hands of Dr Treves.

In *Dune*, the seemingly all powerful House of Atreides, collapses overnight as a result of a single act of betrayal. In *Blue Velvet*, Jeffrey shrewdly manipulates his investigations into a secret and hidden world, finally to stand facing a man without conscience, and is powerless. Lula (*Wild at Heart*) careers down a make believe yellow brick road, but Sailor Ripley is steered from one predicament to another with the hapless disarray of H C Andersen's *Little Tin Soldier*.

The 'Wounded Hero' of Lynch's world is victim to events determined by a perversely macabre fate. Lynch's stories are tales of initiation, where 'innocents' traverse darkness to emerge on the other side, traumatised, purged, and finally, absolved.

For the viewer, the Lynch film is similarly an initiatory experience, exposed to his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery 'on a level not counterfeit and illusory, but interior.'

## *2 Influences*

David Lynch was born in Missoula, Montana in 1946, where his father worked as a research scientist for the Department of Agriculture. He grew up in Idaho, Washington State and Virginia. He shared a studio with Jack Fisk (who would become a cinema art director) in his high school days, and studied painting at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington DC.

After a year at the Boston Museum School he left for a three year trip to Europe, but returned after 15 days. 'I didn't take to Europe. I was all the time thinking, this is where I'm going to be painting. And there was no inspiration there at all for the kind of work I wanted to do.' He returned to the US and took up jobs at an art

store and frame shop before entering the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia in 1965.

Inspired by such painters as Francis Bacon and Edward Hopper, Lynch graduated two years later with a collection of large dark paintings, which 'needed just to move a little bit'. He completed his first film, a one minute long animated tape loop which was entered in a contest for experimental painting and sculpture at the Academy. 'Not so much a film as a moving painting, a loop which could repeat itself endlessly... the figures caught fire, got headaches, their bodies and stomachs grew, and they all got sick.' The six figures of the film consisted of three sculptured surfaces based on plaster-casts of Lynch's head (executed by art college colleague Jack Fisk) and three animated film figures. Their movements were accompanied by the sound of a wailing siren.

A wealthy patron, H Barton Wasserman, financed Lynch's next project which would be a similar combination of animation on a repeating loop with a sculptured screen. The film was ruined but Lynch had sufficient funds to finance *The Alphabet*, completed in 1968, a four minute long film combining animation and live action. He used a similar combination of techniques to make *The Grandmother* (1970) which was financed by the American Film Institute.

Lynch worked at a variety of jobs while filming his first feature film, *Eraserhead*, which was completed in 1976. Its foreboding and surrealistic quality attracted discriminating audiences of the art house circuit, and finally the attention of commercial cinema. With the support of Mel Brooks he made *The Elephant Man* (1980) based on accounts recording the life of the deformed Joseph Merrick in London in the late 1800's. *Dune*, one of the largest science fiction film projects undertaken, with a budget of \$45 million, was completed by Lynch in 1984 - a critical and commercial fiasco. He made *Blue Velvet* in 1986 and *Wild at Heart*, which won the Cannes Film Festival *Palme d'Or*, in 1990.

David Lynch became a household name when the television series *Twin Peaks* was screened throughout the world in the late 1980's. His most recent film projects include two feature films based on the series, the first of which, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, was released in 1992.

He photographs, paints, makes commercials and videos, produces records, composes song lyrics, writes *The Angriest Dog in the World* comic strip for *The LA Reader*, and produces television programmes together with Mark Frost, the most recent of which is the TV situation comedy, *On The Air*, a parody based on the fictitious 'Lester Guy Show', set in the USA, 1957.

Unlike many of his contemporaries amongst the American new wave of filmmakers, David Lynch is not a director who has climbed up through the ranks of the commercial film industry, nor is he the film school graduate who perceives life in terms of what he's seen on a cinema screen - David Lynch is the art school student who made his paintings move.

Lynch's quirky visual style and apparent disregard for narrative makes him something of an anachronism in the mainstream of the commercial cinema. The preoccupation of the Hollywood cinema is story-telling, and since the silent films of D W Griffith and Cecil B de Mille, the efficiently told narrative has been paramount in American film production. This has not been the case in Europe where the avant-garde, expressionism and surrealism, have, in the wake of other art movements, rejected the 'iron script' and filmed pictures first and stories second.

David Lynch - art student and animator - does not share the same pre-occupation with stories as such, with the conventions of a dilemma, an intrigue and its resolution. For Lynch narrative conventions are simply a means to an end, and the end is creating an atmosphere, a resonance, of 'making the phenomena strange', whether that phenomena is ordering coffee and pie in a small town diner, cockroaches in underwear, or watching a strangely dressed man mime a Roy Orbison song, while executing acts of incongruous violence.

Scorsese, Coppola, even Woody Allen, make essentially American films, even outside the restrictive grip of the studio system, but often from the perspective of ethnic groups, and how they adapt to America.

Lynch, a self-confessed 'all-American boy', uses quintessentially American settings and characters (there are no socially integrated foreigners in a Lynch film - not even on the Planet Arrakis), yet seen through a lens distorted by an outsider's perspectives - the eye of the estranged artist.

Lynch's portrayals of America have more in common with the America filmed by Europeans; Werner Herzog, Wim Wenders, John Schlesinger and Nicolas Roeg, than the America we see in the films of Martin Scorsese, Francis Coppola, Steven Spielberg, Oliver Stone et al. *The Elephant Man*, filmed in Great Britain, is a triumph of authenticity - Lynch has succeeded in creating a world, not only credible, but it seems, a world in which he is 'at home.' Alternatively, never has America looked so foreign, so strange, sinister and exotic, as in his first feature film, *Eraserhead*.

Aside from Lynch's personal influences - a childhood in the Northwest, life in Philadelphia, and the entanglements of his personal relations; his films reveal influences ranging from the surrealists to the American Romantic movement and the film noir of the 1940's and 1950's.



## *Surrealism*

A painting by René Magritte entitled *Reproduction Interdit* (1937) shows a man in a dark suit standing before a mirror. The mirror reflects his back so that both he and his reflection reveal only their backs to the viewer. It is a paradoxical image, suggesting an inverted narcissism, of the kind that imbues Lynch's cinema. In films such as *Eraserhead* and *Blue Velvet*, Lynch shows himself, but only his back, and always neatly dressed in a dark suit. Like Magritte, who walked daily to his nearby studio in suit and bowler hat, Lynch's methodical life style extends to dress, and the strict control over the expression of artistic creativity. And like Magritte his work is, what the surrealists describe as 'a loosening of the horizon's belt through an increased fertility of the senses... the abandonment of accepted perspectives...'

In a programme made for BBC Arena in 1987, Lynch presented, what he described as, 'films made by some of the greatest artists this century - the surrealists. They discovered that the cinema was the perfect medium for them because it allows the subconscious to speak. If surrealism is the subconscious speaking.. I could say I was somewhat surrealistic.'

In the Surrealist Manifesto published in 1924, Andre Breton wrote:

'Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association heretofore neglected, in the omnipotence of the dream, and in the disinterested play of thought. It leads to the permanent destruction of all other psychic mechanisms and to its substitution for them in the solution of the principal problems of life...

'The mind of the dreaming man is fully satisfied with whatever happens to it. The agonising question of possibility does not arise. Kill, plunder, move quickly, love as much as you wish. And if you die, are you not sure of being roused from the dead? Let yourself be led. Events will not tolerate deferment. You have no name. Everything is inestimably easy.'

David Lynch, 'the Hieronymus Bosch of middle America', cites Jean Cocteau, Man Ray, Hans Richter, and other surrealistic filmmakers, as his mentors in the art of creating strange pictures. However, in an interview from 1990, he maintains: 'I still haven't seen a lot of Bunuel... I don't even know that much about surrealism - I guess it's just my take on what's floating by.'

Lynch's 'take on what's floating by', like the surrealists, draws from dreams and the imagery of the subconscious. Not surprisingly his own favourite film sequences are either dream sequences, or have a dream like quality. The dancing dwarf sequence, (the best piece of film I've ever made'), the opening sequence to *Blue Velvet*, the dream sequences in *The Elephant Man* and *Dune* - *Eraserhead*, one long dream

sequence, and the flashback and fantasy sequences in *Wild at Heart*. *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* is redeemed by a dream sequence, which has the resonance and intrigue of a painting by René Magritte. Laura Palmer receives a photographic image of a room with an open door, from the young David Lynch lookalike. She places the picture on her bedroom wall and as she sleeps, walks into the image and through the open door. It leads into a labyrinth of corridors and curtains, and her dream swiftly becomes a nightmare, without the overt bravado and manipulative 'scare tactics' of, for example, Wes Craven's *Nightmare on Elm Street*.

The dream recipient structures the random imagery of the dream into a kind of narrative; similarly, the viewer structures the images of a film, if order doesn't exist, into a cognissant form. Structure provides the possibility of comprehending a meaning. 'Meanings', wrote Carl Jung, 'make things bearable.'

### *American Gothic*

As well as the man's back reflected in Magritte's *Reproduction Interdit* is a copy of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym*. The story concerns a young man who endures a series of terrifying experiences, and thereby undergoes an initiation - a descent into hell from which he emerges transformed. It is the theme which pervades Lynch's films.

Just as the British horror film draws from the tradition of English Gothic literature, there is a parallel in the films of David Lynch and the Romantic movement of American literature.

The surrealists, and André Breton in particular, spurned the novel as a form, yet singled out the English Gothic novelists (as well as, understandably, the writings of Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear). It can be argued that the Gothic novel, like the Lynch film, is more concerned with atmosphere and mood, than the conventions of narrative structure.

The Gothic movement of the late eighteenth century heralded 'a new preoccupation with death, solitude and the visual/emotional appeal of ruins...'

The Gothic novels which preceded these writers by a century, have been a constant source of inspiration to filmmakers - Shelley's *The Vampire*, Mary Woollstonecroft's *Frankenstein (Prometheus Unbound)*, and later the work of the Irish writers, Bram Stoker and Sheridan le Fanu. Old houses and chateaus, social outsiders bearing dark secrets, unresolved intrigues, the decay and delapidation of antiquated structures, (social structures, architectural structures, psychological structures), identify the Gothic novel - night, cemeteries, winter, gloom - death and

decay. Apparitions, giants, dwarves, hunchbacks and freaks have a place in the gothic tradition.

These are elements notable in the literature of American Romanticism, and in particular in the writings of Edgar Allen Poe, Emily Dickinson, Whitman, Melville and Emerson.

The other element of Gothic and American Romanticism, is that of the unattainable 'other'. In *American Romantic Psychology*, Martin Bickman writes: '...In the works of Edgar Allen Poe and Emily Dickinson, . a figure of the opposite sex, surrounded by an aura of the mysterious and numinous, holds out the promise of harmonious unity, of initiation into the higher secrets, a promise usually accompanied, though, by the possibilities of dissolution and death.'

The mid 1980's marked a period in which the US cinema delved into the murkier realms of the human condition, and not since the film noir period of the 1940's and 50's had so many commercial film releases contained the themes attributed to American Romanticism. In 1986, when *Blue Velvet* was released, came *Something Wild* (Jonathan Demme), *River's Edge* (Tim Hunter, later a director of several episodes of *Twin Peaks*) *Blood Simple* (Joel and Ethan Coen), and a plethora of films in which death, and death in the guise of the feminine, predominate.

Lynch's vision of the psychological feminine, as we shall discover, has a correspondence in the writings of Poe, and the tradition in American literature in which Poe is a central figure. In addition, Poe's stories, like the films of David Lynch, reveal a fascination with the process of decay and corruption.

Underlying the Romantic movement is a yearning for the past and a nostalgia for past values. It is a yearning borne of anxieties over the impermanence of things; a deeply rooted mistrust of the present and contempt for the future; ambiguous hallmarks of Lynch's film world.

### *Film Noir*

Gothic elements are apparent in Lynch's earlier films; *Eraserhead* and *The Elephant Man*, and *Dune*. Dark corridors, gloomy hallways, and despondent women in black, framed in windows and doorways. The Caladan sequence of *Dune* depicts a raging sea, a stormy night, and a gloomy castle on a cliff-top; the Atrides household. The Duke's concubine, Jessica, walks through the wooden portals shrouded in a black cape, across a cobble-stoned courtyard. The Duke sits in his ill-lit study, a bulldog at his side, his features illuminated by intermittent flashes of

lightning. The time and place pertain to another galaxy, but the mood is Victorian gothic, from the pages of Bram Stoker or Mary Woollstonecroft.

In *Blue Velvet* Lynch begins a disquieting journey into noir territory. *Blue Velvet* captures the mood of the small town noir films of the 1950's - film noir of the 1940's encapsulated the fears and anxieties of the big city - with the later noir films, nowhere was safe - the psychopath could be the next door neighbour, a friendly face on the local train (*Strangers on a Train*, 1951), the town's sheriff (*Touch of Evil*, 1958), a visiting preacher (*The Night of the Hunter*, 1955), or a forgotten face from the past (*Cape Fear*, 1962). It was an underlying fear that British director, Alfred Hitchcock, tuned into in his early years in the US, which found expression in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), where the psychopath emerges as the 'favourite uncle'.

The 1950's is a rich source of inspiration for Lynch; his contemporary films (not least *Twin Peaks*) are imbued with an idealised pastiche of a fifties 'look' - clothes, cars, roadhouse diners, and apron dressed smiling women. The era is represented by a spate of Hollywood films, in both film noir and the increasingly popular science fiction film - expressing fear of infiltration. The threat could be communist (*Pickup on South Street*, 1953), alien (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 1956), radioactive fallout (*The Incredible Shrinking Man*, 1957) or the vindictive woman, (*Born to be Bad*, 1950), any of which could threaten the idyll of the nuclear family.

Film noir describes a style rather than a genre - the kind of film that delves into the darker side of society and human nature. Hollywood film noir found its public in the 1940's and 50's, and noir elements can be found in films as diverse as Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) and Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) - *Blue Velvet* is its 'evil twin' according to *Time's* film critic, Richard Corliss. Directors, many European exiles, integrated the visual style of German expressionism and the narrative style of the American 'hard boiled' novel, creating a low-budget film form which contravened many of the accepted requirements of the Hollywood film.

Noir means 'black' and the noir film found its expression in the black side of the human spirit - the destructive feminine, the femme fatale; the destructive masculine, the psychopath; and, most significantly, melancholy. (melas = black). Carl Jung borrowed an alchemical term to describe the condition of depression and melancholy - the 'blackness' of the human spirit; nigredo. 'To slip into the blackness of the psyche is to regress from order to disorder, or from structuring into destructuring, or from adaptedness to unadaptedness,' writes Jungian analyst, John Weir Perry.

In *Laura* (Otto Preminger, 1944) Mark McPherson is the unruffled, yet compassionate detective investigating the murder of the much-loved Laura. Just as

Twin Peaks is dominated by the photographic portrait of Laura Palmer, the film is dominated by her painting. He finds her 'secret diary' and is finally compelled to reconcile the young woman with her flawless image.

Laurie Palmer is a beautiful girl beaten to death by a psychopathic killer in the Robert Wise film, *Born to Kill* (1947). The Twin Peaks television series is a catalogue of references to noir cinema, integrating plot lines into the series subplots: Walter Neff, an insurance agent (Fred McMurray in *Double Indemnity*, 1944); James Hurley playing a naive Joe Gillis character to a Norma Desmond spider woman named Evelyn Marsh, with lines lifted from the pages of the *Sunset Boulevard* screenplay (Billy Wilder, 1950). Anna May Wong, in the 1933 Sherlock Holmes film, *A Study in Scarlet*, plays the part of Mrs Pyke, a beautiful Chinese woman, whose husband fakes his own death in order to wreak his own vindiction upon unsuspecting victims. Mrs Pyke, like Jocelyn Packard (Joan Chen) is, despite her innocent countenance, duplicitous and culpable, and goes toward her premature demise with inevitable certitude.

Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini), *Blue Velvet's* nightclub singer seductress with a secret past, and a sentimental signature song, succeeds legendary noir women - Gilda (Charles Vidor, 1946), Kitty Collins (Ava Gardner in *The Killers* - Siodmak, 1946). In Lynch's debut feature film, *Eraserhead*, a character entitled 'The Beautiful Woman Across The Hall', appears as an alluring manifestation of the femme fatale, enticing Henry to the bed and drowning him in a pool of quagmire.

Perdita, in *Wild at Heart*, is a stylised Lily Carver figure from *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), with the nonchalance and ready contempt of a Gloria Grahame character of the 1940's. As her name suggests, perdition, damnation and loss of soul, is what she has in store for the film's protagonist, Sailor Ripley.

The cinema's femme fatale has precedents in Romantic literature and Pre-Raphaelite art - in Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, and the alluring and deadly maidens of J W Waterhouse paintings. She is a recurring figure in Lynch's films - 'fatale' to the men she allures, as she is ultimately to herself.

### *3 A David Lynch Film*

David Lynch and the dollar motivated Hollywood movie can be seen as two different avenues of concern which, against all probability, have met up somewhere in the middle. *Blue Velvet* proved that 'original' can make profits - *Dune's* commercial failure, Hollywood accountants moralise, suggests something opposite.

Bookkeeping figures regardless, Lynch's films transgress the conventions of the Hollywood film, yet remain attuned to its commercial demands. Lynch's use and parody of cliché, his preoccupation with motif, mood and texture as opposed to a lineal narrative, are also tendencies in, say, the films of Jim Jarmusch and the recent films of Woody Allen. But unlike these directors, Lynch's audience extends beyond the art house cinema circuit; the commercial failure of *Dune* notwithstanding, Lynch's films, since and including *The Elephant Man*, have been marketed within the parameters of commercial mainstream cinema.

Eraserhead excluded, Lynch's films balance precariously between the popular and the elitist, treading the fine line of commercial appeal and art house critical acceptance. Just as Hitchcock's films appeal to the broad general market (good stories well told) and, following the acclaim of the French nouvelle vague, the film 'literate' (innovative, experimental in extending the film medium into untried territory), the same broad generalisation can be made of Lynch. Like Hitchcock, he has also made the transition to media personality, in front of the camera as well as behind it. Lynch has appeared in most of his films, and created a plot bearing character, for better or worse, in the *Twin Peaks* film and television series.

Unlike Hitchcock, Lynch is not associated with a particular genre. A Hitchcock film is synonymous with the thriller, and his few exceptions Hitchcock later considered errors of judgement. The Lynch catalogue, brief though it now may be, covers all genres, and the Lynch name is synonymous more with a particular style - namely, the bizarre.

Lynch is both representative of our post-modern times - a 'shopper' picking out medial images, narratives and characters from cultures popular and elitist; and a filmmaker adapting to the demands of the commercial cinema - where the innovative and the new is modified to the needs of the market. Either way, it makes Lynch one of the most interesting of contemporary filmmakers as a subject for analysis - here is an artist sufficiently in tune to the diametrically opposed demands of art and commerce, that whatever he does next is an indication of the shape of things to come.

### *Cliché*

*Cliché: (1) a stereotype printing plate (2) a trite idea or expression.*

'Two clichés make us laugh but a hundred clichés move us,' wrote Umberto Eco, describing the cumulative effect of clichés in *Casablanca*.

Commercial cinema employs cliché as recognisable codes to enforce and facilitate the understanding of a narrative. The familiarity of the cliché assists the viewer, making commonplace the untrodden territory of a new story, amplifying audience identification. Lynch's films, and in particular his self-penned personal films (*Eraserhead* and *Blue Velvet*), subvert and parody cliché. His films are a game with clichés, and just as Umberto Eco describes the cineastes that join in the game as they watch a film like *Casablanca*, cinema aficionados are likewise moved by the array of the familiar and the identifiable in the Lynch film. For the uninitiated, a Lynch film is accessible by virtue of the recognisable elements flourishing wildly within his visual landscapes. The unprecedented success of *Twin Peaks* as viable commercial television functions primarily on this level, 'because we sense dimly that the clichés are talking among themselves, celebrating a reunion... the extreme of banality allows us to catch a glimpse of the Sublime.'

In *The Wake of the Imagination*, Richard Kearney describes 'A Critique of the Rule of Cliché' whereby 'postmodern society is increasingly portrayed as an artificial world woven together out of repeatable clichés and bereft of any real experience of historical praxis or coherence.'

According to the contemporary French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, clichés are 'floating and anonymous images which circulate in the external world, but also penetrate each person and constitute his internal world, so much so that each one of us possesses no more than the psychic clichés by means of which he thinks and feels, becoming himself a cliché amongst others in the world which surrounds him. Physical clichés of sight and sound and psychic clichés feed off each other. In order for people to survive such a world it is necessary that this miserable world has infiltrated into their innermost consciousness, so that inside is like the outside.'

In several exchanges in *Blue Velvet*, Sandy and Jeffrey, fresh-faced innocents of middle suburbia, deliver the line 'life is strange.' Uttered once such a line would constitute a line of cliché dialogue - with each repetition the line becomes parody. Are Sandy and Jeffrey actually proclaiming that 'life is strange', or drawing attention to their characters as stereotypes that observe the banal and proclaim it 'strange?'

For just as 'cliché' is 'stereotype' - the duplication of an original; it is also by implication, the duplication of an 'archetype'. Lynch's conscious manipulation of cliché, as we shall explore in the opposing elements of *Blue Velvet*, elevates the banal to the mythological.

*Wild at Heart* Lynch describes as 'a violent comedy... Some scenes are a game with clichés,' he says. 'Wild at Heart has a lot in common with B-film violence. I love these honest film-films which don't have any purpose other than being a film.'

The game with cliché, in particular in *Wild at Heart* and *Twin Peaks*, exemplify Lynch's humour, if it can be called such, which in part may explain the failure of *Dune*. Lynch's fidelity to the literary source extended to its earnest, humour-free literary style - Frank Herbert's seriousness of purpose, appropriate within the context of the novel, proves a restrictive framework, unsuitable for Lynch's play with pastiche and cliché.

Lynch's humour is a combination of cynicism and naivety - the happy endings of *Wild at Heart* and *Blue Velvet* (even *Dune*) - are so overstated as to caricature the traditional happy ending - they are derisive appendages of mock narrative closure.

The contrived 'happy ending' of *Wild at Heart* ('I couldn't buy the ending of the book,' says Lynch) is at once complying to the mainstream cinema's convention of an ending most gratifying to the largest possible audience, but at the same time, a pastiche of such exaggerated proportion as to lack credibility.

The happy ending is intrinsic to the nature of the popular film, and it is the cinema's 'happy ending' that has become the most potent cliché of all.

Literary purists object to Lynch's treatment of both *Wild at Heart* and *Dune*, where the 'happy ending' transgresses the supposed necessity of cinematic closure, by perverting a narrative convention as if either to ridicule such a convention, or at least parody it.

In *Blue Velvet*, once harmony has been restored, a robin sings on the branch of a tree outside a suburban home, in answer to Sandy's earlier wish that everything will be all right 'when the robins come back'. Closer examination reveals that the 'singing robin' is a mechanical device which the characters regard in wide-eyed delight, pretending that it's real. Is Lynch mocking the audience, the narrative convention of the 'happy ending', or simply enjoying a large afternoon toying with clichés?

In the opening of the same film, the garrishly red roses and yellow tulips against the perfect white of the picket fence and the vivid green of the freshly cut lawn, paint a pastiche of the attributes of suburban happiness. These are clichés of the banal made strange by their deliberation. Lynch's extreme imagery signifies a dissatisfaction with the film media reissuing images already available - the rehashing of clichés. When, in the same opening sequence, a fireman on a passing fire-engine, looks directly to the camera, smiles and waves, the effect is comic. But are we meant to laugh? That beneath this suburban idyll, the forces of chaos lurk in ready waiting to engulf our smug self-satisfaction? Or is Lynch laughing at himself, that he is mockingly lured into his own pastiche image of the suburban American dream?

### *Motif*

Lynch's first animated film (tentatively entitled 'Six Figures Get Sick'), is a ten second loop accompanied by the sound of a wailing siren, depicts stick figures vomiting, catching fire and burning up. Vomit and fire are two motifs in *Wild at Heart*. The flame motif is interwoven throughout the narrative - its subtle variations function as a narrative voice to describe the interplay between the principle characters, Sailor and Lula.

The film begins with the sound and image of a striking match, followed by an engulfing fire. This image recurs at key points in the narrative, ostensibly to describe the death of Lula's father, but also as an image to describe the relationship between Sailor and Lula. Sailor lights up a single cigarette with a single match, proclaiming his individuality. On the drive to New Orleans Sailor and Lula light up -two matches, two cigarettes - a couple. As they lie together in a motel room the significance of the motif is clarified: apart from the symbolic value of the image (enflamed passion, burning love), a pertinent plot point is established with Lula's accompanying line of dialogue; 'Daddy poured kerosene over himself then LIT A MATCH.' She is mistaken, it transpires. 'Daddy' didn't light it.

Following an intense round of lovemaking in the New Orleans hotel, a single match lighting a single shared cigarette is enough to suggest the culmination of unity. Their lovemaking prior to leaving New Orleans is followed by a succession of dissolves from a match to the flame, the road, lovemaking once more, and again the road. There is an intensity to this couple's flight unmatched by the profusion of the cinema's Bonnie and Clyde style of road journey.

'Maybe you got too close to a fire. Maybe you're gonna burn,' is Lula's mother's warning that keeps coming back to Sailor.

Lula and Sailor betray each other - they sell out to Bobby Peru; Lula by responding to his sexual advances, Sailor by agreeing to a planned hold-up. He lies on the motel bed, lights a single cigarette with a single match. They both nurse their secrets, they both nurse their guilt - there is no contact, no 'fire' between them. Only a close-up of an extinguished cigarette and its ashen remains. No passion.

References to *The Wizard of Oz* is an underlying motif to the film. Lula plays Dorothy and Lula's mother, Marietta, appears as the Wicked Witch of the East. The Good Witch, Glinda, appears 'deus et machina' to redeem Sailor in his moment of despondency.

A tube of bright red lipstick helps define Marietta's descent into madness, beginning with her intense red mouth, then, at intervals throughout the story, her red wrist, red mirror, and finally, her entire face painted in garish red lipstick.

A motif is 'any significant repeated element in a film'. Motif may be an object, a colour, a place, a person, a sound. A lighting pattern or camera angle may be 'motif' if its repeated meaningfully throughout the narrative.

Lynch's films abound with aural motifs as well as visual; the industrial sounds accompanying images of steam and vapour in *The Elephant Man*; the striking match in *Wild at Heart*, a splashing drop of water in *Dune*, the wurlitzer music in *Eraserhead*, the title song in *Blue Velvet*.

David Lynch's collaboration with sound technician, Alan Splet, began with *The Grandmother*, and between them they have created some of the most imaginative soundtracks in contemporary American cinema. Lynch's predilection for the sounds of industry create a relentless narrative drive in both *Eraserhead* and *The Elephant Man* (motif derives from motivate - to push forward), and the effect is alienation. The grinding noise of machinery evokes the human spirit estranged in a fabricated environment - a sense of not belonging.

Likewise, the song as motif, an established narrative component in the American film noir of the 1940's, features in *Eraserhead*, *Twin Peaks*, and serves as a foundation in both *Blue Velvet* (named after the song), and *Wild at Heart*, where Sailor's shift of feeling is defined his singing Elvis Presley's 'Love Me' at the outset, imbued with sexual innuendo and self-deprecation, and concluding with a pledge to conjugal unity, 'Love Me Tender'.

Motifs in specific Lynch films accentuate particular themes, whether it's a burning match for passion in *Wild at Heart*, or the umbilical cord/spermatozoon motif in *Eraserhead*. Equally insightful are the motifs which recur in many of Lynch's films. The elements to which Lynch persistently returns provide a key, unlocking some of the esoteric themes his films embrace.

The Lynchian protagonist is a social outsider striving to conform against impossible odds; characters with little or no control over their fate - Henry Spencer (John Nance in *Eraserhead*), stuck with a monstrously deformed infant and isolated within an industrial landscape, a machine operator who dresses in a suit and tie; John Merrick (John Hurt in *The Elephant Man*), who in spite of his deformity, wants only to dress up in a suit and tie and sleep 'like a normal person'; even Paul Atreides (Kyle MacLachlan in *Dune*), who has perfect control over his body and mind, becomes a prisoner of his own myth; Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan in *Blue Velvet*) transgresses the unwritten laws of suburban conformity and enters a

netherworld of violence and sexuality over which he not only has no control, but not even comprehension; Sailor Ripley's (Nicholas Cage in *Wild at Heart*) search for a normal life is constantly thwarted by 'moira', the goddess of fate and, according to the Greeks, the oldest power in the universe, at her most vindictive in the form of Lula's mother. Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan in *Twin Peaks*) is the archetypal Lynch protagonist - a fresh faced innocent in a dark suit and dark tie, the bearer of dark secrets, estranged yet enamoured by an alien environment, and pitted against the forces of destiny. It's hardly surprising that the same face should represent intrinsically the same character; Arrakis, Lumberton, *Twin Peaks* are different geographies within the same space of the Lynchian universe in which the displaced seeker discovers that knowledge is a dangerous thing.

Lynch's antagonists are most often psychopaths; 'I think it's the scariest thing,' says Lynch. 'To know someone, or suspect someone, that has a very intelligent mind - really nothing is wrong with them in any way - but who is possessed by evil and who has dedicated themselves to doing evil.'

John Merrick's tormentor, Bytes (Freddie Jones in *The Elephant Man*) is a character fabricated by Lynch, and developed further in *Dune*; the Baron Vladimir Harkonnen is far removed from author, Frank Herbert's character. In his Lynchian guise the Baron is a bloated psychopath, bereft of the political cunning of the novel's character, so grossly overweight that an anti-gravity mechanism is necessary for his mobility, so enamoured with his own pustulant flesh that his physician admires and embellishes his festering boils rather than attempt to cure them, and so exaggerated his homosexual appetites that the sexual abuse of young boys culminates with the Baron's cannibalising of them.

The psychopathy of Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper in *Blue Velvet*) is rather more complex. Whereas the psychopathy of the above named is driven by wanton greed - Bytes wants his 'treasure', Merrick; and the Baron wants the treasure of *Dune*, the spice, it is never entirely clear what Frank Booth wants. Is it sexual gratification with Dorothy Vallens? gratification through drugs? money? power? Similar questions can be asked of the characters in *Wild at Heart* - Santos and Bobby Peru, and in particular of 'Bob' - the wandering evil spirit seeking souls to possess amongst the inhabitants of *Twin Peaks*. Lynch provides no answers as to the motives of such characters; 'I've never exactly figured out what the fascination is - but I think we want to understand it, so we can conquer it,' he says.

The homosexuality in the Lynch antagonist, whether overt or latent, is just one more facet of the threat these characters place on family structure and the established social order.

Lynch's maternal characters are either nurturing or destructive, manifestations of the archetype Jung terms 'the Great Mother'. (Also the term used by Frank Herbert in *Dune* as the principle deity of the Bene Gesserit). *Eraserhead*, *The Elephant Man*, *Dune*, *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks*, either begin or end with a close-up of a woman's face, smiling compassionately.

Manifestations of the nurturing mother include Mrs Kendal, John Merrick's mother in *The Elephant Man*, and Irulan and Jessica in *Dune* - both these films begin with a woman's face superimposed against the cosmos.

'On the negative side,' writes Carl Jung, 'the mother archetype may connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate.' Mary X's mother in *Eraserhead*, and Lula's mother in *Wild at Heart*, attempt to seduce their daughter's boyfriend - in both films they unleash their wrath upon the unsuspecting protagonist - Henry is left holding the 'baby'; Sailor has psychopathic killers on his trail. The Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam in *Dune* both seduces and torments Paul Atreides with the role of 'messiah'. She is as much 'moira', the feminine embodiment of fate, to Paul as Lula's mother is to Sailor.

Lynch's other feminine archetype is the victim; Dorothy Vallens in *Blue Velvet*; Laura Palmer, Ronette Pulaski, Theresa Banks and many young women besides in both the television and cinema versions of *Twin Peaks*; even Lula in *Wild at Heart* becomes a victim of her own sensuality, loathsomely seduced by the psychotic Bobby Peru, and raped by an uncle at the age of 14.

Relatively uncomplicated women seem to hold little interest for Lynch - the character of Chani in *Dune*, a pivotal figure of the novel, is glanced over briskly in the film, and Sandy in *Blue Velvet* functions primarily as the 'blonde' contrast to the 'dark' Dorothy.

Among the many 'object' motifs in Lynch's films, as distinct from characters, one in particular warrants consideration, the velvet curtain.

*Eraserhead*'s 'lady in the radiator' appears from and retreats into a velvet stage curtain. At the end of her song she disappears into darkness leaving a bewildered Henry standing on an empty stage staring blankly at the velvet curtain.

The curtain is a significant plot device in *The Elephant Man* - not velvet, but a drape concealing the deformed body of John Merrick, through which his silhouette is visible. The drape is a veil, the final stage before Merrick is disrobed entirely,

when he is revealed in the plain light of day, both for an attending day nurse and the viewer.

As the title of the film suggests the velvet curtain motif is replete with meanings in *Blue Velvet*, which begins with the image of drifting blue velvet curtains. The 'blue lady' sings a song entitled 'Blue Velvet' in front of a blue velvet curtain, dressed in a blue velvet dress. The opening credits before a gently billowing stage curtain suggests matters undisclosed - things hidden, dark secrets. The psychopathic Frank Booth clutches at a piece of blue velvet material from Dorothy Vallens dress, weeps into it as she sings, clutches at it and later, sobs wildly into it as he violates her.

In *Wild at Heart*, a parody of the 'blue lady' character, an earthy negress in a blue sequin dress sings 'Up in Flames' (lyrics by David Lynch) in front of blue velvet curtains for the psychopathic Santos and his cohorts. Before the film's culminating sequence, a screen title declaring the time past before Sailor's release from prison, is shown over the gold framed photograph of a smiling young Lula in front of a red velvet curtain. A gold framed photograph of a smiling young girl is a motif subject to further scrutiny - velvet drapes permeate Lynch's films like stage curtains before a performance.

Perhaps most significant of all the velvet curtain motifs, is that of *Twin Peaks*, where red velvet drapes form a labyrinth in which all manner of secrets, psychopaths, dreams and nightmares are both hidden and revealed. The surging red material forms channels of an anonymous mind, like ventricles of the brain, leading us into unknown areas of a dark and sinister imagination.

### *Plot*

The Hollywood cinema favours the story-teller, so Lynch's presence in the commercial mainstream is slightly incongruous. Lynch's originality owes more to the way he tells stories, rather than the stories he tells. He is a visualist first, and story-teller second.

His two original feature film screenplays, *Eraserhead* and *Blue Velvet*, revel in mood and atmosphere; his screenplay adaptations (self-penned, or in collaboration) reveal a reliance bordering on the naive on the plot structure of his source material. *Wild at Heart*, 'film-film' notwithstanding, is benignly faithful to the plot structure of Barry Gifford's novel, down to the seemingly Lynchian lines of dialogue, with the notable exception of the ending.

Lynch's attempt at a faithful adaptation of *Dune* proved a burden too great for the limitations of film screenplay conventions, its literary style imposing uneasy restrictions upon Lynch's cinematic excesses. *Wild at Heart* reads like a film script - *Dune*, like so much of literary science fiction, lends itself to film interpretation rather than adaptation.

Lynch's priority, he affirms, is atmosphere and mood. Plot points and narrative structure are impositions to meet the demands of the commercial cinema. Lynch uses story lines as vehicles around which to structure particular moods and themes. Fear pervades the Lynch film, born of character types capable of the most perverse and inexplicable acts of violence. The uneasy mood of the Lynch film is accentuated by the corruption of the human body, the discordant balance between opposites, and perverse sexuality. Sex and violence in Lynch's films border on the obscene, but are not pornographic - the obscenity relates to limits of degradation to which the human spirit can succumb. As a viewer, the question is not about titillation or arousal, but by what means we can extricate ourselves from the depravity projected before us.

The Hollywood film aims to deliver a narrative as efficiently and economically as the film medium allows (through script, camera, editing, sound). Lynch uses isolated sequences within the narrative which have no direct bearing on plot development, disrupting the syntactic flow with casual abandon, but which form integral narrative segments.

The car accident in *Wild at Heart* disrupts Sailor's and Lula's hitherto uneventful journey, and serves as a premonition for the dark sequence of events to follow. In itself, the episode seems bizarre and out of context. A car wreck, several bodies, and a young girl who dies of visually explicit head injuries, doesn't relate to Sailor and Lula's 'story', but suggests a mood. The film assumes a darker tone after the incident, and prepares us for a later false lead. In the final sequence, when Lula drives to meet Sailor, she encounters a similar meaningless and bloody road accident - like a precursor to doom and their fateful meeting.

Gilles Deleuze suggests the characteristics of the new cinema include: 'the dispersive situation, the deliberately weak links, the voyage form, the consciousness of clichés, the condemnation of the plot. It is the crisis of both the action-image and the American Dream.'

*Eraserhead* 'is not a true narrative, but an intense mood piece,' wrote one critic. '...it defies a coherent plot description, in fact, it defies description on any kind,' wrote another.

Eraserhead's absurd scenarios of man-made chickens oozing putrescent liquid; a deformed lady from behind the radiator, singing, dancing and crushing umbilical cords with her shoes; brain substance transmuted into rubber for the tips of pencils, collude around a central character left holding a mutated infant.

Plot disparity is less extreme in other films, but Lynch's cinema is at its most provocative with the absurdist scenarios that enhance the mood of a narrative, without relating directly to it. The ill-lit face miming 'In Dreams', a severed ear in a field, warring ants beneath a newly trimmed suburban lawn are a few examples of the visual idiosyncrasies of *Blue Velvet*.

#### *4 Behind the Velvet Curtain*

The billowing blue velvet curtain in *Blue Velvet*'s opening credits creates a mood of intrigue and subterfuge. Curtains conceal things, both for the viewer inside looking out, and the observer outside looking in. They represent a shifting surface behind which may be found a performance, as in a theatre; or a performer, as in a nightclub. Curtains cover windows, doors and spaces. The velvet curtain is the seductive surface of artifice.

'I like the idea that everything has a surface which hides much more underneath,' says Lynch. 'Someone can look very well and have a whole bunch of diseases cooking: there are all sorts of dark twisted things lurking down there. I go down in that darkness and see what's there.'

Lynch's preoccupation with surfaces implies a risk of contending only with surfaces, namely, the superficial, surface without depth. The television series, *Twin Peaks*, guides the viewer through a multi-layered text of surfaces, with isolated moments of clarity. By contrast the film version, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, emerges as a text of well-worn surfaces, with only glimpses that transcend the superficial.

The intrigue of a surface lies in what it conceals - when Lynch delves beneath the top layers and drags up whatever from the murky depths of his own subconscious, he is tapping into the murky depths of the collective - the cumulative reservoir of 'things hidden' coloured by the global consciousness of American television and Hollywood cinema.

What's underneath? What's inside? What's on the other side of the door? Only in the American noir films of Fritz Lang do doors feature as significantly as an icon

of intrigue as in the Lynch film; half-opened doors, slightly opened doors, doors ajar and closed doors.

Dorothy listens helplessly to her crying son behind a closed door in *Blue Velvet*; she furtively opens a chained door as she casts her eye upon Jeffrey for the first time; the slatted wardrobe door in her apartment conceals Jeffrey, but not his vulnerability. In *Eraserhead* behind the door to number 26 awaits Henry's seductress who will drown him in his own bed - she spies on Henry predatously from behind her door, and Henry looks through the keyhole of his door to watch her claim another male victim. And behind the door of a bleached white stone shack in a small Texas town waits Perdita; for Sailor Ripley, in *Wild at Heart*, perdition.

In *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, Laura cautiously opens the door to her own bedroom, inch by inch, until she reveals 'Bob' in all his psychopathic glory. Later, the painting of a half-open door hanging in her bedroom, comes to life as she sleeps, taking her ethereal body through the doorway and into a labyrinth a red velvet curtains. Velvet curtains again! If not a door - a velvet curtain. What's on the other side?

David Lynch is not the only film director beset with red drapes. Red scenography dominates Ingmar Bergman's colour films; *Cries and Whispers* (1972) and *Fanny and Alexander*, are awash with blood red curtains, walls, table cloths and decor, as if to recreate a blood lined womb - a placenta from which Bergman draws his creativity. His work is fed by an unsevered umbilical cord - the memories of his childhood, unresolved issues with his parents that stretch back to a precognitive state. For Lynch, the colour red is cerebral, like the blood feeding the ventricles of the brain. In the Lynch film autopsies and violence open up the cranium in search of what lies beneath the bone; is that brain substance 'us', our identity, our individuality?

*Wild at Heart* begins with a fight in which Bobby Lemon's brains stain a white marble floor, and ends with Bobby Peru's brains are blown out of his head with two barrels of a sawn off shot gun, splattering the beige wall of a small town food store. A beautiful young girl, wandering dazed after a car accident, inserts a finger into her cut open cranium and complains about 'this sticky stuff in my head...', then dies. A bullet between the eyes penetrates the brain of Johnny Farragut as he stares down the gun barrel before him.

The velvet curtain is David Lynch's metaphor for surface. We look behind the velvet curtain seeking meaning in the Lynch film, but there is no guarantee we find it. What we do find takes us beneath our own 'surfaces', both of the mind and the flesh. Especially the flesh.

*Decay*

Behind the drapes of Dr Treves is the grotesquely deformed body of John Merrick, the Elephant Man.

The corruption and deformity of the human body are central to *Eraserhead* and *The Elephant Man*, and permeate Lynch's film world like the malaise he infers but never defines. In *Dune* it is the grotesquely disfigured character of Baron Harkonnen. In *Blue Velvet* the psychopathy of Frank Booth is emphasised by his predilection for inhaled stimulation. A severed human ear is the 'disruptive event' which initiates the story. Dorothy accuses Jeffrey of putting his 'disease in me.'

In *Wild at Heart* two characters with the name Bob have their heads split open. Lula recollects her abortion - a crimson embryo cast into a stainless steel waste depository; a new embryo takes hold of her womb and she vomits - meanwhile, back at home, her mother rages in madness, and she also vomits.

In *Eraserhead*, Henry Spencer cuts open the ailing monstrosity, and pierces its pulsing organs with a pair of scissors. Rather than perish, it oozes putrescent substance, stretches its umbilical cord like neck and terrorises Henry with its pustulating face.

Lynch's preoccupations concern the 'abject', rather than the object - the 'otherness' discarded from the body. Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* writes that 'abjection, which modernity has learned to repress, dodge or fake' becomes 'a substitute for the role formerly played by the sacred...'

'The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them.'

As a child Lynch describes 'a force, a wild pain and decay accompanying everything.' Wild 'because it's not able to be controlled. A small world like a painting or a film gives you the illusion that you're... in control. The smaller the world, the more safe you feel and in control.'

Decay is the ultimate loss of control - the abject is the triumph of the body over mind - flesh deteriorates, wastes must be expelled. A young girl vomits blood in *The Alphabet*, which is transformed into letters; in *The Grandmother*, out of a young boy's bed-wetting is born a grandmother, who in her brief sojourn, becomes a ten year old kid's guide through life and death.

From *The Grandmother* to *Blue Velvet*, *Wild at Heart* and *Twin Peaks*, males urinating devise pivotal episodes in plot development. In *Blue Velvet*, Jeffrey expelling a substantial quantity of Heineken lager, results in him missing a given signal and being trapped in the wardrobe of Dorothy Vallens' apartment. Bobby Peru's insistence on using the toilet in Lula's motel room, in *Wild at Heart*, leads to her 'seduction', and in *Twin Peaks*, Agent Cooper's predilection for the joys of urinating in the great outdoors provides an untimely absence and the abduction of Major Briggs into a realm where Cooper himself shall confront the ultimate 'otherness'.

Lynch's autopsy sequences (*Twin Peaks* and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*) are exercises in the abject, as are birth sequences (*The Grandmother*, *Eraserhead*, *The Elephant Man*, *Dune*), and Lula's abortion in *Wild at Heart*. '... the idea of birth was a mysterious and fantastic thing,' says Lynch, 'involving again, like sex, just pure meat and blood and hair. And then at the same time this feeling of life, this spiritual thing.' Lynch's preoccupation with the 'abject' deals with the constitution of the physical form, both inside and outside - between the self and the other.

'He put his disease in me,' repeats Dorothy in *Blue Velvet*, a disease which is never named, and which Lynch declines to define. 'Just the word disease used in that way - it's so beautiful just to leave it abstract. Once it becomes specific it's no longer true to a lot of people. Where if it's abstract there could be some truth to it for everybody.'

Lynch reveals himself a sensualist in the word's intended meaning - relating to the sensory perceptions and placing trust in what can be seen, heard, touched, smelled, tasted. The abstract is suspect - even the dreams of the David Lynch film are firmly rooted in tangibles. But if sensualism is the issue, decay is only one side of the sensory perceptions. The polarity between 'thanatos' and 'eros'; death and pleasure, is one of an array of contrasts in which the viewer can undertake the task which Lynch claims he dare not; namely, the search for meanings.

### *Contrast*

Lynch's recurring contrast lies between the perfect body and the imperfect body, between wholeness and decay. The perfect body is dressed formerly in a dark suit and tie, concealing utterly man's bestial nature. The perfect body is never exhibited unclothed, and is only under the most discreet of circumstances subject to the 'abject'. (Jeffrey urinating, Cooper urinating, and 'the boy' of *The Grandmother* urinating). The perfect body houses the rational man who expresses reason, but rarely feelings. He is controlled and subject to the lack of control, misdeeds and emotional imbalance of those around him.

The imperfect body is deformed, unsuited to clothing, 'broken' - either with disease or deformity, and stripped of clothing to reveal and emphasise its imperfections. The imperfect body bleeds, pustulates and rots before our eyes. Within the imperfect body dwells the irrational man; unpredictable and imbued with feeling:

Henry Spencer - 'infant' (Eraserhead)  
Frederick Treves - John Merrick (The Elephant Man)  
Paul Atreides - Vladimir Harkonnen (Dune)

also:

Jeffrey Beaumont - Frank Booth (also Don, Dorothy's husband whose ears are severed from his head) (Blue Velvet)  
Sailor Ripley - Bobby Peru (Wild at Heart)  
Dale Cooper - 'Bob' (also 'Mike', the one-armed man) (Twin Peaks)  
The Boy - The Grandmother (The Grandmother)

Contrasts and conflicts are quite apparent in Lynch's films, even too apparent; the over-simplified and clearly labelled divisions of 'good' and 'evil' is a contrast Lynch justifies as part and parcel of film narrative: 'Everybody's got many threads of (Good and Evil) running through them. But I think in a film, white gets a little whiter, and black gets a little bit blacker, for the sake of the story. That's part of the beauty of it, that contrast...'

This kind of contrast can be subscribed to a Lynchian manipulation of cliché; conflict is central to film form, but Lynch consciously manipulates contrasts - to the level of cliché, predetermining an outcome (good triumphs over evil), but perverting it. Lynch's 'happy endings' are rarely happy.

The formal closure of Blue Velvet fulfills the promise of singing robins, but it is a fake robin; the formal closure of Wild at Heart re-unites Lula with Sailor, who finally gets to sing 'Love Me Tender', but the implied ending leaves Lula's deranged mother still anxious to be rid of Sailor, and Santos still with a contract to eliminate him.

'Pyschomachia', a struggle between opposites, is the primary source of conflict in Lynch's feature films, where 'good becomes bad' and 'bad becomes good' - characters transform into the express opposite of their original personality.

The psychomachia is 'a drama externalising conflicts between certain interior human traits, desires and capabilities... Plots turning on good guys (selfless, decent to others) versus bad guys (selfish, cruel to others) may be crude psychomachias... Some films turn on pairs or doubles. Hitchcock frequently employs this device, one

character in *Strangers on a Train* (1951) being the evil form of an opposing character, or in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) the naive form, each pair constituting the potential of any one human being.'

'I see films more and more as separate from whatever kind of reality there is anywhere else,' says David Lynch. 'They are more like fairy tales or dreams... they should obey certain rules. And one of them is Contrast... I like murder mysteries. They get me completely because they are mysteries and deal with life and death.'

Lynch contrasts psychological types against each other: innocence against guilt, reason against the psychopathic, compassionate against ruthless.

*Jeffrey Beaumont - Frank Booth (Blue Velvet)*  
*Sailor Ripley - Marcello Santos (Wild at Heart)*  
*Dale Cooper - 'Bob' (Twin Peaks)*  
*Frederick Treves - Bytes (The Elephant Man)*  
*Dorothy Vallens - Sandy Williams (Blue Velvet)*  
*Lula - Perdita (Wild at Heart)*

Similarly, there are contrasts between places; the degeneracy and hostility of those who inhabit Deer Meadows in contrast to the wholesomeness and goodnatured residents of Twin Peaks. The suburban calm of Lumberton in *Blue Velvet* harbours unspeakable horrors - John Merrick, the Elephant Man, is caught between the dichotomy of the doctor, Treves, representing compassion on the one side, and the malevolent sideshow proprietor, Bytes, representing the forces of barbarism on the other. In *Dune* the conflict is clearly labelled between House Atreides (order) and House Harkonnen (chaos).

In the film world of David Lynch, order is unremittingly vulnerable - the forces of chaos lurk beneath the surface, ready to exploit any frailty. Beneath the well-trimmed suburban front lawn, ants and beetles tear each other apart with venomous intensity. A gold framed photograph of a high school girl sophomore conceals a life of drug abuse, promiscuity and self-deprecation.

It is a dichotomy that pervades the human personality as much as surfaces and the order of things: the conflict is between 'self' and 'shadow', and opposites struggle for supremacy; decent becomes obscene, ugly becomes beautiful, wrong becomes right.

'Enantiodromia' is a term Jung uses (borrowed from Heraclitus ca 500BC) to describe a process extended so far as to become its opposite. The word means 'running counter to' and implies that everything that exists turns into its opposite. 'From the living comes death and from the dead life, from the young old age and

from the old youth; from waking, sleep, and from sleep, waking; the stream of generation and decay never stands still.'

'The more extreme a position is, the more easily may we expect an enantiodromia, a conversion of something into its opposite. The best is the most threatened with some devilish perversion just because it has done the most to suppress evil.'

In *Twin Peaks* the deranged character called Bob, a spirit of evil that possesses the father of victim, Laura Palmer, finally inhabits the form of the 'incorruptible' special agent, Dale Cooper.

Thus, from a psychological perspective, Cooper's conversion from the purely 'righteous' to the purely 'evil' (harbouring the spirit of the psychopathic 'Bob') was inevitable because of his unblemished 'purity'.

In *Blue Velvet*, Jeffrey's 'enantiodromia' takes him from blue eyed naivity to the pain of knowledge and experience; while Sailor Ripley's conversion at the end of *Wild at Heart* is as dramatic as the conversion of St Paul - Jung's chosen example of enantiodromia.

Lynch's most pertinent contrast is the conflict between the masculine and the feminine. Male and female are simply two sides of the duality which makes up our world. But like all dualities they flow into one another, continually transgressing their own boundaries. There is good in evil, and evil in good. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman.

### *Sex*

Behind Lynch's velvet curtains a woman waits - in *Eraserhead* she is deformed and smiling, telling us that in heaven 'everything is all right'; in *Blue Velvet* she sings, slightly off-key, but the message is allure, desire, 'know me if you dare.' If we dare, we discover she is being raped and brutalised by a demented psychopath. In *Twin Peaks*, a smiling beautiful 17 year old whispers the name of her murderer in our ear. Terrible secrets. Dark secrets.

From *Eraserhead* onwards the sublimation, perversion and expression of sexual desire has been integral to Lynch's films - the nightmare of Henry Spencer (*Eraserhead*) is generated by the fear of sexual relations; the understated 'horror' for John Merrick (*The Elephant Man*) is that his appearance prevents him fulfilling his desires; in *Dune*, Paul, by an accident of birth, is the only male allowed entry into the hitherto exclusively feminine domain of psychic powers; in *Blue Velvet*, Jeffrey enters into an arcane world of voyeurism and perverse sexuality; and even in

Wild at Heart the intense passion of Lula and Sailor finally leads to them betraying each other, and isolation.

'Lynch is one of the cinema's great sensualists', writes critic, Clas von Sydow. 'But this is the sexual nervousness of a Catholic schoolboy who perceives sex as both pleasure and threat.'

It is a nervousness founded in the apprehension of the 'other' - the unknowable feminine. Yet the urge to know leads the Lynchian protagonist into hiding in a wardrobe at night, content just to watch.

She is a particular kind of woman - the woman on the other side of town, rather than the girl next door. 'Independence is her goal, but her nature is fundamentally and irredeemably sexual... The insistence on combining (aggressiveness and sensuality) in a consequently dangerous woman is the central obsession...' writes Janey Place describing the women of film noir.

Richard Dyer maintains that 'women in film noir are above all else unknowable... Film noir thus starkly divides the world into that which is unknown and unknowable (female) and... that which is known (male).'

The same can be said of Lynch's films regardless the setting - the world of Caladan is similarly divided into known and unknown (male and female), with Paul a lone male perpetrator into the unknown feminine; likewise, Jeffrey Beaumont, a male vigilante at the knife point of an 'unknowable woman', and Sailor Ripley, for all his sexual intensity, is only truly united with Lula when he accepts Lula's pantheon of gods in the same way she has always accepted his - he allows Lula's Good Witch Glinda from The Wizard of Oz to touch his heart.

But underlying Lynch's portrayal of sexuality is fear - it is the driving force in Eraserhead and Blue Velvet, and even the comparatively wholesome sexuality of Sailor and Lula conceals dark undercurrents, as Bobby Peru's mock seduction of Lula illustrates.

'Sex,' says Lynch, 'was like a world so mysterious to me, I really couldn't believe there was this fantastic texture to life that I was getting to do... it has all these different levels, from lust and fearful, violent sex to the real spiritual thing at the other end. It's the key to some fantastic mystery of life.'

The mystery is fuelled by secrets, a conspiracy of unspoken subterfuge - specifically sexual secrets: Laura Palmer's secret diary is secret because it details sexual escapades unbeknownst to family and friends, a life incongruous with her pristine

image. But she is only one of many of 'Twin Peaks' female victims - victims of the secrets they harbour.

'Part of the thing about secrets is that they have a certain kind of mystery to me. A dark secret... I don't want to see something so clearly that it would destroy an imaginary picture... secrets and mysteries... provide a beautiful little corridor where you can float out and many, many wonderful things can happen.' Lynch conceals his own character behind a veil of subterfuge and uncertainty, protecting his work from what he sees as the demystifying process of analysis - a deliberate cloak of vaguaries and abstractions, self-conscious diffusion in order not to be brought into the realm of specifics. Lynch avoids particulars as they may destroy the artifice of banality. He is a filmmaker who makes romance of decay, creates irony out of horror and transforms cliché into poetry.

## The Alphabet (1968)

*A pale-faced young girl, about eight years old, lies half prone in a bed as a voice sings out the alphabet. The letters illuminate the bedroom's sombre walls. At the end of the alphabet the girl doubles up and vomits blood in violent spasms.*

Lynch's first art school film ('Six Figures Get Sick') consisted of a ten-second loop where stick figure characters swelled up, got sick and caught fire. A wailing siren accompanied the sequence which could be repeated indefinitely. Flames and vomit are among the resonant 'images of Wild at Heart, and Lynch's films invariably embrace 'motifs of abjection'; inspired by material 'cast out' from the body.

For this reason, Lynch's early student works provide an insight into 'themes of his later feature films. The Alphabet, which combines several animation techniques and is just four minutes long, is a study in creativity and 'abjection' which Lynch would explore further in Eraserhead.

The setting is a bedroom, portrayed in a starkly hyperrealistic scenography, and the film culminates with the violation of 'the bed', a recurring anxiety in later films, not least The Grandmother. In Eraserhead, Henry Spencer sinks into a quagmire in the middle of his mattress as he embraces his lover; John Merrick's bedroom in The Elephant Man, is the scene of his 'violation' as he made the humiliated victim of the hospital porter's evil sport; Blue Velvet is structured around the violation of the bedroom of nightclub singer, Dorothy Vallens; in Wild at Heart, exchanges of intimacy, both physical and verbal, are acted out in motel bedrooms across the 'southern United States; and Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me is the study of a young girl's nightly violation in the assumed sanctity of her own bedroom.

The little girl of The Alphabet, lies in her bed, white faced in the style of a Japanese Noh player, and listens attentively as she hears children singing the letters of the alphabet. Her white smock and pallid complexion suggests she is bed-ridden, incapable of participating in the life beyond the walls of her darkened room. While a male voice acclaims the joys of the alphabet (lyrics by David Lynch), a 'growth' appears beside a curious plant beside her bed. The 'growth' transforms vaguely into the form of a genderless human infant while the plant sprouts forth letters which fall upon the infant levelling it to a mess of bloody slime. The little girl and her bedclothes are splattered with red measles-like dots. She grabs at each letter as it appears; the capital letter 'A' gives birth to little 'a's, and so on through the alphabet, as a woman sings the alphabet song.

When all the letters have appeared (and been sung) tendrils bind her up, and as she writhes trying to escape, she vomits blood across the sheets.

Lynch's film could be dismissed as a student work imbued with the excesses of an artist seeking 'form', but, because it is about an artist seeking 'form', the film provides us with an early glimpse into Lynch's 'film world which evolves in *Eraserhead*, *Blue Velvet* and beyond.

'There are things in *The Alphabet* that keep coming back,' says Lynch. 'And *The Grandmother* too. Maybe you do keep doing the 'same things over and over.'

The 'plant', for example, comes to play more significant roles in *The Grandmother* and *Eraserhead*, but never more explicitly as in *The Alphabet*, where it stands there issuing forth letters; letters which make words; words which form knowledge. For the little girl the letters of the alphabet are cast out to her, there for the taking. Her final 'abjection', as she vomits blood over the bed, emphasises the gap between the knowledge of the outside world, and the 'abject', the material inside her body.

In *The Elephant Man*, John Merrick finally speaks, he astounds his mentors. He didn't think anyone would be interested in his utterances, he tells Dr Treves. But for Merrick speech was simply a means to an end. He sought contact through his feelings; it is through other people's acts of kindness and compassion, rather than words, that he begins his own internal healing process.

The focal point of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* is of an adolescent girl violated in the assumed sanctity of her bedroom. Her diary (words on paper), is similarly violated and in her dreams she casts out the image of her assailant. *The Alphabet* is about a pre-adolescent girl, also violated in her own bedroom. She rejects 'learning' (letters on the wall), which is outside the body, and 'casts up' blood, which is inside.

Philip Strick, in the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, describes the film as 'an urgent message of pity, disgust and shame at the physical processes of conception, birth and adolescence.' At the same time it is just these processes which Lynch sees as the material for inspiration, and finally, healing. Material cast out from the body must be rationalized by the mind; 'This is part of me — this needs to be examined and evaluated'.

*The Alphabet* describes the process of imagination and healing - a striving for articulation and creative expression, a theme he returns to in his later films.

*The Alphabet* provided Lynch with the possibility of exploring the same technique and style and in his next film. With a grant from the American Film Institute he began a film, like *The Alphabet*, about childhood introspection and creative 'abjection'.



## The Grandmother (1970)

*A boy, about eight years old, neatly dressed in contrast to the slovenly appearance of his parents, is beaten by his father for bedwetting. The boy takes refuge in his room. He plants seeds in his bed which grows into an enormous tree. The tree gives birth to his grandmother, who becomes a companion to the boy.*

*She becomes ill and the boy's frantic cries for help go unheeded by his parents. The old lady and the boy wander through a graveyard, and the grandmother disappears. The boy returns to the isolation of his room.*

The Grandmother continues Lynch's development from a young painter of 'dark, sombre pictures' to 'film painting' to animation, pixilation and to 'straightforward' film drama. The film follows on from The Alphabet's themes of creativity, abjection and childhood estrangement.

With a \$7,200 grant from the American Film Institute Lynch made The Grandmother, a thirty four minute long film combining 'live-action' and animation. The story describes the dilemma of a bright but anxious young boy in a repressive household.

We are introduced to the family at the dinner table; mother, father and the young boy. The mother and father are unruly, dressed slovenly, seemingly bereft of any social graces, and communicate with grunts, squeaks and primitive tonal utterances. This kind of non-verbal communication was employed to similar effect by Claude Faraldo's Themroc (1972) to describe the descent of civilised city folk into wild primitives; everything can be expressed in grunts, because no-one has anything to articulate. For Faraldo modern society was breaking down into barbarism - articulation was superfluous in the primal world.

The boy wears a suit and tie, brylcreemed hair, is mainly silent, subject to the haranguing and abuse of his parents - he is the subdued witness to the barbarism of his household; a lone vestige of intelligence stranded amongst authoritarian primates. But his intelligence is betrayed by his body. He wets the bed and incurs the wrath of his father.

The boy's yellow patch that stains the bed is linked schematically to the animated yellow sun in the blue sky - whether Lynch is simply playing with the interaction of shape and colour, or drawing a parallel between the sun's sustaining energy and body fluids as a source of fecundity, is open to interpretation. The juxtaposition of the images recurs several times in the film.

The boy finds a bag of seeds in the hallway, (marked 'seeds') and places one on his bed, covers it in soil and waters it. A cactus like monstrosity grows toward the ceiling, while the tendril like roots grow beneath the bed. The base of the plant splits apart into a gaping orifice, and the plant gives birth to a dark and shapeless form. The delivery is a long, protracted process amplified by the suggestive and repellent sounds of Alan Splet's elaborate sound design.

Estrangement, procreation, anxiety, disease - the main themes of *The Grandmother*, are later explored thoroughly in *Eraserhead*, where the disparate imagery of the former merge into a homogenous whole.

*Eraserhead*'s protagonist, Henry Spencer, finally identifies himself with the monstrous infant of which he is the assumed father. The 'monster' takes over his identity. The polarity between the two 'principle characters in *The Grandmother* works in another way. Henry's 'infant' is a hindrance to his daily routine, the boy's 'grandmother' is a catalyst; a source of consolation and companionship in his isolation, and a compassionate contrast to his vindictive father.

When the grandmother emerges, covered in secretion and slime, the boy runs to fetch some flowers and presents them to her, and an empathy is divined between them both. Whereas the boys parent's communicate with discordant squawks and jeers, *Grandmother* converses in light amiable whistling tones.

At dinner time the mother and father heap abuse upon the boy and he takes refuge in his room, finding harmony in the presence of the grandmother who rocks in a rocking chair as the boy sleeps.

He wakes up the next morning having wet the bed once more (yellow sun on blue sky), and in a violent animated dream sequence the boy slaughter his parents, returning to a 'live' sequence where he and the grandmother smile and touch each other. Later the boy sleeps, and the grandmother falls ill.

Illness precedes catastrophe in the David Lynch film; the little girl in *The Alphabet* gets measles; the illness of the *Eraserhead* baby, precedes Henry's 'losing his head'; and John Merrick's life, as portrayed in *The Elephant Man*, is the struggle against the malignant disease that finally kills him at the age of 28. In Lynch's later films, disease persists as a precedent to disaster; the doctor embellishing the Baron's festering diseases in *Dune*, precedes the demise of the Duke; Dorothy in *Blue Velvet*, obsessed with the disease which Jeffrey has 'put inside her', leads up to the denouement between Jeffrey and 'Frank Booth; Lula's illness in *Wild at Heart*, precedes both catastrophe (Sailors incarceration) and the birth of her son.

When the boy seeks help from his parents for the ailing grandmother they respond with derision, leaving him more isolated than ever. For all his efforts, the grandmother's condition deteriorates and finally she wanes away. The boy leaves the confines of the house and wanders through a field; he meets the grandmother in a cemetery, and after a brief farewell she disappears. The boy returns to his room, to his bed, and sleeps.

The grandmother's brief sojourn into the boy's friendless life is graphically portrayed from the very explicit 'birth' from the soil around the planted tree, to her 'departure' at the cemetery. The film reiterates Lynch's fundamental preoccupation with, as interviewer David Breskin termed it, 'how we start and how we finish as the biggest subject on (Lynch's) table.'

Another Lynch preoccupation at work in *The Grandmother*, to which Lynch returns in subsequent films, is the creative processes - creativity born of despair and isolation. Lynch describes the alchemical process transforming nigredo - the 'blackness' of the human spirit - into the kind of 'gold' the boy requires; compassion, kindness and a sympathetic ear.

He also describes the rich fantasy world of childhood, and how a rejected young boy creates a companion of his own. When the grandmother dies, his 'fantasy' dies - or specifically, he reaches the stage when the common sense of maturity imposes itself on the freewheeling imagination of childhood. Reason becomes the blight of the unfettered imaginative mind.

Although it's unlikely that in 1970 Lynch would have seen any of the animated films of the Czech film maker, Jan Svankmeyer, the brooding resignation of the two artists work makes for an interesting comparison. They both make use of a variety of animation techniques, also they draw on the literary influences of Kafka and Poe, Svankmeyer quite consciously, Lynch less so. Svankmeyer's *The Pit, The Pendulum and Hope* (Kyvaldo, Jama a Nadeje, Czechoslovakia 1983) is a fifteen minute long film (told entirely with a subjective camera) in homage to the same Poe stories that have helped shape Lynch's visual sense of the macabre.

The downbeat ending of *The Grandmother* makes it possibly Lynch's most pessimistic film to date. His next film moves into an even darker realm, and although the ending is more optimistic, to get to it the viewer must undertake a dark journey into an intensely personal nightmare.



## Eraserhead (1976)

*'In Heaven everything is fine  
You've got your good things and I've got mine.'  
the lady from behind the radiator*

*Henry Spencer sleeps and dreams - a curious umbilical cord shaped entity floats from his mouth. He awakens into a darkened room, with a single window which opens to a solid brick wall. A 'man inside a planet' releases brake levers, and we emerge from darkness through a jagged orifice, into the glaring light of day.*

*Henry visits a girl acquaintance, Mary, and her family for dinner, the domestic atmosphere is stifling and Henry represses a rising anxiety. The girl's mother informs Henry that he is father to her daughter's unborn child. Henry is obliged to fulfill his paternal obligations. The baby is born, a monstrous mutation, and mother and child move into Henry's single room. On the first night Mary flees in despair, leaving Henry literally holding the baby.*

*Henry attempts to relate to the mutant monstrous infant. His introspective withdrawal in the face of an increasingly displeasing reality emphasises Henry's subconscious state. An empty theatre stage Henry had previously seen behind the radiator, now features a young woman with a deformed face performing a curiously sadistic dance routine crushing umbilical cords with her dancing shoes while glaring into the camera. The monstrous 'child' becomes increasingly capricious, develops an undiagnosable ailment, recovers, and continues its spiteful malevolence toward Henry.*

*The deformed dancer on the stage begins singing. "In heaven everything is fine..." Henry watches the stage — his head leaves his shoulders, flies through an open window, and crashes to the concrete below. A boy picks it up and takes it to a workshop where a pencil machine operator uses Henry's brain substance to make pencil erasers.*

*Henry is back in his room and takes a pair of scissors to the infant mutant's vital organs. The infant turns into a monster and attacks Henry — the light bulb explodes. 'The man inside the planet' pulls on the brake levers, and Henry is embraced by 'the lady in the radiator.'*

Eraserhead isn't necessarily a film to make sense of, in the way that it isn't necessary to make sense of an unsettling dream. All the same, like the unravelling of an unsettling dream, there lies an intrinsic logic to the claustrophobic world Eraserhead portrays.

Henry's nightmarish ordeal transpires to have been a protracted anxiety dream; his subconscious fears of becoming involved with the opposite sex create a 'worst possible' scenario of Kafka-esque proportions.

This 'worst possible' scenario suggests that Henry Spencer's encounter with a girl from the neighbourhood, will lead to the girl's mother accusing Henry of being father to her daughter's unborn child. When she gives birth to a grotesque and spiteful monstrosity, one night in Henry's single room apartment is enough to drive her to a hasty exit, and leave Henry 'holding the baby.' And this is not a baby to occupy the pages of the family photograph album.

A recurring 'dream within the dream' shows Henry staring into the spaces between the radiator. Behind it is concealed the stage of a rundown theatre. First it's empty, and as Henry's precarious relationship develops, he watches a deformed and smiling woman perform a curious parody of a tap dancing routine. 'Umbilical cords' rain onto the stage which she crushes under her dancing shoes in malicious pleasure. Finally, when the burdens of paternity force Henry into his own private world, the woman appears on stage and sings: 'In heaven everything is fine.'

'Umbilical cords' is not an entirely satisfactory description, although Lynch is reputed to have fetched actual umbilical cords from the maternity ward of a local hospital for this and other scenes in the film. A host of them appear in Henry's bed in the middle of the night, which he casts against the apartment wall. They burst and ooze a white liquid putrescence, as they did beneath the dancing shoes of the character referred to in the credits as 'the lady behind the radiator.'

These are 'umbilical cords' with tadpole shaped heads, more resembling spermatozoa; an impossibly ambiguous hybrid, which belies a curious logic in view of the sexual paranoia the film conveys. (Although, in some scenes, Lynch used actual umbilical cords fetched from the local hospital).

The spermatozoon is the first stage of the procreative process, the severance of the umbilical cord concludes it. If in this hybrid and detached state, the result is grotesque and repelling, this too is a logical synthesis of reproduction and birth. Eraserhead is the story of a man who wants no part of it.

This 'entity' is a revealing precursor to Lynch's interpretation of the Dune sandworm. The Dune protagonist, Paul Atreides, is an adolescent born with the attributes of the psychological masculine and feminine, and destined to fulfill a role of leader. His greatest test is to master the sandworm, a gigantic beast which opens up into an engulfing orifice - a monster that is both phallic and vaginal, male and female. One of Henry's 'tests' is to contend with the serpents of his own nightmare. In Henry's case the serpent is no dragon, but the male/female hybrid of spermatozoon and umbilical cord. Unlike Paul Atreides, Henry fails to conquer the 'serpent.'

*Some Dark Moments*

Eraserhead is the one David Lynch feature film over which he had complete artistic control. Apart from writing and directing the picture, additional credits include editing, production design, scenography, special effects, and, in collaboration with Alan Splet, sound design.

The collaboration with the production team was a fruitful one, and the beginning of associations which would continue throughout Lynch's filmmaking career. His collaboration with Alan Splet began with *The Grandmother* and continues to the present. In *Eraserhead* their efforts culminated in a soundtrack that was as innovative as it would be influential on their work with sound in the productions to come.

John Nance, the withdrawn Henry Spencer, has subsequently found roles in most of David Lynch's productions, not least, as Pete Martell *Twin Peaks*. Lynch describes Nance as 'a zero-motivated actor... content to stay at home, not even watching television, just sitting, thinking in his chair, wearing his little slippers, attributes for which he was ceaselessly thankful, as the film production stretched out over a six year period. According to David Lynch, the main problem was maintaining 'Henry's' singular hairstyle over such a long period. 'It just stayed up in the air - it was so tall that the first night none of us could believe we could ever film something like this.' Nance recalls periods of months, sometimes years, between takes, which were later matched up in the cutting room. Catherine Coulson, production assistant on *Eraserhead*, recalls in 1972, David Lynch telling her that some day she would appear on a television programme, as 'a woman with a log.' Sure enough, she became Margaret, 'the log lady', in *Twin Peaks*.

*Eraserhead* was initially financed by a \$10,000 grant from the American Film Institute (who had financed *The Grandmother*), and Lynch received financial assistance from many quarters, including actress, Sissy Spacek. In the six year production period, Lynch's jobs included building sheds, delivering newspapers and installing hot water heaters. 'It's a very satisfying thing to direct water successfully,' he says.

'There were some dark moments,' says Lynch. 'At one time I was thinking about building a small eight inch Henry and stop motioning him through some small cardboard sets to fill in the blanks. Just to get it finished.'

Lynch describes the 22 page script as 'a kind of free-form poem,' and the film is rich with the kind of poetic imagery that renders analysis superfluous. Nonetheless, beneath the images lies a story - a story of transformation, and creativity. *Eraserhead* is a portrait of the artist creating art of madness.

*The Trials of Henry Spencer and David Lynch*

Behind Henry's floating head is a single planet and a few stars. We approach the planet, exploring its texture, its furrows; it is grimy, earthy, with a texture of rich soil. Henry Spencer is about to be brought 'down to earth' and from out of his ethereal dream state. We are in a room, and a man stares through a window. His naked flesh is burned and seared - most of the window panes are broken.

The man, a kind of cosmic station master, an instrument of fate, pulls on a lever as though opening a railway line signal to let a train out. A scream, like a steam train issuing forth, echoes in the incessant industrial rumble. It is a signal that announces the beginning of a process - an allegorical birth. The umbilical cord (or sperm) falls into a pool of water within a rocky crag. It sinks deeper and deeper and finally we emerge through the jagged orifice and into the blinding white light of day. A seed is sown, something is born.

Henry is outside and looking over his shoulder. He walks straight ahead and into the black shadows of an industrial landscape. We don't know where he's coming from, but we watch him enter a realm of shadows. It is an imposing exterior location, one of the few exteriors in the film, which according to photographer, Frederick Elmes, was chosen 'because of the scale: what appears to be a very natural looking piece of architecture until you walk up underneath it and you become this little ant. It seemed to be the perfect place for Henry to live - that was really his world.'

He walks through a bleak industrial landscape - over mounds of earth, past derelict buildings, carrying a paper bag under his arm. He steps into a muddy puddle, and gets his foot wet, while the incessant throbbing of industry pounds away in the background.

'There's not one particular kind of sound that I like but if I had to pick a category it would be factory sounds', says Lynch. 'I like the power of them and it makes a picture in my mind... I like the idea of factories and factory life probably because I don't know that much about them. I can just imagine a world and it leads to a bigger place where many strange and beautiful things can happen.'

Henry walks inside one of these derelict buildings, and into an ill-lit lobby - Henry checks through a post box and picks up a key. He waits for the lift, the lift doors open, he gets inside, and waits. Slowly the lift ascends. Inside the lift, passing light illuminates Henry's nonplussed visage.

He walks down a narrow dark corridor, past a pay telephone. As Henry opens his door, a door across the hall opens and an exotic looking woman in a black negligee

asks; 'Are you Henry?' Henry replies to the affirmative, and the woman tells him that a girl named Mary telephoned and that her parents have invited him to dinner.

Henry's apartment is a dim, sombre and claustrophobic affair and the inadequate lighting casts dark shadows on the wall. Henry empties his paper bag, puts on a 78 rpm of old fashioned cinema wurlitzer music and examines his wet foot. He places the wet sock upon the radiator and sits on the bed as the sock sizzles and spits as it slowly dries out, at the same time staring through the window to a view of a brick wall.

Dennis Hopper has called Lynch 'the first American surrealist director', and this tableau has the intrigue of a Magritte painting with the despondency of Francis Bacon. Henry Spencer's first trial is the place he lives. David Lynch once described *Eraserhead* as his revenge on Philadelphia, 'the sickest city in America,' and the inspiration behind the settings of Henry Spencer's world, even though the film was shot around Los Angeles.

Lynch's cinematographer, Frederick Elmes, who has also since 'collaborated on subsequent Lynch productions, claims that *Eraserhead* was inspired by Lynch's experiences in Philadelphia. 'He draws on all those years of being an art student living in the factory part of town.' Says Lynch: 'I love going into another world, and film provides that opportunity. *Eraserhead* way more than any other film, because I really did live in that world.' Henry opens the drawer and fetches two torn halves of a photograph and puts them together. It's the forlorn face of a girl, Mary X. The forlorn face of Mary X stares through a window. Henry approaches, sidling down an old disused railway line in the hours of darkness. Dogs bark, steam bellows through a ventilator shaft, and Mary's forlorn face stares down from the window once more.

Henry looks up to Mary in the window. 'You never come around any more,' he says. 'Dinner's almost ready,' says Mary. 'Come on in.' He passes her in the doorway but there is no physical contact between them. In the living room Mary's mother sits on the corner of a sofa. On the floor, young pups whine frantically feeding off a large motionless bitch. Henry seats himself cautiously, as does Mary - all within respectable distances from each other.

Mother: What do you do?

Henry: I'm on vacation.

Mother: What did you do?

Henry: I'm a printer. I work at Lapell's factory.

Mary has a kind of fit, clucking her tongue in her gullet and rolling her eyes. Her mother pays no attention, and Mary's father, Bill, introduces himself.

Bill: We've got chicken tonight. Strangest damn things. They're man-made. Smaller than my fist. And they're new. Hello. I'm Bill.

Henry: Hello. I'm Henry.

In the kitchen mother prepares dinner as grandmother sits passively on a chair. Mother places the salad bowl on grandmother's lap and they go through the motions of tossing the salad. Then mother lights a cigarette and places it in grandmother's mouth. Grandmother does not respond. A cuckoo clock strikes the hour. In the dining room, at the dinner table, Bill tells a strange story about his arm and asks that Henry carve the chickens. They're about as big as a fist.

Henry: And you just cut them up like regular chickens?

Bill: Sure. Just cut them up like regular chickens.

Henry inserts the knife and a strange liquid oozes over the plate as the legs swing up and down. A brown putrescent liquid bubbles over the plate. Now it is Mary's mother who has a fit and she runs screaming from the room. Mary follows. Henry and Bill sit alone in silence at the table.

Bill: Well, Henry, what do you know?

Henry: Oh, I don't know much of anything.

And so proceeds Henry's other trial. The atmosphere is as thick as the gravy oozing from the insides of the man-made chickens. Henry is the nonplussed innocent trapped in a microcosm of dementia - a situation familiar to anyone who as a restless adolescent has spent an agonizingly ponderous Sunday dinner with a less favoured aunt and uncle.

Mother returns and demands to speak to Henry, in private. Mary stands in the doorway and weeps. A floor lamp flickers precariously, and explodes.

Mother: Did you and Mary have sexual intercourse?

(A bewildered Henry tries to extricate himself).

Mother: You're in very bad trouble if you don't cooperate.

She forces Henry up against the wall and bites into his neck. Henry tries to force her off, then Mary appears in the doorway. This is a favoured Lynch sordid scenario, which he re-enacts in *Wild at Heart* when Lula's mother, Marietta, attempts to seduce Sailor at a dance-hall toilet cubicle.

Mother: There's a baby. At the hospital. And you're the father.

Mary: Mom. They're still not sure if it is a baby!

Henry's nose begins to bleed. Mary's mother fetches some ice.

Mary: You don't mind do you Henry, about getting married?

Henry's mind races through the living room, past the dog and the floral curtains, and straight through the venetian blinds. Henry's trial is over. He is found guilty. Next comes the sentence.

In his book *Kafka's Other Trial*, Elias Canetti describes how Franz Kafka's celebrated novel was influenced by his personal ordeal, his own 'trial' by the Bauer family as he courted Felice Bauer. The Joseph K. of Kafka's novel is as much the author as Henry is to Lynch. Like Joseph K., Henry is passively resigned to the events that befall him. (In Orson Welles' film of *The Trial*, 1963, Anthony Perkins plays a far more passionate Joseph K. than the novel's protagonist, loudly decrying his innocence. Henry is closer to the character of the novel's Joseph K. and Jack Nance in the Kafka role is a tantalizing thought).

Two months after Franz Kafka was officially engaged to Felice at the Bauer family home, in August 1914, he began work on *The Trial*, and according to Canetti, 'the engagement becomes the arrest in the first chapter; the 'tribunal' (when the engagement was called off) appears 'as the execution in the last.'

In his diary, Kafka describes his engagement to Felice Bauer under the strict supervision of her parents; he 'was tied hand and foot like a criminal. Had they sat me down in a corner bound in real chains, placed policemen in front of me and let me look on simply like that, it could not have been worse. And that was my engagement.'

Just as Kafka assimilates his anxieties into *The Trial*, Lynch empties himself into *Eraserhead* with a vehemence unparalleled in his other films. It was written and made when Lynch's girlfriend became pregnant and Lynch himself, (a struggling art student) like Henry, became, first, the reticent husband, and then the reluctant father.

'Lynch describes *Eraserhead* as 'an abstract film... not just about one thing' but also about a man unprepared for and terrified by the prospect of fatherhood. Twenty years after the production was set in motion, Lynch's daughter, Jennifer, maintains the event inspired the film, that 'David, in no uncertain terms, did not want a family.' David Lynch acknowledges the events as 'a subconscious influence' but with characteristic diffidence suggests that the film 'be left alone to float in that pleasant abstraction.

Jennifer was born with club feet, and Lynch began filming *Eraserhead*, financed by a modest AFI grant, supplemented by delivering *The Wall Street Journal*. She appears in *Eraserhead*, filmed during its later stages, under the credit of 'little girl'. Jennifer was born two years before 'Laura Palmer', and encouraged by 'dad' to write the fictitious diary of the model daughter, who, beneath the subterfuge, is

promiscuous, a drug addict and murdered before she reaches 18. The story is expounded in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*.

Elias Canetti says of Franz Kafka: 'He did not have for his private and interior processes that disregard which distinguishes insignificant writers from writers of imagination. A person who thinks he is empowered to separate his inner world from the outer one has no inner world from which something might be separable.'

Joseph K. was taken out and shot for a crime he never committed, for a crime that is never named. Henry is imprisoned in a dark cell with a mutant infant monster and a 'wife' who recoils at his touch. Mary's mother's question, as to whether Henry and Mary had sexual intercourse, remains unanswered.

### *Happy Families and Broken Dreams*

The paradox that runs through Lynch's body of work consists of the family idyll on the one side; wholesome, content and self-contained; and the 'diseases' which that idyll conceals, on the other. The paradox finds expression in Lynch's contrast of the 'closed' body - neat, formally dressed, 'whole', and the 'open' body - broken fissures revealing otherwise concealed matter - an unborn foetus, vital organs, diseases. If you break the skin which covers the 'perfect' body, all kinds of 'imperfections' are revealed; if you look behind the surface of the family idyll, all kinds of 'imperfections' are revealed.

Henry Spencer's family is as 'imperfect' as one is likely to encounter, yet Henry (and Lynch) attempts to conceal the broken skin, and create the idyll of television advertising and popular culture. Mary stands at the table of Henry's single room apartment, dressed in a floral dress, and with bottle in hand, feeds the baby, and swaying to the wurlitzer music of Henry's 78 rpm gramophone player. The tableau is a pastiche of a 1950's magazine advertisement.

The baby is shown in close-up; a grotesque, deformed head is attached to a limbless trunk incarcerated in bandages. It is scarcely human, yet mimics the human infant as it sucks greedily on the milk bottle in Mary's hand. Henry returns home and regards the domestic scene before him; mother feeding 'baby'. He smiles. The family idyll. He lies on the bed, still dressed in his suit and tie, and stares at the radiator. Slime gathers on the floor beneath it. Inside the radiator is a stage. The stage is empty. A single spotlight illuminates the scene.

In bed at night Henry reaches out and touches Mary's shoulder. The 'baby' is crying. She shudders and recoils in disgust. The baby still cries. Outside it rains and howls gusts of wind. 'Shut up,' she shouts at the baby. She gets up, and screams: 'I

can't stand it. I'm going home.' She drags the suitcase from under the bed and leaves.

Henry is now alone, and the 'baby' gets sick. He takes its temperature. It has a fever and boils appear over its face. The next morning, Henry, dressed in suit and tie, nurses the infant, but each time he tries to leave the apartment baby's frantic wailing drags him back. He is a prisoner in a domestic hell, a scenario born of Lynch's bond between the external hell of the world and his inner hell.'

*The Burden of Reality and the Flight of Fantasy*

Up to this point, *Eraserhead*, for all its quirks and surreal absurdity, has proceeded along the lines of a conventional narrative. Burdened with a leaden reality, Henry's imagination seeks new avenues of diversion. As he stares at the stage behind the radiator, a deformed woman dances to Henry's wurlitzer music. She looks at the camera, smiles gleefully through her deformed and distorted cheeks, and clasps her hands before her over her frock. Serpent-like forms (umbilical cord/spermatozoon) fall to the stage. She crushes them gleefully with her foot, and they spurt white liquid. Smiling, she disappears into the darkness behind the velvet curtain. Henry observes a monstrous plant by his bed (echoes of *The Grandmother*), and suddenly finds that Mary is back in the bed. She is sleeping, grinding her teeth, slurping, twitching, groping at her eyes - brazenly executing the sounds and acts of conjugal irritation. Henry gropes under the sheets and discovers, to his horror, an umbilical cord/spermatozoon 'serpent' in the bed and casts it aside. Then another, then another - the bed is filled with these monstrosities. He throws them against the wall and they burst and spurt milky grey putrescence.

The cabinet doors open and Henry regards the animated antics of a maggot like 'seed'. We return to the texture and furrows of another 'planet' from the opening sequence, once again emerging from a gaping hole. Henry stares at the growing planet. He pulls threads from his worn-out dressing gown. Everything is falling apart.

There's a knock at the door, and the seductive woman from across the hall enters. Her eyes and lips are painted and she smiles a wanton smile. 'I locked myself out of my apartment,' she says. 'Where's your wife?' 'She must have gone back to her parents again,' says Henry. 'I'm not sure.' She lures Henry to bed and they embrace, half prone in the middle of the uncovered mattress. She is distracted by the infant's sounds of crying and cackling as they kiss, and Henry tries to divert her with enforced passion. The bed becomes a quagmire and they begin to sink. They

sink into murky grey liquid, until they are submerged completely. Her hair floats on top.

In Fellini's film *City of Women* (1979) Marcello Mastroianni ascends the skies in a hot-air balloon formed in the shape of a large breasted woman with a smiling face. A masked terrorist machine guns the balloon and Mastroianni plunges to the ground. The terrorist removes the mask and reveals the smiling face of a beautiful young woman. Mastroianni wakes abruptly, and looks into the same smiling face seated opposite him - he had fallen asleep on a train journey.

The dream finds a natural expression in the cinema; the dream sequences of both Fellini and Lynch evolve of anxiety, and are rooted in the tangible. 'There is nothing more honest than a dream,' says Fellini. 'And because it's honest it resists obvious interpretation.'

### *The Far Side of Madness*

The deformed 'lady in the radiator' emerges from the dark. She stands centre stage and sings: 'In Heaven everything is fine/You've got your good things and I've got mine.' Henry climbs onto the stage and the woman extends her hands. Henry seats himself in a theatre box and watches the stage where the deformed plant from his apartment now appears. He grinds his hands frantically when suddenly his head erupts from his shoulders and bounces on the stage. A bizarre growth appears where his head used to be, and the plant begins to seep liquid. The growth replacing Henry's head becomes the 'baby's' head. The baby takes over Henry's identity - he is no longer himself, but a monster consumed by the monstrous infant.

Henry's decapitated head disappears into the pool of liquid seeping from the plant, then falls down the side of a building and crashes to the ground. An old tramp on a bench looks at the shattered head. A boy runs up, picks it up and runs off with it. The boy takes it to a workshop where it's examined by the assistant and the manager. They take it into the back room and drill it open. The 'substance' inside is extracted by a pencil making machine and used as rubber tips on the end of pencils. Henry becomes 'eraserhead'.

The machine operator makes a test run, and scribbles on a noteblock, then rubs out the scrawlings with the 'eraser' - the substance inside Henry's head. 'It's OK', he says to the manager, and the manager counts out some notes from a wad of money and gives them to the boy. The machine operator brushes aside the bits of used 'rubber', which fly through air, and shine like illuminated cosmic dust.

Henry has lost his identity, he no longer exists. An alien monster has consumed him utterly. Henry's nightmare is as terrifying as Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) confronting her own projection of parenthood horror in *Aliens* (1986). Like Henry, Ripley stares at the Alien monster before her, and reflects on her own loss of identity. With a little girl safely in her arms, Ripley faces her personal nightmare of motherhood - she sees the formidable Alien mother, imprisoned by her egg laying appendage, surrounded by the off-spring she's creating. For Ripley, the dark side of motherhood entails the sacrifice of her own ego for the single purpose of procreation. For Henry, the dark side of fatherhood similarly implies loss of ego - his identity is consumed by his progeny.

Apparently awakened from his dream, Henry lies on his bed, then is dressed and standing in his room. Steam billows outside his window, he looks outside - two figures wrestle in the dark. Footsteps echo in the corridor. Henry knocks on the door of number 21, the woman across the hall, but there is no answer. He returns to his room.

The deformed infant cackles maliciously, Henry lies down and the wurlitzer music plays in the background. He gets up again and opens his door. The woman across the hall is outside her room, together with an ugly little man. They grope at each other vehemently. The woman looks at Henry and sees the head of the baby connected to his body. Even his identity to the outside world has been consumed by this monster. Because of the infant Henry has forsaken all - he is imprisoned in his room and once beyond the threshold of his own apartment he becomes merely an extension of the mutant infant he fathers.

Henry closes the door, turns off the light and looks through the keyhole, and slumps to the floor despondently. He takes out some scissors and cuts open the baby's bandages. Inside is an array of vital organs - there is neither skin nor bones. The baby whimpers desperately. Henry stabs at the organs with the scissors, the baby gasps and wheezes, spurts blood from its mouth, and its cut-open trunk oozes a thick porridge like substance. The light flickers and electricity sparks.

The baby's neck elongates till it too seems like a spermatozoon. Henry watches in horror - giant baby heads leer at him from all directions. The flickering light explodes, connecting us to the moment at Mary's household when Henry was told he would have to marry.

The 'planet' which Henry observed before his 'seduction', shatters - a hole appears in its side and Henry stands surrounded by flying cosmic dust - the rubber granules of pencil erasers. Inside the shattered planet, the man wrestles with the brake levers. The process which he began by releasing the levers in the first place, must be now halted. The brake levers scream and shudder, sparks fly in all directions,

and his face becomes deformed and mutilated. Henry has traversed his psychosis, for on the other side of madness lies redemption. He has regained his identity. Against a blinding white light the deformed lady appears and embraces Henry. Henry closes his eyes and drifts away.

### *An alchemical transformation*

The alchemical term 'nigredo', blackness, in a psychological context refers to the darkness of despair, the leaden blackness of the human spirit. Alchemists aimed to transform the leaden blackness into gold - Jung translated this into the psychological process of transforming depression (blackness) into creativity (gold). Henry Spencer's ordeal is also the ordeal of David Lynch 'giving birth' to his own creativity by delving into the blackness of his psychosis.

Nigredo signifies decay, suffering and death. 'It casts a blackness of despair which is not so much 'of the ego' as 'witnessed by the ego and into which the ego is compulsively drawn and transformed,' ÇF 'writes Jungian analyst, Robert Grinnell, in *Alchemy in a Modern Woman*.

To understand a psychosis we must understand the primordial imagery; Lynch's ultimate nightmare - the brain (and the brain as a source of identifying the 'self' recurs throughout Lynch's films) is put into a pencil making machine and made into erasers! Such an absurd image and yet such a logical one. The pencil is the essential prerequisite in conveying the creative impulse. A pencil writes, draws, doodles, sketches - it is the most basic extension of the creative 'self' to the outside world. As a symbol for the loss of ego Lynch chooses the eraser - the ultimate negation of the creativity proffered by the pencil. The pencil machine operator who writes on a piece of paper, rubs it out with an eraser fabricated from the substance of Henry's brain, is committing the final travesty. Henry's brain no longer thinks, nor creates - it erases.

Eraserhead is an anxiety dream of a young man cast unwillingly into the role of father. It is also a portrayal of the creative process - of transforming the nigredo of despair and melancholy into substance of 'art.' The opening sequence suggests the sowing of a seed and the painful process culminating in 'birth' - an eruption through the void, as the 'self' frees itself from the darkness and emerges into light.

'In his notebook describing the genesis of *Persona* (1966 - also written during a period of personal crisis), Ingmar Bergman writes: 'I imagine a bleached white strip of film. It runs through the projector and gradually words can be made out on the soundtrack... Gradually just the word which I imagine. Then a face appears almost indiscernible within all the white...' 'In *Persona* the face is that of Alma Vogler,

whose descent into nigredo has left her silent. In *Eraserhead* the face is that of Henry Spencer. *Persona* begins with a montage of images which refer specifically to the 'birth' of a film (a projector, film frames, upside down animated sequences, sexual imagery); *Eraserhead*'s opening sequence suggests a descent into the dark recesses of the human spirit - of taking up the black matter of nigredo, and using it as the fuel to artistic creativity. Ultimately, Henry embraces the woman who teases him. Everything is fine in Heaven, but Henry has distinctly earthly issues to contend with.



## The Elephant Man (1980)

*'Was I so tall, could reach the pole,  
Or grasp the ocean with a span;  
I would be measured by the soul,  
The mind's the standard of the man.'*  
*from Isaac Watts 'False Greatness', quoted by Joseph Merrick.*

**London 1884. Surgeon Frederick Treves visiting a carnival side-show, sees an exhibit entitled the 'Elephant Man', a grotesquely deformed figure of a man. He persuades the exhibit's 'owner' to allow him to take him to the London Hospital for examination. Like everyone else, Treves assumes the man is mentally as well as physically retarded, but after some weeks discovers that 'John Merrick' is articulate, well-read and compassionate. Treves is unable to cure his accelerating deformity, but provides Merrick with a sanctity from the brutality beyond the hospital walls - from those who wish to exploit Merrick for profit.**

**Treves meets with opposition from inside and outside the hospital - Merrick is kidnapped by his former owner and exhibited abroad. But he returns to Treves, becomes the toast of London society, and following the fulfilment of his greatest wish - a visit to the theatre - dies through suffocation by attempting to sleep like a normal human being.**

Shortly after John Merrick is befriended by Mrs Kendal, a celebrated West End actress, she pays him a visit and presents him with a gift, a copy of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. He opens the book and begins reading. They are Romeo's lines to Juliet. Mrs Kendal recites Juliet's lines and John Merrick continues to read from the text, struggling to express the words with as much conviction as his deformed mouth allows.

Merrick:    If I profane with my unworhiest hand  
              This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this,  
              My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand  
              To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

Mrs Kendal: Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,  
              Which mannerly devotion shows in this;  
              For saints have hands that pilgrim's hands do touch,  
              And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

Merrick:    Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

Mrs Kendal: Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

Merrick: O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do;  
They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

Mrs Kendal: Saints do not move, though grant for prayer's sake.

Merrick: Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.  
Thus from my lips, by yours, my sin is purg'd.

He reads out a scene instruction in subdued voice and turns away awkwardly. 'Then it says, they kiss', he says. Mrs Kendal approaches Merrick and plants her lips upon his deformed cheek.

Mrs Kendal: Then have my lips the sin that they have took.

Merrick: Sin from lips? O trespass sweetly urg'd!  
Give me my sin again.

'Oh Mr Merrick', says Mrs Kendal. 'You're not an elephant man at all.' 'No?' says Merrick. 'No', she says. 'You are Romeo.'

It is a scene that externalises the inner turmoil of Merrick's unexpressed fervour - a dramatic device enabling this unlikely couple to articulate themselves through the lyricism of the bard.

The implausible desperados of Robert Altman's *Thieves Like Us* (a 1974 remake of Nicholas Ray's *They Live By Night*), played by John Carradine and Shelley Duvall, find themselves alone in a mountain hideaway, sitting on separate sides of the room, too shy and awkward to submit to the throes of ardour. The Saturday afternoon radio play broadcasts *Romeo and Juliet*, and the couple giggle nervously at the same lines John Merrick and Mrs Kendal play out as though they were their own.

For Merrick the scene expresses the desires concealed beneath his deformity, emphasising the hopelessness of his condition. The story of Merrick is a man struggling for love whom nature has thwarted at birth.

When Treves exhibits Merrick before the Society of Anatomists, (Merrick's silhouette is outlined through a sheet draped before his body) still believing him to be an imbecile, he notes to his colleagues 'that the genitals are normal.' When Treves and Comm Garr examine him Treves concludes, 'An imbecile from birth.' 'Yes,' says Comm Garr. 'A complete idiot. I pray to God he's an idiot.' The grim subtext to these lines conclude that were not Merrick so hideous to look upon, he would be capable of a normal sex life. As he is 'an imbecile from birth' it makes no difference.

In Treves' account, published in 1923, entitled 'The Elephant Man', upon which the screenplay is partially based, he wrote: "I supposed that Merrick was imbecile and had been imbecile from birth... That he could appreciate his position was unthinkable. Here was a man in the heyday of youth who was so vilely deformed that everyone he met confronted him with a look of horror and disgust."

Better to be an imbecile, reasoned Treves, and be thus less conscious of fate's appalling blow, than to be aware of the hideousness of his appearance and the inhumanity of those around him. Better an imbecile than to consciously endure human desires for love and companionship and never assuage them.

Later Treves writes: "It was not until I came to know that Merrick was highly intelligent, that he possessed an acute sensibility and - worse than all - a romantic imagination that I realised the overwhelming tragedy of his life."

Treves' observation - "worse than all - a romantic imagination" is the inspiration to Lynch's film which elevates the narrative from the macabre to the sublime. It is the story of 'Beast' and 'Beauty', the inverse of Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et La Bete* (1946).

Beast: My heart is good but I am a monster.

Beauty: There are many men more monstrous, but it doesn't show.

They are lines as appropriate to Merrick and Mrs Kendal as to Beauty and the Beast. Whereas *La Belle et la Bete* concerns the sexual awakening of a young girl - Belle integrating her projected animus, Merrick's story is of a man attempting to integrate the archetypal feminine.

Treves wrote: 'To secure Merrick's recovery and to bring him, as it were, to life once more, it was necessary that he should make the acquaintance of men and women who would treat him as a normal and intelligent young man and not as a monster of deformity. Women I felt to be more important than men in bringing about his transformation. Women were the more frightened of him, the more disgusted at his appearance and the more apt to give way to irrepressible expressions of aversion when they came into his presence. Moreover, Merrick had an admiration of women of such a kind that it attained almost to adoration. This was not the outcome of his personal experience. They were not real women but the products of his imagination. Among them was the beautiful mother surrounded, at a respectful distance, by heroines from the many romances he had read.'

*Many men more monstrous*

The film begins with the image of the smiling and compassionate face of a young woman - the photographic portrait of Merrick's mother. The images which follow, the birth scene, parading elephants, swirling clouds and machine steam, are accompanied by the sounds of the rhythmic pounding of industry, steam driven machines and the wailing of elephants which tone into her own screams, and the screams of a newborn infant. It is an opening charged with the intensity of *Eraserhead's* more metaphoric birth, as a human soul departs the void. It marks the beginning of the film's cyclic passage moving toward the final images of the spirit disincorporating and returning to the void from whence it came.

The wails of despair and pain of birth dissolve into the screams of fairground amusement and people milling about carnival sideshows. The screams express both the isolation of pain and the collective shrieks of idle amusement.

A well dressed gent, the surgeon Frederick Treves, surveys the carnival exhibits. He walks through a labyrinth of various exhibits, arriving finally at a dark cul-de-sac where police are involved in an altercation with a side-show proprietor. They are closing down an exhibit. The freak on display is so grotesque it is causing offence and distress to onlookers.

At the surgery of the London Hospital, Treves is operating on a man's face mutilated by an industrial accident. 'Abominable things these machines,' he says, an ironic aside in light of the abominations to be perpetrated by people.

Treves walks through the squalor of the London East End to meet Bytes, the sideshow exhibit proprietor. 'This creature's mother was struck down by a wild elephant in the fourth month of pregnancy,' he declares. It is a statement pertaining more to the crowd drawing patter of the showman (both in fiction and reality) with little basis on fact. Lynch's 'parade of elephants' is more visual and aural metaphor than paying credence to the sideshow explanation of Merrick's condition. (In 1930 Dr Parkes Weber diagnosed Merrick's condition as an extreme case of neurofibromatosis).

The character Bytes (Freddie Jones), and later the hospital porter (Michael Elphick) are apparently fictitious elements, melodramatic caricatures to provide dramatic contrast. (Tom Norman, one of Merrick's actual showmen, claimed the freaks with whom he had dealings were 'with very few exceptions, as happy as the days are long, and were very contented with their lot in life.')

Both Bytes and the character of the hospital porter are the stuff of melodrama, inspired, possibly, by David Lean's Charles Dickens' adaptations - to the ear Bytes and Sykes are not so far removed, nor is his character so dissimilar from the

manipulative and tormenting characterisation of David Lean's Fagin, and the convict. In addition, the contrasting innocence and naivety of both Oliver and Pip have the endearing qualities of John Merrick, and even the look and style of *The Elephant Man* resembles Lean's recreation of Victorian London in both *Great Expectations* (1946) and *Oliver Twist* (1948).

The Bytes character can also be seen metaphorically - Merrick was unquestionably brutalised and degraded during the years in which he was 'an exhibit' - both Bytes and the hospital porter function as token representatives of a 'nether world', contrasting succinctly to the pristine and correct society inhabited by Dr Treves and his colleagues.

Treves beholds the creature - a shadowy figure in the corner of a darkened cell - and weeps a single tear. He persuades Bytes to bring the 'exhibit' to his surgery at the London Hospital for examination. 'Life is full of surprises', he says.

The 'Elephant Man', John Merrick, arrives at Treves surgery. He is covered in a cape, and mute. Treves begins his examination.

Treves exhibits Merrick's deformities to the Anatomical Society. Merrick's silhouette is visible on a sheet draped before his body. 'The genitals are normal' emphasises Treves.

Treves discusses the case with his superior, Carr Gomm. They are satisfied that the man is 'an imbecile from birth', and return him to the showman, Bytes. In a drunken rage Bytes beats him viciously. Word gets back to Treves, and Merrick is returned to the doctor's care. The doctor is warned for contravening hospital regulations. Merrick must be taken elsewhere. A nurse takes a bowl of porridge into Merrick's room and screams in horror. Merrick screams back. The scene is vividly portrayed in Treves' memoirs - Lynch uses the incident as a dramatic climax - for the first time Merrick is revealed in the full light of day.

Treves briefly relinquishes his role as observer and becomes 'involved.' He attempts to communicate with Merrick. 'Nod your head if you can understand,' says Treves. Merrick nods. Treves teaches him to repeat a sentence. 'Hello. My name is John Merrick.' As Merrick's first utterance it is a line charged with savage irony. His name was not John Merrick.

His real name was Joseph Merrick. Treves referred to him as Merrick, but in his hand written account wrote that according to the showman 'his name was John Merrick'. When records revealed his name to be Joseph, Treves crossed out these references, replacing it with the name 'John', presumably to keep his accounts in

order, and prevent unnecessary confusion. The result was just the opposite. Merrick's birth certificate records: Joseph Carey Merrick b. Leicester 5.8.1862.

Bytes comes back and demands the return of his source of income, his 'treasure'. Treves refuses to give him up. 'All you do is profit from another man's misery,' he tells him, and Bytes leaves. Treves is still uncertain as to what level of 'humanness' is concealed by Merrick's disfigured form, but has established a bond with his new-found 'patient'. Treves teaches Merrick the 23rd psalm, beginning 'The lord is my shepherd...' Carr Gomm insists that Merrick be transferred to another hospital as the man is incurable and only capable of learning passages taught to him. He is incapable of thinking for himself. Carr Gomm leaves and outside the door Treves listens in astonishment. He calls Carr Gomm back. Merrick is reciting 'And ye I walk through the valley of death...' 'I never taught him that part...' says Treves.

Treves discovers that Merrick can read and write and learnt many biblical passages as a young boy. He is appalled to consider that he has gone through life in this wretched state quite aware of his condition. Merrick is allowed to stay. No mirrors are allowed in his room.

News of Merrick travels quickly. From fashionable newspapers to pub gossip, interest in the 'Elephant Man' ranges from concern to idle prurience. The hospital porter assures Merrick of his 'interest', foretelling a grim unfolding of events, which dissolves into a montage of factories, steam and the sounds of industry. Merrick is as much a victim of his time as his deformity.

Treves invites Merrick home for afternoon tea and to meet his wife Anna. She smiles and shakes his hand. Later Merrick weeps. 'I'm not so used to being treated so well by a beautiful woman,' he tells her. Then asks; 'would you like to see my mother?' He shows her the photograph. 'Why, she's beautiful', says Anne Treves. 'I must have been a great disappointment to her,' says Merrick. 'My mother was so very beautiful.' His words accompany the image of 'mother's' photograph - a young and beautiful woman with a faraway gaze, more in keeping with the idealism of a pre-Raphaelite portrait than the impoverished woman from a Leicester working class family who bore Joseph Merrick into the world. A musical coda, reminiscent of a music box tune, intensifies the nostalgia and the delicacy of the image - in his mind Merrick opens up a figurative music box taking out the one precious memory of his past, admiring it, treasuring it. Anne Treves turns away discretely and weeps in silence.

Treves' memoirs record the following: 'It was a favourite belief of his (Merrick) that his mother was beautiful. The fiction was, I am aware, one of his own making, but it was a great joy to him. His mother, lovely as she may have been, basely deserted him when he was very small, so small that his earliest clear memories were

of the workhouse to which he had been taken. Worthless and inhuman as this mother was, he spoke of her with pride and even with reverence. Once, when referring to his own appearance, he said: "It is very strange, for, you see, mother was so beautiful."

Treves' account, written 35 years after Merrick's death, is, on occasion, guilty of melodramatic excess. Joseph's mother, for example, died when he was 10 years old. Nonetheless, the line is central to Lynch's concept of Merrick's story - a disfigured creature who carries with him an image of the idealised feminine - the 'Beast' and 'Beauty'. In *Dune*, Lynch portrays a similarly ambiguous mother-son relationship - following the death of his father, Paul's relationship with his mother (his father's mistress) is imbued with sexual tension, just as Merrick's evocation of the 'feminine' evokes desire rather than maternal nurturing.

Back in his quarters, Merrick sketches a cathedral spire visible from his window. He begins constructing a model and Treves encourages him. 'I wish I could sleep like normal people', says Merrick. 'Can you cure me?' he asks. 'No,' says Treves. 'We can care for you, but we can't cure you.' Part of Treves' 'caring' is arranging for the celebrated West End actress, Mrs Kendal, to visit.

As a result, Merrick finds himself a centre of attention under less exacting circumstances than his carnival side-show days, as prominent citizens follow Mrs Kendal's example.

Merrick's fragmented dream images contrast the past - the workhouse and parading elephants - and the vaporous uncertainties of the present and future - the sky, clouds, steam...

Treves battles with his conscience. 'I've made Mr Merrick a curiosity all over a again... why did I do it? Am I a good man or a bad man?' he asks himself. But Treves soon finds a more pressing conflict to resolve. The committee of the London Hospital wants Merrick evicted; 'He attracts unfavourable publicity - he does not belong here,' protests a committee spokesman.

Treves records; 'there were two anxieties which were prominent in his (Merrick's) mind... he often asked me timidly to what place he would be next moved... another trouble was his dread of his fellow-men, his fear of people's eyes, the dread of always being stared at, the lash of the cruel mutterings of the crowd.'

The hospital committee scene is principally a dramatic contrivance - following the objections of committee members, and threat to Merrick's precarious security, Princess Alexandra enters the chamber with the gusto of a theatrical denouement. She, Queen Victoria and the royal family are most interested in the Merrick case,

she informs the committee. They trust the hospital will continue their support. Merrick is granted permanent residence.

Treves informs Merrick who is overcome with joy. The 'vanity set' Treves gives him as a present relates to an incident recorded by Treves as follows; 'I asked Merrick what he would like me to purchase as a Christmas present. He rather startled me by saying shyly that he would like a dressing bag with silver fittings...

'So the bag was obtained and Merrick the Elephant Man became in the seclusion of his chamber, the Picadilly exquisite, the young spark, the gallant... I realised that as Merrick he could never travel he could hardly want a dressing bag. He could not use the silver backed brushes and the comb because he had no hair to brush. The ivory handled razors were useless because he could not shave. The deformity of his mouth rendered an ordinary toothbrush of no avail, and as his monstrous lips could not hold a cigarette the cigarette-case was a mockery... still the bag was an emblem of the real swell and of the knockabout Don Juan of whom he had read.'

Treves refers to the 'one shadow in Merrick's life', which is significant in light of one of the film's most poignant scenes in which the hospital porter organises a 'private show' amongst the clientele of the local public house. He makes good his earlier promise to Merrick in maintaining his 'interest'.

Treves writes: '(Merrick) had a lively imagination; he was a romantic; he cherished an emotional regard for women and his favourite pursuit was the reading of love stories. He fell in love - in a humble and devotional way - with, I think, every attractive lady he saw... He was amorous. He would like to have been a lover... when he talked of life among the blind there was a half-formed idea in his mind that he might be able to win the affection of a woman if only she were without eyes to see.'

The paying customers the hospital porter lures to the basement quarters of the 'Elephant Man' consist of couples, well-dressed 'gentlemen' seeking to entertain their 'gentlewomen' escorts. A solitary elderly man enjoins the glad and intoxicated throng - Bytes.

The entourage of genteel spectators break into Merrick's room. He is passive and distressed. The men force their women to look, while they caress and slaver over them in sexual excitation. It is a scene of grotesque sexual perversity where the seemingly normal and well-dressed gentle folk display themselves as monstrous and 'deformed' while Merrick struggles to retain his composure and his dignity. Orchestrated music swells. One man forces his lady 'escort' to kiss Merrick upon his deformed lips. The hospital porter aided by the other men pin Merrick against the wall.

It is an obscene contrast compared to the tenderness and romance of the love scene played between Merrick and Mrs Kendal. If *The Elephant Man* is a horror film here is one scene which is 'horrific' in the word's intended meaning. The kiss, from an expression of esteem and exaltation becomes degrading, subjugating - an act of humiliation and the defeat of John Merrick. It precedes similar scenes in Lynch's forthcoming films; tenderness becomes prurience, the pure, impure - closeness becomes estrangement, a bonding becomes isolation, the sublime turns obscene. Merrick, briefly liberated into hitherto unknown realms of romance and tenderness, is compelled once more to withdraw into the lonely enclaves of the monstrous.

His room is destroyed. The porter takes out a mirror and encourages everyone to watch - he forces the mirror before Merrick's face to gloat over his reaction. Carousel music becomes more frantic. Bytes appears. 'My treasure,' he says.

The following morning Treves enters the room - it is in disarray and Merrick is gone. He encounters the porter in the cellar and attacks him in a rage. No-one knows where Merrick is. The porter is dismissed.

The restrained and conventional mode of the film avoids sensationalism, is at times understated, at times contriving narrative devices and climaxes to comply to the traditional three act drama of the commercial cinema. It's probably the most conventional screenplay with which Lynch has been involved - the chronology of Merrick's life has been re-arranged for the sake of the story.

In the terminology of the Hollywood screenplay, Merrick's disappearance constitutes the second act climax - 'what will become of Merrick now?' The conflict between Merrick (protagonist) and the fictitious Bytes (antagonist), with Treves in the role of catalyst, together with the film's dramatic structure, are contrivances that obscure more suggestive themes.

Merrick's continental tour is factual - his abduction fiction; his arrival and collapse at Victoria station factual; his dramatic escape aided by fellow freaks, fiction.

The film proceeds with Merrick's return to the freak show; to avoid local prosecution Bytes undertakes a tour to Belgium. Merrick collapses. He is locked in a cage and monkeys attack from the other side of the cage bars. In scenes reminiscent of the camaraderie in Tod Browning's film, *Freaks* (1932), Merrick is released by other members of side-show exhibits. A procession of freaks proceeds through the forest at night. They smuggle Merrick on board a boat from Calais to Dover. He returns to England. A steam boat. A steam train. The vapours and sounds of industry provide an ambience, a protective blanket - substance and noise as impermanent as life itself.

At Liverpool Street station, Merrick dressed in cape and hood, is harassed by juveniles, and unmasked. He runs ungainly through the station pursued by a hostile crowd, and finally is cornered like a frightened animal. 'I am not an elephant,' he cries. 'I am not an animal. I am a human being.' He collapses. The police come to dispel the unruly crowd. In the pocket of the unconscious Merrick is a visiting card bearing the name Frederick Treves, London Hospital.

In the sanctity of his hospital quarters, Merrick's rehabilitation is swift, but the disease causing his deformities is accelerating rapidly. Merrick is now 27 and dying. 'I am happy every hour of the day', he tells Treves. 'I have gained my Self.'

But his final triumph is a visit to the Drury Lane Theatre, as arranged by Mrs Kendal. It is a pantomime of Puss in Boots (this is no fiction - it was indeed Puss in Boots viewed by Joseph Merrick in the Drury Lane Theatre in 1887). Merrick becomes an observer of a spectacle rather than a spectacle himself, and he is enthralled. The fragments of the pantomime - the cat, the journey along a magic road, a little girl, a monster who turns into a lion, the carousel - could easily be interpreted as fragments from The Wizard of Oz, which features later in both Blue Velvet and Wild at Heart. Indeed the final scene we observe with Merrick, of the Princess Sweetheart descending to the stage, magic wand in hand, and concluding the performance with 'happily ever after' bears more than a slight resemblance to the final scene of Wild at Heart, when the Good Witch Glinda descends to transform a morally defeated Sailor Ripley. Princess Sweetheart's effect on Merrick is much the same. He is transformed, enchanted, uplifted.

At the end of the performance, as the players take their curtain calls, Mrs Kendal addresses the public and dedicates the evening's presentation to 'a very special guest', John Merrick. Merrick stands and the public applauds. A spotlight casts its light upon his deformed but well-dressed figure, and he bows.

It is an ambiguous moment - though for all of Treves' misgivings there is no suggestion, neither in the film nor in the records of Merrick's life, that he spurned the public gaze - on the contrary, he volunteered himself for exhibition in carnivals, and now, before the gaze of the theatre public, basks in the limelight as they applaud his presence. It is a moment of triumph, yet distinctly uncomfortable - Lynch makes us accomplices, lauding and validating the voyeur within us. Merrick is a spectacle once more - recalling Treve's earlier pangs of conscience; 'I've made Mr Merrick a curiosity all over again... why did I do it?'

After the evening, in Merrick's quarters, Merrick is overwhelmed with joy. He completes the last touches to his model of the cathedral. 'It's finished', he says. He gazes at the picture on the wall of a sleeping child and re-arranges his pillows.

Ordinarily, due to his deformed shape, he must lie half prone during the hours of sleep. Tonight he will sleep like a normal person.

Treves writes: 'He often said to me that he wished he could lie down to sleep "like other people." I think on this last night he must, with some determination, have made the experiment. The pillow was soft, and the head, when placed on it, must have fallen backwards and caused a dislocation of the neck. Thus it came about that his death was due to the desire that had dominated his life - the pathetic but hopeless desire to be "like other people."'

In the swirling stars outside his window, his mother's young face appears, diffused with clouds and vapour, and she smiles and says; 'Never, no, never, nothing dies. The stream flows, the wind blows, cloud fleets, the heart beats. Nothing will die.'

From the void and returned to the void - where we come from and where we go; as in Lynch's earlier films, *The Grandmother*, and the deformed infant of *Eraserhead*, Lynch traces the cycle from birth to death and the unanswerable mysteries of before and after.

### *An elemental being*

*The Elephant Man* is a self-consciously, old fashioned styled narrative, enhanced by Freddie Francis's black and white cinematography, (himself a director of low-budget Hammer horror films in the 1960's) told simply and directly with a minimum of cinematic effects. The opening, closing and central 'dream' montage sequences contribute to the illusion of form coming from the ether and returning to it. It emphasises a predominant existential theme in Lynch's films - the frailty of human existence - the transient brevity of human life made all the more poignant by the exemplary fate of the 'inhumanly' born Joseph Merrick.

'I found that I had to give my soul to the part,' commented John Hurt, who was nominated for the Best Actor Academy Award. 'It is so far beyond any ordinary human experience.'

Paradoxically, by evaluating a life such as Merrick's, the 'rational being', whether doctor, scientist or magician is himself energised; the 'primitive' unleashes a creative drive, providing new found purpose. 'Am I a good man or a bad man?' asks Treves of himself. Or as Sandy assesses Jeffrey in *Blue Velvet*; 'I'm not sure if you're detective or a pervert.' Treves interest in Merrick is an investigation on behalf of medical science, but are his motives perverse?

Lynch portrays the scientist as 'magician' and his relationship to his protege. On one level exists the relationship between voyeur and the object of his gaze (a theme with which Lynch, like many film directors, finds a source of inspiration), on another level, the role of 'scientist' and 'object of study'. There exists a parallel between the film director/artist and his interdependence upon the viewer, but also the archetypal relationship between the rational mind and the primitive life-force.

Merrick embodies the life-force; he is the misshapen monster that replenishes Treves with his unrelenting yearning. 'Salvage, deformed slave' is the description attributed to Caliban in the *Dramatis Personae* of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Caliban is subservient to Prospero in the same way Merrick is dependent upon Treves. But just as Prospero's stature grows fuelling Caliban's strength, so does Treves' stature develop with Merrick's progress. The two are dependent upon on each other.

Treves, as personified by Lynch, is a Victorian romantic, seeing in Merrick 'the Noble Savage', a 'primitive creature.' (Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, published in 1854, which popularised the 'noble savage' concept, became a source of inspiration for the Romantic movement in the late 19th century). For Lynch the tale of *The Elephant Man* is a social parable describing the affinity between the Enlightened and the Noble Savage. Merrick's creativity and desires feed Treves' reasoning mind - Treves 'lives' through Merrick's delight in the theatre, in romance, the acquisition of a dressing set, building a model cathedral, learning to articulate speech.

It is the relationship of Prospero and Caliban, and recent films treating this theme by so-called 'thinking' directors, invite comparison with *The Elephant Man* in order to understand why Lynch's film is thematically similar yet essentially different. Francois Truffaut's *The Wild Child* (*L'enfant sauvage*, 1969) documents, in the same objective straightforward approach, the case of Cargol, a young boy found in the woods in central France in 1798. He was sent to the Institute for the Deaf and Dumb in Paris. Dr Jean Itard, played by Truffaut himself teaches Cargol, who had been raised by wolves, to walk upright, wear clothes and speak. Like *The Elephant Man*, Truffaut's film was based on an actual account; Cargol was dubbed the wild boy of Aveyron, and the case received similar attention and notoriety as the case of Joseph Merrick. Truffaut dedicated the film to Jean-Pierre Leaud, his protege whose film career began with Truffaut's debut feature, *The Four Hundred Blows* (*Les Quatre Cent Coups*, 1959), and saving him, by all accounts, from a life of juvenile delinquency.

Truffaut, like Anthony Hopkins, plays the doctor without sentiment -a man of science unravelling a mystery - ultimately the mystery of what makes us human - yet prodded by a conscience as to whether his subject is as much a 'victim' - an

object of the voyeuristic gaze - in his jurisdiction, as elsewhere - is his fascination as prurient and ill-motivated as the public gaze craving the sensational, the grotesque, the carnivalesque?

It is a dilemma encapsulated in the original title of Werner Herzog's film - *Jeder Fur Sich Und Gott Gegen Alle*; *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974). *Every Man for himself and God Against All*. Also based on an actual case, of a young man who appeared in the Nuremburg town square in the early 19th century. Kaspar Hauser's 'condition' also drives him to the carnival sideshows - finally he is taken under the kindly wing of Herr Daumer - and Kaspar's education begins. It traces the relationship between the mentor and protege - making human the 'freak'. Herr Daumer teaches Kaspar speech and logic, delighting in the progress he makes with his unlikely pupil. Like Merrick, Kaspar came under public scrutiny, 'a fascinating case' of his day. He was killed by an unknown assailant when in his late 20's.

'He was an elemental being, so primitive that he might have spent the twenty three years of his life immured in a cave.' The words are an accurate description of Kaspar Hauser's life, yet they are written by Frederick Treves describing his impressions of Joseph Merrick. They echo Lynch's view of himself - that 'there was nothing much going on upstairs until the age of 19.'

Truffaut dedicated *The Wild Child* to a wayward juvenile social rebel, saved from himself by Truffaut's directorial hand, and in the process liberating Leaud's acting talent. *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* is Werner Herzog's tribute to the remarkable personality of Bruno S, who plays the title role. He spent 22 years in prisons and institutions, before being discovered by Herzog, playing an accordion in a Berlin square.

These films concern the film director's preoccupation with the outsider, the social misfit, and the developing relationship between mentor and protege. There are dramatisations entrenched in the tradition of social realism.

*Padre Padrone* (Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, 1977) is also a true-life account based on the life of Gavino Ledda, who is forced into the isolated life of a goat herd by a domineering father. He is deprived of language and companionship until his late teens. Ledda himself introduces the film - in his 20's he taught himself to read and write, and fascinated with language, continued his studies, finally becoming a professor in linguistics.

Arthur Penn's 1962 film, *The Miracle Worker*, tells the true-life story about blind, deaf Helen Keller and how she is taught speech and literacy by her teacher, Anne Sullivan. (Anne Sullivan is played by Anne Bancroft, who plays the role of Mrs Kendal). *Awakenings* (Penny Marshall, 1990) also based on actual events, traces the

career of a research doctor (Robin Williams) who works at a chronic care ward. A comatose patient (Robert De Niro) responds to his treatment and awakens from a 30 year coma, now compelled, under the good doctor's guidance to contend with life as an adult. The story is based on the book and experiences of Dr Oliver Sacks in the late 1960's.

Awakenings and *The Miracle Worker*, and the many similar well-intentioned films of the commercial cinema, are straightforward Hollywood bio-pics, complying rigidly to the conventions demanded by the genre - sentimental and sufficiently socially conscious to attract appreciative comment at Academy Award functions. The films of Taviani, Truffaut and Herzog relate to actual people, but also to actual relationships between the director and the subject - Leaud is Truffaut's 'wild child', Bruno S is Herzog's Kaspar Hauser, and Gavino Ledda himself is the driving force that inspired the Taviani brothers to make *Padre Padrone*. In each case the protagonist is driven by a spiritual hunger - striving to realise 'logos' - the word.

*The Elephant Man*, like these other stories, based on an actual case, nonetheless remains Lynch's 'fiction'. Behind the mask of the Elephant Man is a gifted performer - John Hurt - and behind him is the gothic vision of David Lynch.

For Herzog, Truffaut, Arthur Penn, Penny Marshall and the Taviani brothers, the story's emphasis is on social adjustment - social outcasts struggling against deprivation, in order to attain knowledge. They are narratives that bear the implications of social critique - castigating the inadequacy of social systems incapable of accepting the 'Kaspar Hausers' of the world - who are redeemed only by the efforts of another social outcast - the devoted 'teacher'.

The narrative ingredients are the same but *The Elephant Man* is a different kind of story. David Lynch is the romantic seeking the sublime in the imperfect - realising the grandeur and nobility of the human spirit concealed in the superficial distortion of corrupted flesh. For beneath the surface of Lynch's hitherto most conventional film narrative lies a netherworld of decay and decomposition, of inhumanity and brutality. Merrick, estranged in the exclusively male domains of carnival entrepreneurs and medical science, is seeking something else other than knowledge.

John Merrick is also driven by a spiritual hunger. Literacy, however, he had. His literacy remained hidden beneath his deformity. Merrick was driven, not by logos - the word; but by eros - the touch.

His longing is embodied by the portrait of his mother - the idealised image of the feminine. The ideal is finally realised in the appearance of Mrs Kendal, who unlocks his own feminine side with the romance of drama, a few words of love and a kiss upon the cheek.



## Dune (1984)

*"I was happy. It was so awful." Alejandro Jodorowski.*

'A beginning is a very delicate time. Know then that it is the year 10,191. The known universe is ruled by the Padishar Emperor Shaddam IV - my father. In this time the most precious substance in the universe is the spice, Melange. The spice extends life, the spice expands consciousness, the spice is vital to space travel...' Princess Irulan begins narrating the story of the conflict between the Emperor, in league with House Harkonnen, and House Atreides. Young Paul Atreides is to be killed, and House Atreides defeated. That they are to take over the production of the spice on Planet Arrakis - Dune - is a ploy designed to bring about their demise.

On Dune the deformed and malevolent Baron Harkonnen leads the assault on Atreides - Paul's father, the Duke is killed, but Paul and his mother, Lady Jessica, escape into uncharted desert. Here the giant sandworms devour all living things. But Paul and his mother come under the protection of desert dwellers, the Fremen, and Paul's arrival fulfills an ancient prophecy.

Both Paul and Jessica possess occult powers and teach the Fremen warriors the means by which to defeat the Harkonnen. In the final battle, Baron Harkonnen is destroyed and the Emperor defeated. Paul has become all powerful, and true to his promise to change the face of Arrakis, summons the rain, which begins to fall on the planet's surface where no drop of rain has ever before fallen.

John Merrick, the Elephant Man, is a lonely hero isolated in a predominantly masculine world administered by carnival entrepreneurs and medical scientists. Bytes is a brutal tyrant; Treves, a scientist preoccupied with the pursuit of knowledge. What Merrick seeks is an alternative feminine world, imbued with compassion and feeling, which is denied him. Paul Atreides, the young hero of Dune, is also the solitary and socially estranged hero - with a destiny as the only male to be granted entry into an otherwise exclusively feminine realm. In Lynch's next film, Blue Velvet, Jeffrey is the male intruder stealing his way into the forbidden domain of 'Aphrodite's' boudoir.

Dune is concerned with male politics, male militarism and male power plays. Beneath the surface of these male orchestrated inter galactic conflicts is a 'feminine' network, called the Bene Gesserit, orchestrating political manouvres of

their own, with subterfuge and cunning, plotting to produce a female messianic leader. However, it is Paul through an accident of birth, who is destined to be the Kwisatz Haderach - a male child combining psychological attributes of masculine and feminine.

At the beginning of the story, Paul undergoes a two-fold initiation; trial by combat to satisfy his male peers, and trial by psychic suggestion to satisfy the Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam, Proctor Superior of the Bene Gesserit. The Duke, and the patriarchal system he represents, must ascertain the credibility of the youth as a political and military leader. The Reverend Mother must determine whether or not Paul is to become the Kwisatz Haderach. At the end of the story he once more undergoes two 'trials' - one masculine, one feminine; proving his military strength to the Emperor, and demonstrating the powers which prove that he is the Kwisatz Haderach.

On one level the conflict in *Dune* is between good and evil; House of Atreides and House of Harkonnen; on another level it concerns the psychological conflict between masculine and feminine. David Lynch's interpretation of one of the most successful science fiction novels of all time, is at once faithful to the novel, yet incorporates themes of his earlier films. Ultimately the compromises necessary to combine Lynch's vision and Frank Herbert's narrative to the demands of the movie business proved unrealisable. What remains is a quasi-David Lynch film within a \$45 million De Laurentiis production - some outstanding sequences within a disjointed whole.

'I sold out from the start,' says David Lynch six years later, 'by not having final cut, and by attempting to provide the producers with what they wanted more than what I wanted.'

Parts of Frank Herbert's novel appeared in science fiction magazines during the 1960's, and it was published in its entirety in 1965. Ten years later, the same year the novel was voted 'the greatest science fiction novel published', the Latin American film director, Alejandro Jodorowsky (*El Topo* - 1971), *Santa Sangre* - 1989), etc) began the preparatory work to make 'the greatest film ever made in the history of Hollywood.' He assembled the talents of the French illustrator, Morbius (Jean Giraud), the special effects expert, Dan O'Bannon, and H R Giger (best known for the Alien monster design), and they began a three year collaboration on the project. Morbius sketched a storyboard containing three thousand drawings; 'he was the cameraman and I was the director', says Jodorowski. Escalating costs proved too much even for the Hollywood financiers and the project was abandoned in 1978.

The rights having expired, Dino de Laurentiis bought the property and in 1979 assigned Ridley Scott as director, who in turn assigned Rudolph Wurlitzer to write

the screenplay adaptation. He opted for a personal interpretation - Alia was the result of an incestuous relationship between Paul and Jessica. Once again, an escalating budget led to Scott's departure from the project, and in 1981 de Laurentiis, following the success of *The Elephant Man*, assigned David Lynch, 'the one man who could maybe make the movie better than me', according to Alejandro Jodorowski.

When Lynch was engaged, the \$45 m budget was one the cinema's largest ever. For Lynch it involved 3 1/2 years work - 18 months on the script, first in collaboration with his co-scriptwriters from *The Elephant Man*, Christopher de Vore and Eric Berggen, though the final screen credit is Lynch alone; then a full year's shooting, and twelve months post production work. In 1983 filming began in Mexico - six months principle shooting, studio and location, then six months special photography and miniatures.

Lynch claimed later that his main problem was too much material to edit into a two hour film; 'I would like to make it more like a long poem. Just let it be abstract in some places, with no dialogue, and let it be more of a mood.' Some years later a special 190 minute version of the film was edited for US television, despite protests from Lynch, containing new narration and previously unused footage. Lynch disavowed the project and direction is attributed to pseudonym Allen Smithee.

The film that was finally released in 1984 was a failure of magnificent proportions, castigated by critics, audiences and even Lynch himself, who 'died a thousand deaths.'

Yet what remains is David Lynch's pictures to Frank Herbert's words; the story's themes are as central to the novel as they are to the film, and Lynch's interpretation, for all its shortcomings, embellishes, on occasion, transcends the source material. *Dune* is the ultimate 'George and the Dragon' film.

### *Irulan*

*Dune* begins where *The Elephant Man* ended. A young woman's kind and compassionate face is superimposed over the swirling stars of the cosmos. The final words of *The Elephant Man*, 'nothing ever dies' spoken by Merrick's mother, becomes 'a beginning is a very delicate time.' Princess Irulan, the daughter of the emperor, is ushered away at the arrival of the Third Stage Guild Navigator, then does not return to the narrative until the very end. Her presence pervades throughout in the same nebulous manner of the idealised image of Merrick's mother in *The Elephant Man*.

Princess Irulan's voice-over provides the viewer with some necessary, though complicated exposition, ('You know you're in trouble when the film's opening narration setting up the story is completely incomprehensible,' wrote critic Leonard Maltin) in which, amongst other things, the importance of the spice 'melange' is emphasised. It is only found on the desert planet, Arrakis, known as Dune, and 'he who rules the spice rules the universe.'

It is an opening which suggests a 'literary' style to the narrative - Lynch sets out to recreate the chronicle feel of Frank Herbert's epic novel. Lynch uses the voice-over device throughout the film adhering to Herbert's 'externalising' process. The voice-over is often criticised as an intrusive non-cinematic device - Deckard's voice-over in *Blade Runner* (1982) was a post-production afterthought, considered necessary to clarify complications within the plot. In the case of *Blade Runner*, the effect, even if by de-fault, is to emphasise the film noir style of the story - the solitary protagonist wrestling with his own despair and isolation, telling his tale with dispassionate gloom to an anonymous 'listener' (Deckard in Philip K Dick's novel was a married man pursuing the luxury of a non-mechanical sheep - Deckard in the film was divorced, an emotionally 'cold fish', about to be ensnared by a humanoid femme fatale).

In *Dune*, the voice-over is not the perspective of a single person - it may be the story of Paul Atreides, but just as Herbert reveals the inner thoughts of many characters, Lynch uses this essentially literary device for the same reason, to externalise the inner thoughts of principle 'dramatis personae' - sometimes several within the same scene. Even the Baron Harkonnen reveals his bloody intent with the aid of inner monologues in David Lynch's *Dune*.

The *Elephant Man* begins with the face of John Merrick's mother. She is John Merrick's idealised image of the feminine; her photograph returns our gaze as she looks directly at us. The image of Princess Irulan, likewise returns our gaze, but her initial frozen stillness is a deception - she is not a photographic portrait but a character. She is the woman Paul Atreides will later marry - not for the sake of love, but for the sake of restoring and maintaining political balance and bringing an end to intergalactic conflict. Irulan is the quintessential projection of the feminine; passive, beautified and challenging the masculine gaze with her look to the camera. As the head-on gaze of John Merrick's mother pervades *The Elephant Man*, so is the image of Irulan a constant element in contrast to the turmoil of the characters and situations pitted against each other on *Dune*.

Frank Herbert describes her as, 'a tall blonde woman, green eyed, a face of patrician beauty, classic in its hauteur, untouched by tears, completely undefeated. Without being told it, Paul knew her - Princess Royal, Bene Gesserit - trained, a face that time vision had shown him in many aspects: Irulan.'

*The Third Stage Guild Navigator*

Lynch's use of computers to clarify complicated exposition is a further diversion from Frank Herbert's concept. 'A Secret Report Within the Guild', and a computer screen, accompanied by a computer voice. Computers, absent from the novel, are an anachronism which features throughout Lynch's film. The computer describes the four worlds which make up the story: Arrakis (Dune) - the desert planet on which the spice, Melange, is mined. It is a world inhabited by the desert people, the Fremen, and administered by the Atreides's sworn enemy, House Harkonnen.

Kaitain is the home planet of the Emperor, Shaddam IV, Irulan's father. Caladan - home of House Atreides, and Giedi Prime - home of the sinister, House Harkonnen, under the rule of the tyrant Baron Vladimir Harkonnen.

The sequence describes the complex political situation at the outset of the story. However, in doing so, Lynch abandons the novel's concept of worlds without machines. So-called 'thinking machines', principally computers, had been abolished as a result of the 'Butlerian Jihad', also known as the Great Revolt, many centuries before. This led to the establishment of the Bene Gesserit - a training school for female students to develop psychic powers, and the Mentat - humans trained as 'human computers.'

Similarly, the weirding modules are a fabrication of the film - the 'weirding way' described by Frank Herbert consists of the power of the voice, an occult force mastered and taught by the (feminine) Bene Gesserit. In the film, when Paul leads the Fremen, he constructs modules - machines - from plans salvaged after the Harkonnen's attack on Dune.

Whereas Frank Herbert is deliberately vague about the appearance of Guildsmen (No-one sees a Guildsman, the Duke tells Paul. "Do you think they hide because they've mutated and don't look... human anymore?" 'Who knows?' The Duke shrugged. 'It's a mystery we're not likely to solve.'"), David Lynch, with Carlos Rambaldi's design, portrays the Third Stage Guild Navigator as the definitive form of asexuality.

Black dressed First Stage Guild Navigators direct a massive black steel vessel to the court of the Emperor. The First Stage mutants already show distinct signs of the Lynchian 'open body', with broken skin, intruding tubes, protruding mechanical devices and hairless skulls. The removal of the black plates reveal a roving eye imbedded in an aquatic slug far removed from Rambaldi's E.T. creation.

This slug is one more Lynch mishapen biological throwback, like Henry's genderless mutant infant in *Eraserhead*, like the umbilical cord forms that plague

Henry's dreams. Whereas gender is clearly defined on Kaitan by dress and adornments, the Navigator is repulsively naked, floating around a glass tank like an internal organ in an alcohol filled specimen jar. It is sexless, like Henry Spencer's 'monsters', and like the Arrakis sandworm on Dune. And just as Henry's genderless monstrosity determined his fate, so does the 'genderless monstrosity' in the form of the Navigator, determine the fate of Paul, the protagonist of Dune.

Through the voice of a First Stage interpreter, the Navigator, from his glass-paned water tank, tells the Emperor that, 'the spice must flow.' The Emperor relates his plot to incite conflict between House Atreides and House Harkonnen. He will allow Atreides to assume power over Arrakis, so they then may be destroyed by Harkonnen. The Guild Navigator sees a flaw - the untimely birth of a male to a sister of the Bene Gesserit. And his father is the Duke Atreides. The boy may be the foretold messiah, the Kwisatz Haderach. For the Space Guild, Paul might unbalance the the established order of things based on the ongoing conflict between patriarchy and matriarchy. 'Paul Atreides must be killed,' says the Navigator.

### *Reverend Mother*

The initial conflict - that Harkonnen defeat Atreides - is conspired by the Emperor in league with the Space Guild. The Guild wants Paul killed because, as Fremen leader, he could threaten spice production. The intrigue initiated by the emperor is the attempt of patriarchal order to eliminate a matriarchal power which threatens it. Although the Bene Gesserit plot demanded a noble born woman they can still use Paul because of his Bene Gesserit (feminine) powers.

The matriarchal order is unconcerned with political boundaries, or race, or House. Bene Gesserit Reverend Mothers are amongst the Fremen, House Atreides, and Planet Kaitain, home of the Emperor.

The initiation sequences that begin the story, test the two sides of Paul's character. He proves control over his body (a battle with his instructor, Gurney, who fights to the maximum; and with a machine, as a test of reflexes). Then he must prove control over mind, and withstand the test of Bene Gesserit Reverend Mother. He passes this test too. Paul is in control of both mind and body - he is the Lynchian 'perfect body' protagonist par excellence; whole as opposed to broken, 'closed' as opposed to 'open'. He is the antithesis of Lynch's version of Baron Harkonnen, who has no control of his body, is ravaged by disease, is frequently unclothed, and 'open' in that his skin is ruptured, revealing matter and blood beneath the fissures. An anti-gravity machine is necessary to transport the Baron as he is too overweight to transport himself; his desires control his mind, hence the ravishing and

cannablisng of young boys, and the hysterical madness which accompany his deeds.

Paul may be in control of body and mind, his thoughts and deeds, but he has no control over his fate - the Reverend Mother has decided his destiny; she is his 'moira'. Paul is the means to an end; the matriarchal conquest over patriarchal dominance.

The 'psychomachia', the struggle between souls, is not the conflict of opposites, but the conflict of polarities. The polarity of male and female define each other, as do patriarch and matriarch. The Emperor's conflict with the Bene Gesserit Reverend Mother represents a struggle for supremacy between two sides - their 'opposite' is all-powerful, yet genderless.

### *Caladan*

A towering dark castle on a cliff side above a raging sea and silhouetted against a stormy night sky, introduces the home planet of Paul Atreides, his father, the Duke Leto, and his mother, Jessica. Jessica, in a hooded black cape, walks briskly across a windswept cobble-stoned courtyard to the giant wooden portals. The Duke sits at the mahogany desk of his book-lined study, rain beating against the lead-rimmed glass panes, and a well-groomed bull terrier waiting at his boots. 'I'll miss the sea,' says Paul's father, when they finally leave for Arrakis.

The images combine the visual splendor of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Reisz, 1981) and the ambiance of a turn of century European royal family. Lynch's choice of a Victorian scenography and production design is more than mere kitsch delight in monstrous metallic machines of the past, brass knobbed devices, contraptions lifted from the illustrations of Jules Verne stories, stylish military clothing, long dresses and plunging necklines. The costumes and production design of the film's early sequences (on the planet Kaitain, home of the Emperor, and the planet Caladan, home of House Atreides), emphasise sexual contrasts and gender defined social status. Men dress militarily, women dress domestically, and with sexual allure. Men are the social instruments of power and violence, women are the bearers of sexuality. There are clear and rigid lines of demarkation between the biological roles of male - female; between the social roles of men and women. Less apparent are the psychological attributes of masculine and feminine - Paul Atreides is a symbiosis of the two opposites; his 'wholeness' is the means by which harmony can be restored.

In analysing the novel, Derek Longhurst maintains that: 'Herbert's narrative can be read as an exploration of the ways in which masculine identity often conceals

conflict, uncertainty and ambivalence. On the one hand, the pull of aggression, competitiveness and desire for dominance and on the other the need and desire for tenderness, intimacy and sharing. This uneasy dichotomy of public identity and private self is registered in Herbert's fiction together with an examination of the relationship between militarism and masculinity.'

Lynch accentuates the story's 'uneasy dichotomy' by emphasising Paul's 'masculine/feminine' duality. As the Duke's son he undergoes a male (physical) combat test with his trainer, Gurney. Dagger to dagger, each penetrating the other's shield, it is a display of masculine bravado, preparing Paul for his manly role in forthcoming trials of strength. As the offspring of a 'Bene Jesserit' he undergoes a female (mental) test, administered by the Reverend Mother. Under the threat of death he places his hand in a box and must withstand the pain of flames burning his hand to cinders. It is a psychic technique to illustrate the telepathic powers of the Bene Gesserit - and a sequence verifying young Paul's resolve - he doesn't move his hand.

Military power and politics in Dune are exclusively male patriarchal issues between the Emperor, the Duke and the Baron. There are no empresses, duchesses or baronesses in Dune. The archetypal feminine is represented by the Reverend Mother (Magna Mater - 'The Great Mother') who directs Paul's initiation. She is a forboding high priestess with a resolve bordering on the sadistic. Jessica is the Duke's concubine; Chani is to become Paul's concubine. In David Lynch's Dune, Alia, Paul's young sister, is as merciless as she is powerful - it is she who defeats Harkonnen, sending him reeling into the gaping orifice of an open mouthed sandworm.

### *Giedi Prime*

In contrast to the gothic lyricism of Caladan, the Baron's home planet is a world of steel girders, mammoth structures and imposing edifices. All surfaces are manufactured, and unlike Caladan, here exists no evidence of 'nature'. Sea, sky and earth are obliterated by towering man made forms, which are overwhelming and as unsightly as the most vast of industrial complexes. It is the landscape of Eraserhead gone mad with power.

David Lynch's interpretation of the Baron Vladimir Harkonnen continues his explorative characterisations of the perverse and psychopathic. Bytes, John Merrick's persecutor, is a parodic representation of the grotesque; the Baron's psychopathy borders on the absurd - an obese figure covered in boils and abscesses, who plots to destroy Atreides, rule Arrakis, the galaxy, the universe. 'He who controls the spice controls the universe,' he exclaims to his nephew protégé, Feyd. A servant brings him a young boy, who glares at him open-eyed in terror and

repulsion - the Baron rips open the boys chest and drinks his blood. 'This is what I'll do to the Duke and his family', he says, for not only his violence will eliminate the Atreides, but the Baron's flagrant homosexuality will ensure the end of a progenitive line of rule.

There is no ambiguity in the portrayal of Harkonnen and Atreides. The Baron is evil, sadistic, gluttonous, avaricious - he is without redeeming features. Most significantly, the disorder he represents, is bereft of a social structure, specifically, the family. Frank Herbert goes to lengths to explain the interwoven family relationships between Emperor, Harkonnen and Atreides; Jessica is Baron Harkonnen's daughter, Alia - who kills him - is his granddaughter; Leto Atreides is related to the Emperor; '... we are Harkonnens,' declares Paul after the Baron defeats the Duke. In the film, Harkonnen and Atreides are two opposing sides - good against evil, order against chaos.

The Baron's gluttony extends to his sexuality, which in the film is exclusively homosexual and sadistic. When Jessica is bound, trussed and gagged before him the Baron's dribbles spit onto her cheek, articulating jovially, that this he must do. It is a Lynchian excess as repellent as the Baron's festering boils. There are no women or children in the traditional family structure within the Baron's entourage.

The Duke, by contrast, is the traditional family patriarch - ruling his domain and his domicile with benevolence, yet naive to the political subterfuge which threatens his position. Has Lynch purposely depicted the Duke in the image of Tsar Nicholas II? And a Caladan decor with more than a casual reference to the court of Imperial Russia? The fate of the Duke, betrayed and shot by Harkonnen guards in the year 10,191, as a precedent to that of Tsar Nicholas II, shot by the Red Guards in 1918. The departure of the Duke and his family as they leave Caladan for Arrakis in a space convoy, removes us abruptly from the political chicanery of a quasi turn of the century Europe, and back into space opera.

The contrast between Atreides and Harkonnen are polarities, not opposites; for Atreides the family unit represents a 'wholesome' social order, for Harkonnen its perversion belies madness. The 'psychomachia' pits the benevolent dictator against the mad tyrant. Their opposite is the tribal structure of the Fremen; in which there is no 'lineage' or family exclusivity - the community at large is an all-embracing family.

### *The Fremen*

The political and ecological aspects of the novel, for which it won so much acclaim in the late 1960's (it was published in 1965), Lynch has largely disregarded. Herbert

portrayed the Fremen as 'fremd / fremmende' - (foreign), as foreign as the Beduins are to Europeans. Herbert researched desert cultures in detail to create an authentic and alien sub-culture; the language, customs, rituals, history, and, above all, the appearance of Frank Herbert's Fremen are estranged from other galactic inhabitants.

For Lynch the Fremen are 'free-men'; displaced Californians in both appearance and language. Lynch himself plays the part of a Fremen machine operator to emphasise they are a race like you and me, only displaced and altered by their having to adapt to the planet's harsh and waterless environment.

David Lynch's *Dune* is less concerned with Paul's initiation into the ways of an alien culture, and more concerned with the masculine - feminine dichotomy.

Paul's experiences on *Dune* rekindle past memories and dreams - the geography, the people, and events which befall him, are familiar - he is like a sleepwalker going toward a predetermined destiny. As Paul and Jessica flee from the sandworm amongst the rocks, even the sudden appearance of blackgarbed and staring blue-eyed distinctly hostile Fremen poses no threat Paul. Although ordained for the task he assumes the role of leader. He takes the name 'Muad'Dib', after the second moon that orbits Arrakis.

Meanwhile, a new trial awaits Paul. He must drink the 'water of life' in a Bene Gesserit initiation in the desert. The 'water', deadly to mere mortals, will provide the chosen one with a rush of insight. For Paul it is that 'the worm and the spice are one.' Paul has integrated both masculine and feminine within himself.

### *The Dragon*

Male and female are polarities not opposites, each defines the other. Male - female represent gender, the opposite is androgynous, in which the polarised genders are assimilated. In *Eraserhead* Lynch devised a singular metaphor, combining the spermatozoon with the umbilical cord. With the literary source of Frank Herbert's Shai-hulud, the Arrakis sandworm, David Lynch has devised a similarly terrifying metaphor of androgyny.

On his first flight into the desert, Paul sees a sandworm, and watches this monstrosity, 150 metres long, rise from the sands and devour an entire mining plant. The machinery is operated by David Lynch himself - is he consumed by the incongruity of the monster? This heinous permutation of male and female?

Later, after the Harkonnen overthrow of House Atreides, Paul and Jessica, trussed and bound, are taken out into the middle of the desert to be consumed by sandworms. By using the telepathic commands of the 'voice', and Jessica's sexual allure, they overcome their capturers, crash land the vessel, and flee across the unchartered desert seeking refuge in the rocks.

They are alone in a vast wasteland. Paul is enthralled by the sight; 'Never one drop of rain on Arrakis,' he says. 'The sleeper must awaken.'

A sandworm attacks, and Paul faces the gaping toothed orifice of the monster that rises up from below the planet's surface. The Dune sandworm is a giant serpent which opens up into an engulfing cavity, devouring everything. It is a paradoxical combination of the phallic, with what mythologist Joseph Campbell refers to as 'the toothed vagina' - a recurring motif in primitive mythologies; the vagina that castrates.

In Return of the Jedi (Marquand, 1983) Han Solo and Luke Skywalker also face the 'toothed vagina' the ultimate threat, or what Freud refers to as 'horror feminae.' Solo and Luke are 'taken to the Dune Sea' to be 'cast into the Pit of Carkoon, the nesting place of the all-powerful Sarlacc...', a tooth-rimmed palpitating orifice in the middle of the desert. In saving themselves they re-establish their male bond.

Paul, who has been attempting to establish a connection between the sandworms and the spice, experiences a revelation: 'The spice and the worms are one,' he tells himself, the significance of which is not made apparent until later - when 'the sleeper does awake.'

The image of the sandworm is ambiguous - integrating both masculine and feminine; just as Paul is 'ambiguous' - born to assimilate the psychological functions of both masculine and feminine. Later Paul must 'conquer' the sandworm in order to prove himself a 'Fremen' leader. It is a portrayal of an age old tale of the hero defeating the dragon - which in many versions, St George included, is the hero's quest for rescuing the maiden. Psychologically it can be interpreted as the hero releasing the feminine. Paul must fulfill the prophecy in order to prove his leadership by 'riding the sandworm'. It is an initiation of manhood, primarily to affirm his masculinity before the Fremen men.

The story begins with 'initiations' - trials by which Paul must prove his worth - and ends in trials by which he must demonstrate his worth. In his trial in the desert Paul weeps blood. The women who witness the trial bleed from the nose and mouth. The sandworms are summoned, but don't attack. The destructive side of male energy has been harnessed, and 'the sleeper has awakened.' The union of masculine and feminine energies unleashes a power to subdue and control the monsters

beneath the planet's surface (unconscious), and integrate this powerful and lethal energy into a vital 'conscious' force.

Unfortunately, by this stage, the film's preoccupation with its symbols and images has left the story stranded somewhere in the Arrakis desert. For the dozing cinema goer, Paul's cry of 'the sleeper has awakened', is a cue to wake up and view the pyrotechnics of the culminating battle scene.

### *Restoring the family*

Dune, full of promise and potential, now proceeds along a narrative course as limp and flaccid as a dead sandworm. Irulan's voice-over, rather than emulating a literary device, is a means to hasten along an unnecessarily protracted plot: two years later - the spice production is halted, Alia further develops her powers and the Fremen launch attacks upon the Baron's stronghold. Disorder prevails. The Third Stage Guild Navigator tells the Emperor to remedy the situation and restore spice production. The Emperor decides to destroy all life on Arrakis. Paul summons a meeting of the Fremen and they prepare for battle with the forces of the Emperor. The Emperor comes to Arrakis and Paul summons the sandworms. The Emperor chastises the Baron for his ineptitude and inability to quell the Fremen uprising. The Emperor takes control.

The final part of Dune is a pyrotechnic excess demanded of the genre - battles, explosions and long suffering extras flung into the mouths of awaiting sandworms, and stuntmen cavorting through shattering windows. Paul leads the Fremen attack. With the aid of the sandworms, the Harkonnen forces are swiftly defeated. The Baron is destroyed by Alia who demobilises him with a lethal Bene Gesserit needle, the Gom Jabbar, and ushers him through the broken Arrakeen walls and into the tooth lined orifice of a sandworm.

Paul takes over and Emperor Shaddam allows Feyd to battle Paul. This seemingly meaningless encounter provides Sting with an opportunity to embarrass himself further with a fixed pixie-like grin and a woodland prance choreography. The forces of 'good' have already won and the fight merely reaffirms Paul's heroic status. Paul kills Feyd and the Emperor concedes defeat.

'Muad'Dib has become the hand of God.' Paul summons the rain and it rains. Arrakis is transformed. Alia exclaims: 'And how can this be? For he is the Kwisatz Haderach!' This last line is symptomatic of one of the film's unresolved obstacles. Frank Herbert provides a 20 page glossary for readers of the novel - a luxury not available to first time viewers of the film.

Dune ends with the restoration of family order, unbalanced though that family may be. With the Emperor rendered politically impotent, Paul is the solitary male among a court of potent women; his concubine, the Fremen warrior, Chani; his wife, the Bene Gesserit Emperor's daughter, Irulan; his mother, now a Reverend Mother 'high priestess'; a surrogate grandmother; Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam; and most potent of all, Alia, his tiny younger sister.

*Words to pictures: Herbert's novel, Lynch's film*

In condensing a 500 page novel to a two hour screenplay there are omissions and compromises which complicate an already complex plot. Whereas the novel is hailed as 'one of the monuments of modern science fiction', with a worldwide sale of more than ten million copies, the film has received its fair share of disparaging criticism. 'Huge, hollow, imaginative and cold,' according to *Variety*. 'This movie is a real mess,' wrote critic Roger Ebert, 'an incomprehensible, ugly, unstructured, pointless excursion into the murkier realms of one of the most confusing screenplays of all time.'

As a story, Dune has found its form in the novel, and rather than provide a film interpretation based on Frank Herbert's narrative (as Ridley Scott had intended), Lynch provided illustrations to a written text. As a former animator, he had elected to 'breathe life' into words in print, and as illustrations the imagery of Dune is superb. A Readers Digest style of condensed narrative, however, fails to enlighten the uninitiated reader, nor does it satisfy the expectations of the reader familiar with the novel.

Although Lynch has infused the idiosyncracies of his own universe into the literary universe of Frank Herbert, that he so faithfully retained Herbert's plot structure reveals the director's low priority for narrative. Lynch's skill as scenographer (the overall production design for Dune was closely supervised by Lynch) is as apparent in Dune as in *Eraserhead* and *The Elephant Man*. Unlike the worlds of these films, Dune proved to be a world Lynch could not make his own.

In spite of Dune's spectacular failure, Dino de Laurentiis had sufficient faith in David Lynch to provide a \$7 million budget for Lynch's next project - and this time Lynch would have 'final cut.'

It is a film which begins with the happy family of middle American suburbia and charts the wayward son's swift descent into chaos and darkness.



## Blue Velvet (1986)

*"Give me Love and Desire," she said, "the powers by which you yourself subdue mankind and gods alike." Aphrodite in Homer's Iliad.*

Jeffrey Beaumont's father collapses while watering the garden outside his suburban Lumberton home. Returning home from visiting him in hospital Jeffrey finds a human ear in a field. He takes it to Detective Williams at the police station, and with encouragement from Williams' daughter Sandy, investigates the intrigue. It transpires that the human ear may belong to the missing husband of nightclub singer, Dorothy Vallens.

Jeffrey seeks evidence in Dorothy's apartment while she is away. She returns home unexpectedly however, and finds Jeffrey hiding in the closet. At knife-point she forces him to participate in sado-masochistic sex games, then forces him back into the closet when the psychopathic Frank Booth pays a visit. Jeffrey witnesses Frank brutally assault Dorothy.

Jeffrey investigates the intrigue further, uncovering Frank Booth's criminal drug dealings. Once again visiting Dorothy, he is discovered by Frank and taken for a horrendous 'joy-ride' to a bleak industrial area of town, where Dorothy's son is being held captive. Jeffrey is severely beaten and left bruised and bleeding in a timberyard.

Prompted by Sandy he reports his findings to her father, hoping to extricate himself from the murky affair with which he has become involved. At night, however, Dorothy appears naked in the street, outside Sandy's house, proclaiming that Jeffrey 'has put his disease in me.'

Jeffrey takes Dorothy to the police and returns to her apartment discovering the bodies of Dorothy's husband and a police investigator. Frank is on his way to the apartment to kill Jeffrey, and once more Jeffrey hides in the closet. As Frank attacks, Jeffrey shoots him.

The next day Jeffrey awakens in the sanctity of his suburban home - Sandy makes him lunch and an artificial robin sings in a tree. Dorothy sits in a sunlit park embracing her young son.

Aphrodite is the irresistible blue-eyed seductress of Greek mythology, a temptress who could arouse desire in any man she chose. She is associated with the colour turquoise blue. She married a smith named Hephaestus, and, according to the myth, embarked upon a romantic liaison with the warrior god, Ares.

Ares is the brutal, insensitive and belligerent god of war. He is always accompanied by his three cohorts; Deimos, Phobos and Eris (Fear, Fright and Strife), and his unpredictable bouts of violent temper, strikes the fear of the gods into mere mortals. Ares makes a point of being seen, whereas Hades, who shares Ares predilections for power and sex, rules the underworld, hidden well away from prying eyes.

Jeffrey ventures into a dark and secret world, an inquisitive mortal in forbidden territory, the hidden realm of the 'gods'. For his curiosity he must reap the consequences; with experience - pain, with knowledge - the loss of innocence.

'Aphrodite' who lures him to the pantheon of the gods, is the nightclub singer, Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini). Jeffrey (Kyle MacLachlan), between the jalousie of the wardrobe, furtively watches her 'adulterous' relationship with the psychopathic Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper). Frank in turn introduces Jeffrey to his three cohorts; Raymond, Paul and Hunter, (Brad Dourif, Jack Nance and Michael J Hunter), and takes him on a 'joyride' to the underworld, where Ben (Dean Stockwell) rules with benign malice. David Lynch describes Blue Velvet 'as a film that deals with things that are hidden within a small town called Lumberton and things that are hidden within people.'

From the rolling folds of the blue velvet curtain - a textured layer of conscious subterfuge - drapes hiding secrets - over which the opening credits appear, the film ritualises Lynch's predominant theme, 'that everything has a surface which hides much more underneath.' 'Symphony No. 15 in A Major,' Dmitri Shostakovich's final symphony, was to have accompanied the opening credits and recurred at various points in the narrative. Blue Velvet, however, marks the beginning of Lynch's fruitful collaboration with Angelo Badalamenti. The haunting soundtrack first accompanying the title credits, then weaving through the narrative accentuating the noir mood to the film. The story begins in the bright light of suburban day and descends swiftly into netherworlds of crime, dis-ease and Jeffrey's 'dark side.'

### *Exterminating bugs*

Bobby Vinton's song 'Blue Velvet', plays over the opening sequence, when the blue velvet dissolves into blue sky. Against the sky we have a white picket fence, red

roses and yellow tulips. A fire engine passes slowly by. A fireman smiles and waves. At us. Kids cross at a school crossing. Mr Beaumont waters the garden and Mrs Beaumont watches television, drinking coffee. The television shows a close-up of a hand held gun. In the garden, Mr Beaumont has an attack. He sinks to the ground, water spraying from the hose. A dog laps greedily at the water, and a toddler watches enthralled. Mr Beaumont is writhing on the green and newly trimmed suburban grass in the throes of a coronary thrombosis. Bobby Vinton's song fades swiftly into the background, and the grinding torturous sounds of subterranean conflict accompany the camera's excursion beneath the blades of grass.

Bugs! Black beetles plough through the grass with their serrated pincers and waving antennae. A pair of them are locked in mortal combat, tearing each other apart. Later Jeffrey dresses up as a bug exterminator to gain access to Dorothy Vallen's apartment. Bugs form the hidden virus of restlessness and dis-ease that plague the tranquillity of suburbia. 'It's only a bug man,' says Dorothy to the man in the yellow jacket as Jeffrey goes through the motions of spraying her kitchen. A pest in human form, that gets under all the surfaces and makes a nuisance of himself. Bugs remain a menace until the end of the film when the robin sits in the tree with a bug in its beak. 'Ugh!' says Jeffrey's Aunt Barbara, 'I could never eat one of those.'

'The sound of the falling tree' announces the local radio over a 'Welcome to Lumberton' poster, as Jeffrey strolls across a field on the way to the hospital. His father is in traction; arrested by an array of metal arms with tubes piercing his flesh and his mouth forced open by medical apparatus. Returning through the same field, and looking for stones in the grass to throw at a tin drum, Jeffrey finds an ear. A human ear, half rotten around the edges where it had been severed from the side of someone's head. Strands of black hair wrested from the temples. Jeffrey brushes off the insects and places the ear into a brown paper bag. More bugs.

Jeffrey presents the ear to Detective Williams, a friend of his father's, at the local police station. 'Yes,' says Williams. 'That's an ear all right.' Jeffrey accompanies Detective Williams to the coroner's office, who assures Jeffrey that the ear has been cut off with a pair of scissors, and that 'after tests we can identify the person.'

Later that evening, assuring his aunt he won't go near 'Lincoln' (the sinister side of town), yet burning with curiosity, Jeffrey leaves the house to visit the Williams who live nearby. The Williams' home is introduced by a large gold framed photographic portrait of daughter, Sandy, placed before red velvet drapes. Detective Williams warns Jeffrey the dangers of being too curious, in a memorable exchange of 'discourse of obviousness', the kind of Lynchian dialogue that pervades the Blue Velvet screenplay;

*Williams: That's what got me into this business.*  
*Jeffrey: It must be great.*

*Williams: It's horrible too.*

Outside the house, Sandy, a blonde blue-eyed innocent of 17, emerges from the darkness of a suburban night, yet for most of the story Jeffrey's interest in Sandy is purely as the bearer of secret knowledge. She takes Jeffrey to see the apartment block of a woman believed to be implicated in the 'missing ear' case. It's on Lincoln.

Jeffrey and Sandy agree that 'it's a strange world', and Jeffrey tells a story about a kid he knew who had 'the biggest tongue in the neighbourhood.' The next day, at his father's hardware store, he jokes with two of his father's employees, both negroes, one of whom is blind, yet can still count the number of fingers Jeffrey holds up.

Sandy has a boyfriend (Mike), but she meets Jeffrey anyway, who convinces her that his plans provide 'opportunities for learning knowledge.' He is going inside Dorothy's apartment dressed as a bug exterminator, leave a window open, and sneak in at nighttime. Sandy resists but Jeffrey persuades her by condemning the suburban disease of ordinariness which tarnishes them both.

*Jeffrey: No-one will suspect us. Because no-one would think two people like us would be crazy enough to do something like this.*

*Sandy: You have a point there.*

So the bugs are biting Jeffrey, and he's restless. He dresses up as a bug exterminator and climbs the stairs to the seventh floor of the Deep River Apartments. Briefly we are back in the world of Eraserhead - a neon light falters, the lift is out of order, the stairs and corridors are dark and menacing. He knocks on the door of 710 and Dorothy answers - a frightened painted face behind a chained door. Jeffrey sprays the kitchen, and while Dorothy answers a knock at the door to the man in the yellow coat, Jeffrey, 'the Bug Man', steals a spare key and leaves.

*In the realm of the senses*

Jeffrey and Sandy sit at a table of The Slow Club and discuss brands of beer, just as Sailor and Lula in Wild at Heart discuss brands of cigarettes. Sandy's father drinks Budweiser, Lula's father smoked Camels. Sailor prefers Marlborough and Jeffrey favours Heineken. 'Here's to an interesting experience,' says Jeffrey, and the Master of Ceremonies introduces 'The Blue Lady'. She sings Blue Velvet in front of a blue star, bathed in blue light, in front of a red velvet curtain. Jeffrey watches enthralled, Sandy is restless.

Outside the apartment block Sandy attempts to dissuade Jeffrey from going in, without success, then promises to sound the car horn as soon as Dorothy arrives. 'I don't know if you're a detective or a pervert', says Sandy as Jeffrey sets off.

'I'd always had a desire to sneak into to a girl's apartment and watch her through the night...' says Lynch, and has accordingly structured *Blue Velvet* around this central sequence of Jeffrey inside Dorothy's apartment. The sequence lasts 20 minutes, and four different scenarios, each about five minutes long, are played out. Jeffrey watches Dorothy, Dorothy watches Jeffrey, Jeffrey watches Dorothy and Frank, and finally, Jeffrey and Dorothy are united through Frank's brutality.

Until Jeffrey's entry into Dorothy's flat he relates to the senses in a purely abstract manner - a story to Sandy about the kid with biggest tongue; joking with the blind man who works at his father's hardware store, a severed ear in a field, drinking beer and expounding on brand qualities, these are representations of the senses either redundant or deformed (eyes that can't see, an ear that can't hear, a tongue that's too big, etc). Lynch presents each of the five senses misused, corrupted or perverted in some way.

For Jeffrey, Dorothy's boudoir, is the realm of the senses - it is the scene of Jeffrey's initiation of the post-adolescent accepting the adult body. From the outset, once inside the apartment, Jeffrey's senses take over, from the sensual relief of urinating, ('Uh! That Heineken!'), which makes him miss Sandy's warning, to answering Dorothy's pleas to strike her. He is subject to an entire range of sensation experiences, far removed from the realm of abstracts, which, up to this point, has been his refuge.

### *Jeffrey watches Dorothy*

'That's the fantastic thing about the cinema,' says Lynch. 'Everyone can be a voyeur.' Jeffrey plays voyeur from behind the jalousie of the wardrobe door. He watches Dorothy undress down to underwear, then as she answers the telephone.

Dorothy: Frank, Frank let me speak to him... Don? Don. Is little Donny all right... You mean Madeleine? Mummy loves you...

Dorothy walks around the floor, like a cat on all fours. She removes her wig, goes to the bathroom, and returns naked but for a towel. She opens the wardrobe door and Jeffrey hides himself amongst the clothes as she removes a robe of blue velvet, closes the door, and puts it on. He remains undetected.

Voyeurism, and in particular the way in which a man watches a woman, have emerged as central themes in directors from Alfred Hitchcock and Michael Powell, to Krystow Kieslowski - just as the way in which a woman is watched has become central to feminist film theory. For L B Jeffries in *Rear Window* (1954), his fiancée, Lisa Fremont, only became arousing when he could watch her on the other side of the courtyard through the telephoto lens of his camera. For Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960), the excitement was in filming his female victim's fear before killing them with a blade concealed in the camera's tripod. Tomek (about the same age as Jeffrey) in Kieslowski's *A Short Film About Loving* (1989) watches a woman in the window opposite through a telescope, stolen expressly for the purpose. But when they meet, and she manipulates him sexually, and he succumbs to her sexual manipulations, he is so defeated by the experience, that he attempts suicide.

Jeffrey's voyeurism is imbued with tension - he may be discovered at any moment. An early version of Lynch's film script established Jeffrey as a voyeur at the beginning of the story, when he is in the school furnace room 'fascinated by a sight, beyond in the darkness', a girl student fighting off the sexual advances of a male colleague. Although this sequence was subsequently dropped, there is little mistaking Jeffrey's pleasure in the situation; this is his sought-after 'opportunity for learning knowledge.'

Jeffrey is not curious about Sandy - she is 'the girl next door', without secrets, devoid of mystery. Dorothy is the love-goddess, Aphrodite, arcane and beyond the reach of mortals. She sings on stage, bathed in blue light, where anyone can watch her, but no-one can touch her. Now her 'performance' is solely for Jeffrey's eyes, and already he has uncovered secrets, not only concerning her situation (missing husband, missing son), but her nature. She prowls like a cat because she is a cat-woman, predatory and unpredictable - and that her hair is not her own is just one more secret Jeffrey has all to himself. Not for long however. He bumps some coat hangers, and gives himself away.

### *Dorothy watches Jeffrey*

Armed with the flashing blade of an oversized kitchen knife, Dorothy opens the door, and demands that Jeffrey get out, get down on his knees, and place his arms above his head. Watching and listening which began as abstract voyeuristic pleasures now exacts their price.

'What have you heard? What have you seen?' demands Dorothy. She nicks Jeffrey's cheek with the knife and draws blood. 'Get undressed!' she says, 'I want to see you.' Jeffrey undresses and when he stands she falls to her knees and removes his underwear. 'Don't look at me!' she commands.

The goddess Aphrodite is renowned for her skills in the arts of love, and she is considered irresistible to all men. Moreover, she is no passive lover, but assumes control over the man, ensuring gratification both for herself and her lover. According to the myth, Aphrodite has a darker side, an irrational vengefulness whereby she derives pleasure from provoking and tormenting mortals with vindictive intent. Should Aphrodite make love with a mortal man, he is at once stricken with old age.

There is little doubting Jeffrey's mortality - 'Don't look at me, or I'll kill you,' screams Dorothy, as she arouses him orally, then drags him to the couch, and assuming the dominant position, with the knife over Jeffrey's throat, renders him passive.

For all its controversy, one of the most striking images of Nagisa Oshima's film *In the Realm of the Senses* (*Ai no Corrida*, 1976), shows Eiko Matsuda, in red kimono, and blood red lips, leaning over her lover and former employer, Tatsuya Fuji, with a knife held in her mouth and hovering over his exposed throat. Her sexual domination leads to his death. In *Basic Instincts* (Verhoeven, 1992), Michael Douglas describes the experience of sex bound and tied to the bed, in the supine position, and with a knife at his throat, as the 'fuck of the century' - when the distinction between the little death and the big death for one brief moment becomes inseparable. Jeffrey doesn't find out. There's a knock at the door and Dorothy forces Jeffrey back into the wardrobe.

### *Jeffrey watches Dorothy and Frank*

Jeffrey peers through the jalousie once more, and as the word suggests, with misgivings about the proceedings acted out before him. Frank Booth enters and demands his bourbon. He sits on a chair and tells Dorothy to spread her legs. In the celestial pantheon even Aphrodite is subject to the brutal whims of Ares. All Jeffrey can do is watch. Now it's Frank who demands of Dorothy, 'Don't look at me,' and erupts with a torrent of obscenities. (Dennis Hopper later commented that for every 'fuck' in David Lynch's screenplay, he'd add six more...) He inhales a gas which stimulates him further, intensifying Frank's ritualised abuse of Dorothy.

He clutches a blue velvet cord, a perverse mockery of an umbilical cord (echoes of *Eraserhead*), as he sobs; 'Hello baby. It's daddy,' then inhales once more, whimpering, 'Mummy... mummy,' followed by further obscenities. 'Don't look at me...' he shouts, from which we realise the source of Dorothy's 'performance'.

'Baby wants blue velvet,' shouts Frank, striking Dorothy and pulling her to the floor, taking out a pair of scissors and snapping them wildly. The severed ear, the piece of velvet from Dorothy's robe, the blue cord. Frank cuts anything and everything, yet is unable to sever himself from the primordial pre-cognitive state of demanding everything and yielding nothing.

During a mad and frantic simulated sexual act he shouts, 'Daddy's coming home,' strikes Dorothy once more, and shouts; 'Don't you fucking look at me...'

Frank's use of obscenity is an expression more of impotence than rage. Language can both name something and deny it at the same time. Frank's obscenities are exclusively sexual, as though he is attempting to validate his sexuality. As the plot develops his misogyny becomes more pronounced, just as his 'male bonding' becomes more pronounced. Frank Booth, along with Bytes and Baron Harkonnen, joins Lynch's pantheon of homosexual antagonists.

'You stay alive baby,' Frank tells Dorothy as he leaves. 'Do it for van Gogh.'

### *Jeffrey and Dorothy united*

Jeffrey leaves the wardrobe and helps Dorothy; Dorothy, shaken, bruised and traumatised, collapses into Jeffrey's arms, 'Don. Hold me. Hold me. I'm scared.' Throughout the scene she refers to him by her husband's name, they embrace each other on the sofa, and Dorothy's embraces become more fervent. She demands the Jeffrey feel her breasts, and Lynch employs his favoured close-up of the red painted half parted and sexually enticing lips as she whispers, 'Hit me.'

Jeffrey declines, gets up, and while Dorothy goes to the bathroom he notices the missing patch of material from the bottom of her blue velvet robe. He then finds a photograph of husband, Don and their son, together with a marriage certificate. Jeffrey leaves as Dorothy stares into the bathroom mirror and whispers, 'Help me,' with a vacant glare. She is seeking an identity as much as we do.

We never find out who Dorothy is; we only know her through her performances - either on the stage of the nightclub, or various stages to specifically male audiences, all of which she provides with a different scenario - the victim to Frank, the dominatrix to Jeffrey, and later, the self-ingratiating lover, and to her son, she performs 'mother', but even that performance is as much for the benefit of Frank, Ben and the curious assembly at Ben's place. The nearest Dorothy comes to a natural representation of herself, is in the final sequence - the slow-motion image when she embraces her little boy. Yet, even in this sequence, the camera is performing on her behalf.

Meanwhile, her performance with Frank has profoundly shaken Jeffrey, who, once outside, sees himself as a savage growling animal in the guise of Frank, and in his own bed is plagued by bad dreams.

*Trouble till the robins come*

Sandy has also has a singular performance to present to Jeffrey, but unlike Dorothy, she believes it herself. Outside a church, at night, they meet in the car and Jeffrey tells his story. Once more they agree 'it's a strange world', and Sandy has profound consolation in the form of a dream she had the night she met Jeffrey.

'There is trouble till the robins come,' she tells him. 'The robins will bring love into the world...' As they drive away, the church remains in the background and the soundtrack of church organ music wells up to a mocking crescendo.

For once, Sandy is centre stage, when she acts rather than reacts, is expressive, rather than passive. Yet her eloquence is embarrassing, comic in its naivety. Jeffrey is neither convinced, nor dismissive to the suggestion that the psychopaths will perish in one fell swoop, and the suburban American dream restored, once 'the robins come.' Shortly afterwards, not surprisingly, he visits Dorothy.

'I looked for you in that closet last night,' she says, and leads him to the bedroom. Dorothy likes to be watched (like Lisa Fremont, like the woman across Tomek's window) - Dorothy wants to perform.

At The Slow Club Jeffrey drinks 'Blue Velvet' cocktails and watches Dorothy perform for her male audience. Jeffrey's pleasure is short-lived however, as at another table Frank listens to Dorothy singing clutching the piece of her blue velvet robe, sobbing into it, and manipulating it in surrogate masturbation.

'Why are there people in the world like Frank?' asks a troubled Jeffrey, prior to Sandy's consoling vision of 'everything all right when the robins come back.' He seems less concerned with why Frank should be tormenting just Dorothy. Lynch's assembly of psychopaths are motivated by greed - Bytes wants his 'treasure', Merrick; Baron Harkonnen wants Dune and the spice; Bobby Peru wants his 'silver dollar'. What drives Frank, it seems, is the desire for pleasure - he is the 'sensualist' in contrast to Jeffrey's asceticism, but his sensuality is uncontrolled. He takes what he wants, whether its drugs or a desirable woman.

As the plot unfolds, Frank and Dorothy's husband, Don, have had drug dealings together - Frank, driven by his desire for Dorothy, holds Don prisoner, and their

young son, in order to blackmail Dorothy for sexual pleasure. The severed ear is both a token of Frank's seriousness of intent and a perverse interpretation of van Gogh's 'sacrifice' in the name of unrequited love.

Now Jeffrey, as he watches Dorothy, and watches Frank watching Dorothy, is troubled that the desire he feels for the woman performing before him, is not so far removed from Frank's desire. 'You're like me', says Frank later to Jeffrey, as Jeffrey becomes more attuned to his physical senses, both the pleasure they provide, and the pain.

Similarly, Jeffrey's desire for Dorothy, who is dark haired, voluptuous, ('overweight' remarked some critics in regard to Isabella Rossellini's naked scenes) contrasts against the lean and ascetic form of Sandy.

Jeffrey plays detective, watching Frank's movements and taking photographs. The next day at Arlene's Diner, he summarises Frank's complicated dealings with the 'man in the yellow jacket', among others. 'A drug dealer shot to death and a woman had both her legs broken.' Jeffrey is breathless: 'I'm seeing something. I'm in a mystery and it's all secret.' He kisses Sandy passionately, then goes to Dorothy's to make love with her. A whole new world has opened up for Jeffrey.

In Dorothy's flat red velvet curtains billow, and thunder rumbles ominously outside. 'Blue Velvet', sung by Bobby Vinton, fades out swiftly at the same point it faded out in the opening sequence, as the song's delicate chords dissolve into a subterranean rumbling and Jeffrey's father clutches the side of his head and sinks to the newly mown lawn, beneath which black bugs are tearing each other apart. The bugs are the dis-ease of the suburban garden, and, suggests Lynch, 'someone can look very well and have a whole bunch of diseases cooking: there are all sorts of dark twisted things lurking down there.'

'I want your disease in me,' says Dorothy. Later; 'Are you a bad boy? You want to do anything? Anything?' With Dorothy's coaxing Jeffrey strikes her, over and over. He is engulfed with the image of burning flame and for a few short seconds Jeffrey becomes the monster he saw in Frank. 'I have your disease in me now,' says Dorothy, and as they part company outside her apartment, she smiles wistfully. 'I still have you inside me,' she says.

### *A Joyride to Meadow Lane*

Frank Booth and his cohorts appear outside the apartment as Jeffrey is about to leave - Ares, accompanied by Fear, Fright and Strife. 'Who is this fuck?' demands

Frank, and with Dorothy in tow, decide they must see Ben. 'We're going on a joyride,' says Frank.

Ben is the suave, well-dressed and effeminate ruler of a netherworld of drug and prostitution, the benevolent dictator in the manner of Hades (Pluto) and his rule over the underworld. Ben is a more sinister representation of the forces of chaos than Frank - Frank is a brutal thug, who raises a toast ('Let's drink to fucking. Here's to fuck. Here's to Ben'), and smacks Jeffrey across the face, enraged that Jeffrey should be watching him. (Jeffrey's problem from the outset has been that he can't not watch). Ben, on the other hand, refined, well-groomed and courteous, approaches Jeffrey with a sympathetic smile before punching him in the stomach, and asking politely, 'Did that hurt?'

Dorothy goes into another room and Jeffrey listens to the cries from behind the other side of the door; 'Donny. Mamma loves you.' Just one more of Dorothy's performances.

Jeffrey's 'joyride' is his journey into an unknown realm where he is vulnerable and mortal, at the mercy of the gods' mean-spirited games. Dorothy gives him pleasure, Frank - pain. Ben leaves him winded and bewildered. The 'surrealism' with which Lynch portrays the familiar territory of the middle class suburban community, dissolves into the 'anti-realism' of Ben's underworld. Jeffrey is disorientated - nothing seems real, not the place, not Ben, not Frank and his three thugs, not even Dorothy. Is there a little boy behind that closed door?

To emphasise the 'unreality', Ben picks up a wire encased light globe, and in a parody of Dorothy's night club performance, mimes to Roy Orbison singing 'In Dreams.' Frank listens in a kind of ecstasy, and the characters gather around Jeffrey like archetypal projections forcing themselves into his conscious state. The detached peculiarity of the scene evokes an other-worldliness, a sense that Jeffrey finds himself divorced from reality.

Although it is Ben (then Frank) miming the lyrics of the Roy Orbison song, the lines: I close my eyes then drift away into the dark night... is as appropriate as Jeffrey's inner monologue.

Frank insists on continuing Jeffrey's joyride 'into the dark night': 'Let's hit the fucking road', he says, and they depart, Jeffrey in the back with Fear, Strife and Fright; Dorothy in the front with Frank. 'You're like me', says Frank to Jeffrey, while molesting Dorothy, inferring that they share the same icon of desire. Jeffrey, outraged at Frank's treatment of Dorothy, does become like Frank - he lashes out with his fist and strikes him in the face.

Lynch's most explicit 'psychomachia' is the conflict between Jeffrey and Frank. Jeffrey has flashes seeing himself in the roaring bestial guise of Frank, as he hits Dorothy. Frank creeps through the fissures of Jeffrey's normality, and becomes his dark self.

The car stops and Jeffrey is dragged out - Frank paints himself with red lipstick (later to become Marietta's signature of dementia in *Wild at Heart*), then kisses him. 'You receive a love letter from me,' says Frank, 'and you're fucked forever.' As a girl dances on the bonnet of the car to the tune of Roy Orbison's 'In Dreams', Frank recites the text, wipes Jeffrey's face with the torn piece of blue velvet, and instructs his thugs to hold Jeffrey down while he beats him savagely.

In the light of morning Jeffrey comes to, and finds himself in a timberyard off 'Meadow Lane'. Originally, Lynch had written the scene with Jeffrey, with his trousers around his ankles and 'fuck you' written on his legs with lipstick. Although this scene was filmed and later deleted, there is much to suggest that Jeffrey was nonetheless raped. Frank's continuous references to Jeffrey's 'joyride'; his thugs referring to Jeffrey as 'a pussy Frank, our pussy'; Frank's insistence that 'when you get a love letter from me, you're fucked forever'; and in Frank Booth's final sequence as 'the well dressed man', he enters the apartment looking for Jeffrey, saying; 'I know where your cute little butt is hiding.'

Jeffrey's rape, the final degradation, marks his entry into the netherworld realm of the senses - if Dorothy gave pleasure (they have made love once), then Frank's 'joyride', as Frank promises, is the love letter that has 'fucked him forever'.

### *Suburban American Dream*

Jeffrey's return is a return to normality. Whatever innocence Jeffrey had is lost forever. The normality he once took for granted is torn asunder with fissures of corruption. When Jeffrey goes to the police station to tell all to Detective Williams, he sees the man in the 'yellow coat', and discovers that he's a policeman - Detective T R Gordon, Williams' colleague.

He visits Williams at his home instead, who responds by becoming abusive. Jeffrey has had enough. He abandons the world of intrigues and returns to the pleasures suburban life can offer - watering the garden, visiting father in hospital, and going to a Friday night teenage party with Sandy.

Sandy's party is the direct contrast of Ben's, sufficiently wholesome to prompt an exchange of dialogue between Jeffrey and Sandy as they dance to a tune called 'Mysteries of Love' (lyrics by David Lynch, sung by Julee Cruise).

But his return to ordinariness is not as easy one. When Jeffrey and Sandy drive home, Sandy's former boyfriend, Mike, and his buddies, give chase through the suburban streets - Jeffrey is convinced Frank is on his tail - and outside the Williams' residence Mike and his buddies rough him up. They take off when Dorothy appears, emerging from the darkness as Sandy had, only Dorothy is naked and confused. She is the love-goddess, descended from celestial heights, to stir up trouble in a Lumberton household.

Inside the house, unashamedly naked before Sandy, and Sandy's mother, Dorothy points to Jeffrey and claims; 'My secret lover. He put his disease inside me.' Sandy is upset. When an ambulance comes to take Dorothy away she strikes him.

Jeffrey returns to Dorothy's apartment; the door is open and a record player plays 'Love Letters' sung by Kitty Lester. Gordon, 'the yellow man', is shot, apparently dead, yet still standing, blood dripping from his arm, and brain matter seeping through a head wound. A dead man, minus an ear, is seated in an armchair with a piece of blue velvet stuffed into his mouth - Dorothy's husband, Don.

While the police, led by Detective Williams, raids Frank Booth's place, Jeffrey is about to leave Dorothy's when he sees a man with moustache ascend the stairs - Frank in disguise. Jeffrey returns to Dorothy's flat, and to the wardrobe from where he first watched Dorothy undress. Now he watches Frank as he shoots and rants. He opens the wardrobe door and Jeffrey shoots Frank through the head.

We return to the blue skies, green lawns and white picket fence - Jeffrey bathes in sunlight and looks at a bird in a tree. Jeffrey's father and Sandy's father chat in the lounge room. Jeffrey embraces Sandy, and from the kitchen, together with Jeffrey's mother and Aunt Barbara, they watch the bird which holds a large black beetle in its mouth. 'Maybe the robins are here', says Jeffrey, but 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 bird is a mechanical device, although according to Lynch 'it's not an artificial bird; it's a real bird. That's just the way it turned out.' The scene is as pretty as it is artificial, as artificial as the charade of security and normality which the suburbs proclaim.

Dorothy and her little boy, also illuminated by sunlight, embrace; the blue sky becomes blue velvet, Bobby Vinton sings the 1950's song, and harmony returns to once troubled community of Lumberton.

According to the Aphrodite myth, Ares adulterous liaison with Aphrodite resulted in a daughter, named Harmonia. The lesson to the Aphrodite story suggests that brute force can be subdued by love and can bring 'harmony' to the world. In Blue Velvet, chaos and disorder prevail until Dorothy and child are united. Brute force is defeated, harmony reigns.

In a scene which Lynch later deleted from the film, Dorothy and Jeffrey make love while 'a very sad forlorn version of 'Over the rainbow' creeps through the wind.'

Another Dorothy, who has secured her place in American popular 'mythology', travels down 'a yellow brick road', is pitted against wicked witches, and finally realises that no other place can compare to her home in Kansas.

In the final cut, The Wizard Of Oz had no place in Blue Velvet, but this most American of tales found its niche in Lynch's next project, based on a sprightly little novel of contemporary America. Barry Gifford's book was barely off the printing presses before Lynch had written his screen adaption.



## Wild at Heart (1990)

*'A film that doesn't have a happy ending is misunderstanding the basis of all cinema.'*  
*Brazzaville Beach by William Boyd*

Ripley Sailor is released from prison after a two year sentence for the manslaughter of Bob Ray Lemon. He is re-united with Lula and the couple leave North Carolina and head south for New Orleans in a red convertible. Lula's mother, Marietta, is determined to split the couple up and enlists the aid of boyfriend Johnny Farragut, then a hired killer, Marcello Santos.

During their road journey Lula and Sailor recall fragments of the past - the death of Lula's father (who supposedly burnt himself to death), Marietta's attempted seduction of Sailor. From New Orleans they drive to Big Tuna, a small and sleazy community, where Sailor meets a former underworld contact, Perdita.

To get money Sailor is persuaded by the psychopathic Bobby Peru to join him in a bank robbery. Unknown to Sailor the robbery is a set-up orchestrated by Santos to have Sailor killed. The robbery becomes a bloodbath and the unexpected intervention of the police results in the death of Bobby Peru and the arrest of Sailor. He's sent to prison, and as at the beginning of the film, Lula meets him when he is released. However, six years have passed, Sailor has a young son he's not met before, and walks away feeling that a reunion would be impossible. At this point the Good Witch from The Wizard of Oz descends from the heavens and inspires him to return to Lula.

They are reunited. He sings 'Love Me Tender'.

It's midday in Big Tuna and Lula (Laura Dern) lies alone on the bed in provocative black lingerie. Sailor (Nicolas Cage) is out fixing the car. The psychotic Bobby Peru (Willem Dafoe) enters her motel room, in order to use the bathroom. He makes suggestive remarks while he urinates, and instead of leaving, approaches Lula, and forces himself upon her.

'Y'know,' he says, 'I sure do like a woman with nice tits like yours who talks tough and looks like she can fuck like a bunny. Can you fuck like that?'

Lula, indignant, tells him to leave, but he heaps upon her one obscene proposition after the other, grabs her by the waist and pushes his face into hers; 'Say 'fuck me',

then I'll leave.' She turns away repelled by his disfigured jagged teeth imbedded in his bloated gums - a pencil like moustache across his protruding upper lip. 'I'm not leaving till you say 'fuck me', he says, mauling at her breasts and groping between her legs. 'Say 'fuck me" he repeats, his mouth almost touching hers; Lula's red lipped and enticing, his protruding and repellent.

Her eyes closed, her body trembling, she finally whispers the words. He pushes her away, shouting, 'Someday, honey, I will, but I got to get going.' He leaves, laughing to himself - Lula holds herself and cries out for Sailor.

The episode is grotesque, unsettling and perverse - and it's all David Lynch. In Barry Gifford's novel Bobby Peru makes no advance on Lula. Lynch wants Lula to betray Sailor, and to be betrayed by her own sensuality, just as Sailor, in colluding with Bobby Peru, betrays Lula.

At night, when the couple share the same bed, they are unable to share these their darkest moments. As it transpires, their final moments together, before Sailor sets off to participate in the robbery the next morning.

Sailor is released from prison six years later and Lula is there with their young son, Pace, to meet him. But Sailor soon feels ill at ease, and decides to make his own solitary way.

"'You been doin' fine without me, peanut. There ain't no need to make life tougher'n it has to be.' He picked up his suitcase, kissed Lula lightly on the lips and walked away. She let him go."

Barry Gifford ends the story there, but, says Lynch: 'I didn't buy the ending of the book. In the first script I wrote, the ending was true to the book. (Sailor and Lula part company) (which was) a real defeat... I almost wanted a miserable ending just to show that I wasn't trying to be commercial. And that's wrong... it's got to feel honest...'

In Lynch's final sequence, Glinda, the Good Witch from *The Wizard of Oz*, appears *deus ex machina* to Sailor and says, 'Don't turn away from love.' (Lynch insists it is not him talking, but the Good Witch). Sailor returns to Lula and sings 'Love Me Tender', a token act of commitment for which he was 'not ready' at the beginning of the story.

Apart from being a 'happy ending', Glinda's appearance (with the face of Sheryl Lee - *Twin Peaks*' 'Laura Palmer') confirms Sailor Ripley's acceptance of Lula's world. *The Wizard of Oz* is, Lula tells Sailor, her favourite film. She gives him fantasies and dreams, Sailor has both feet on the ground. His anecdotes describe past acts of violence, conflicts and traumas. Like Mrs Kendal, in *The Elephant*

Man, opens up the 'fantasy' world of pantomime, theatre and drama - as an alternative to the dreadful reality John Merrick has undergone, Lula provides an alternative reality for Sailor. (That this is a 'feminine' role was the basis of *The Kiss of the Spider Woman* - Hector Babenco, 1985; another MGM production which reverses the sepia and colour schema of *The Wizard of Oz*, where the effeminate homosexual 'sexual' prisoner (William Hurt) gives Hollywood melodramas to the Raul Julia, the brutalised 'masculine' political prisoner).

Like Raul Julia in *The Kiss of the Spider Woman* in the South American prison cell, is fascinated/frustrated by William Hurt, Sailor is tantalised by Lula's flights of fantasy 'You never fail to fascinate me peanut,' but suitably cynical within the masculine mould to which he adheres, refusing or incapable of sharing her 'feminine' fantasy world. Until the end of the picture when Lula's Good Witch, Glinda, descends from the heavens, inspiring him with moral fortitude, but also finally accepting Lula's alternative reality, affirming his love for her.

Lynch has transformed the Hollywood 'happy ending' cliché into pastiche, yes; and in doing so emphasises the narrative form of the cinema - 'The essence of all art is positive. So in the one great popular art form, the art form, this motive has to be even more powerful.'

### *Fire Walk With Me*

The film begins with the sound and image of a striking match, followed by an engulfing fire. Through the wall of flame the film title explodes across the screen. This image recurs at key points in the narrative, ostensibly to describe the death of Lula's father, but also as an image to describe the relationship between Sailor and Lula; a single match, a single cigarette - Sailor's individuality; one match, two cigarettes - unity; sharing the same cigarette - intimacy.

Fire, indeed, does walk with both Sailor and Lula through the story -Lula watched her father burn, and Sailor watched the fire, not aware of exactly what it was he was watching. 'Maybe you got to close to a fire - maybe you're gonna burn', says Lula's mother to Sailor. Both of them had seen the murder of Lula's father, yet not seen it.

The story opens at a place that has already made its way into film mythology; Cape Fear, somewhere near the border of North Carolina, where Sailor meets Lula at a swank dance hall. Glen Miller's 'In The Mood' playing; and Lula's mother, Marietta (Diane Ladd; Laura Dern's real-life mother) watches from behind a pillar as Bob Ray Lemon pulls a knife; 'Trying to fuck your girl's mamma in the toilets!' At the

end of the fight Bob Ray's brains seep over the marble floor, just as Bobby Peru's brain substance colours the dust coloured ground in the films finale.

Sailor points an accusing finger at Marietta, who leers as she hides herself in the shadows, and Lula collapses in tears. Sailor is sent to the Pee Dee Correctional Institution.

'22 months 18 days later', reads the text, and Sailor telephones to Lula. Marietta answers and warns; 'If you try to see her you're dead', then tells Lula not to see him, pressing her red lips to a dry martini.

Lula in a tight red dress, meets Sailor outside the prison and presents him with his snakeskin jacket, which, Sailor declares, and not for the first time, 'represents my individuality and my belief in personal freedom.' They get in the convertible and they drive away.

The fire that 'walks' with Sailor and Lula is both past and present - each time they make love their passion dissolves into a blazing image, either from a cigarette lighter, a match or the memory that ties them both. After their first round of lovemaking in a hotel room, the frame dissolves to red which in turn dissolves to the flame from a cigarette lighter. They share each other - they share a single cigarette. Lula's fiery memories transport her to her sexual debut with a wicked uncle, the wicked uncle's demise in a burning car as it crashes down a hill, and to the burning house in which her father perished.

As Marietta enlists the aid of her boyfriend, Johnny Farragut (Harry Dean Stanton), to be rid of Sailor Ripley, Sailor nurtures fiery flashbacks of his own. Marietta confronts Sailor in a cubicle of the men's toilets and tells him, 'I'd sure like to fuck.' Sailor declines and Marietta threatens him with, '... maybe you're gonna burn.'

As Sailor and Lula go dancing, Marietta and Johnny Farragut play animal games with each other. She plays tiger and he plays bunny rabbit.

### *Sailor Ripley, Elvis Presley and Marlon Brando*

On the dance floor a young rival makes a pass at Lula, and Sailor intercedes. Sailor beats up the interloper, apologises for embarrassing him in front of the crowd and once more declares the significance of his snake skin jacket. (An unscripted prop supplied by Nicolas Cage). He picks up the microphone and with the accompaniment of the stage band sings to Lula and Elvis Presley song, 'Love Me'.

They make love in their hotel room and Lula asks Sailor why he didn't sing 'Love Me Tender?' He'd always promised that one day he'd sing 'Love Me Tender.' 'Not ready yet babe', says Sailor, and two separate matches light two separate cigarettes.

'Love Me' is a raunchy Presley number full of meaningless lyric and sexual undertone; 'Treat me like a fool/treat me mean and cruel/but love me...' Lula and Sailor's commitment escalate from the earthy sexuality of 'Love Me' to the subdued resignation of 'Love Me Tender.' Sailor Ripley, like his American mythological mentor, begins as the wild untamed rebel and is subjugated into the compassionate sentimentalist. Sailor's story is the story of Elvis from Jailhouse Rock (Richard Thorpe, 1957), where Elvis learns to play guitar in prison, and once outside begins a career as an ill-tempered, surly rockstar with the all the nostril-flaring insolence of his Sun Records career, to Girl Happy (Boris Sagal, 1965), a formula Elvis musical set in Fort Lauderdale, Texas, where a subdued Elvis undertakes the task of chaperoning the beautiful young, but spoiled daughter (Shelley Fabares) of a notorious Chicago mobster. In compliance to the formula, romance ensues, the girl is tamed and family unity restored. Sailor begins as the nostril flaring untamed jailbird (with rockstar aspirations), and ends up as the guy that ran off with the mobster's daughter. Like Elvis, Sailor's story begins with 'Mystery Train' and ends up as 'Teddy Bear'.

'What really grabbed me,' says Lynch, 'was the characters of Sailor and Lula. Sailor could be wild and like a rebel and be masculine, and Lula could be wild and like a rebel and feminine. They treated each other with respect, they were in love, they were equals in the relationship... a modern romance.'

Sailor's masculine role models, Presley and Brando, are wild and rebellious in 1950's Hollywood movies - a decade later they are tamed icons marketed for general consumption.

Brando's last 'rebel role', after his 1950 debut in *The Men* (Fred Zinneman), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Elia Kazan, 1951), *The Wild One* (Laslo Benedek, 1954) and *On The Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954), was Sidney Lumet's *The Fugitive Kind* (1959) in which he wears a snakeskin jacket 'representing his individuality and freedom.' The film, based on Tennessee William's play *Orpheus Descending*, has Brando, a wayward drifter, persuading Joanne Woodward to cruise the highways of America's southern states in an open top convertible. Lula and Sailor's journey through Texas in Lula's open top convertible leads to the same kind of small town hell-on-earth that Brando drifts into.

Sailor has no parents, no family. Lula watched her father burn to death, unaware that the 'accident' was engineered by her mother, and executed by an underworld psychotic, Marcello Santos. Her mother, by now, is out of control.

Marietta engages Santos to rid her of Sailor, and unintentionally sanctions Johnny Farragut's death at the same time. While she paints her entire face with red lipstick, Johnny, in New Orleans on the trail of Sailor and Lula, watches television in his hotel room. Screeching hyenas tear apart and devour a gazelle. Marietta telephones. 'I've done something real bad,' she says, her hands and face bright red. She tells Johnny she's coming to New Orleans, hangs up, then vomits into the toilet bowl.

*Lula Pace Fortune, Momma Marietta and Mombi the Wicked Witch*

After Sailor tells Lula he's not ready to sing 'Love Me Tender', Lula tells Sailor the story of the Wicked Witch of the East from *The Wizard of Oz*.

Throughout her adventures, Dorothy Gale, the heroine of *The Wizard of Oz*, remains a good hearted conventional home-loving Kansas girl. The virtuous resonance of Frank L Baum's books, and later, the MGM musical with Judy Garland, is due to Dorothy - she is forthright, wholesome, even sententious, but that Good will invariably triumph over Evil, can be attributed to Dorothy's moral fibre. She reacts to bewildering characters and events with interest rather than fear, and she admonishes those who do not meet with her expectations of down to earth moral resolve.

Like Sailor, Lula's archetypes are firmly planted in the mid-fifties, when *The Wizard of Oz* was first screened on American television, finally gaining the accolades of praise it was denied on release in 1939. In 1939 the film was not only poorly received, its box office barely covered production costs. When the film was screened on television in 1956 (the year Elvis first appeared on television) the film gained a status by which other musicals are measured, and a permanent place in American popular culture.

An International *Wizard of Oz* Club was formed in 1957, and the film has since had an airing on American television almost every Christmas. The story is known universally as *The Wizard of Oz*, yet of the fourteen 'Oz' books, seven written by the creator, Frank Baum, none of them bear this title; the film fable has a place in popular culture the story books could never attain. And it is the influence of the film acknowledged by contemporaries (and Lula), which has ingrained itself into anglo-saxon culture. (Since the late 1950's, following the success of the film, editions of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* have often been published under the film title). British author, Salman Rushdie, claims this was the film that inspired him to be a novelist - he perceives the Wicked Witch of the East as a possible benevolent dictator, and the Wicked Witch of the West as a positive woman role figure, compared to the frail and delicate Glinda, 'frilly pink versus slimline black. No contest' The 'no place like home' motif, says Rushdie, conceals the films subtext -

escape from inadequacies of adults to find one's own maturity. John Boorman's oddity, *Zardoz*, made in 1974 and set in the year 2293 portrays primitive, Sean Connery, who uncovers the mask of the god he worships - an insignificant technocrat who has taken his name from the disparate syllables of *The Wizard of Oz*.

Baum himself filmed the first version of *The Wizard of Oz*, in 1925, produced by Chadwick Pictures, with Laurel Hardy in the role of the Tin Man. It is a thoroughly American fable; a quest story which leads to a journey down a gold lined road in search of a Wizard who turns out to be a charlatan. A parable of blind faith, innocence and the American dream.

'It aspires to being a modernised fairy tale, in which the wonderment and joy are retained and the heartaches and nightmares are left out,' wrote Baum of his first book, *'The Wonderful Wizard of Oz'* published in 1900.

In fact, the 'nightmares' are part and parcel of the stories, and the highlights of the MGM film include the gruesome deaths of the Wicked Witches die gruesome deaths and the Tin Man's self-mutilation with an axe. The nightmare visions of the Wicked Witch terrorise Lula - the Good Witch only shows herself to Sailor.

But there is more than the Wicked Witch of the East to terrify Lula, who sees omens of ill-fortune strewn along the yellow brick road.

Firstly the radio plays an old 1940's melody, 'Smoke Rings', while Lula and Sailor fill up Lula's open top convertible at a petrol station somewhere in the middle of an advertisement for Levi's jeans; a nail varnish ruby red automobile against blue sky and green trees. Sailor naps in the back as Lula drives, cruising down the yellow brick road, on the way to Emerald City.

Now the car radio issues forth its own version of the American dream - like Baum's fable, with the heartaches and nightmares, only little else besides; news items about a mother who killed her three children, a local judge who praises the defendant John Roy but 'was dismayed to learn that Roy had had sex with the corpse...'; crocodiles released into the Ganges to devour floating corpses... Lula goes crazy, stops the car, wakes Sailor and demands that he find music on the radio. He tunes in to a heavy rock station and they dance wildly in the desert against the red dusk sun.

Driving by night to the tune of Chris Isaaks 'Wicked Games' Sailor tells Lula that he knew her daddy, Clyde; that he did some driving for Santos, and that he saw Lula's house go up in flames. Lula sees the same image, only 'daddy Clyde' is inside all those flames. Why didn't he tell Lula before? 'We all got a secret side baby,' says

Sailor, one of the few dialogue lines that Lynch contributed to Barry Gifford's novel.

Lula sees the Wicked Witch of the East cackling on a broomstick flying beside the car. In *The Wizard of Oz*, the Good Witch Glinda (Billie Burke) tells Dorothy, 'Close your eyes and tap your heels together three times. And think to yourself, there's no place like home.' Only for Lula, Marietta rules the roost, and her life pales before the ultimate Hollywood product - a film which boasted many writers, many directors (Victor Fleming and King Vidor included), and many compromises; Shirley Temple was swapped over for Judy Garland, and in the first final cut the song 'Over the Rainbow' was deleted because it slowed the story down.

Lula's Hollywood fabricated dream insists home is best; 'If ever I go looking for my heart's desire again,' says Dorothy (Judy Garland), 'I won't look any further than my own backyard, because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with.' Only Lula's 'home' is burnt down, 'daddy Clyde' included, by a psychotic mother, so that all that's left is Emerald City, whatever horror that may be, whatever villain runs the place.

### *Emerald City*

Santos has arranged for Sailor's demise at the small Texas town, Big Tuna. Mr Reindeer (W. Morgan Sheppard) is a David Lynch character, a sinister Oz Wizard eccentric who sits on the toilet talking on the telephone, watching naked girls dance in his bathroom. He is a contract killer who lives in a brothel, with three fellow assassins, and who exhibits the gratuitous perversity of a mind gone rampant in an Emerald City of his own. Reindeer gives Santos one of two silver dollars for the assassination of Sailor, while a black woman in a blue sequin dress stands before blue velvet curtains and sings; 'Up in Flames.' (Lyrics by David Lynch).

The other silver dollar is for Johnny Farragut, who is thumped on the head at his New Orleans hotel, taken out into a desolate patch of Louisiana night, tied to a post and shot between the eyes.

Meanwhile for Lula and Sailor, the yellow brick road is strewn with clothing and dead bodies, not gold. 'One bad car accident' says Sailor as he looks at the two crashed cars off the road side. Two dead bodies lie beside each other, then another. A girl wanders dazed clutching her bleeding head. 'Robert' she screams (as though all acts of violence, in a Lynch film, must be perpetrated by a character with that name), and as Sailor tries to calm her down she complains about 'sticky stuff in my hair..' and inserts a finger into her head wound. She collapses by a tree, bleeds from

the mouth, then dies. Sailor and Lula watch helplessly, then drive off down the road, red lights on black.

In Barry Gifford's novel, just before Sailor and Lula arrive in Big Tuna, Lula tells Sailor that she doesn't appreciate being called 'peanut' so much. It puts her, she says, 'so far down the food chain.'

The road accident is a Lynch sequence, unessential to the plot, yet an unsettling scene which sets a darker tone to the rest of the story. Lula's niggle about being called 'peanut' has a similar disquieting affect.

'Big Tuna, Texas. Pop 603 Elev 3700' reads the road sign in the middle of a Texas wilderness, and the reverse side of tin plate 'Big Tuna' sign is emblazoned with the legend 'fuck you' in red spray paint. 'I know it's not exactly Emerald City,' says Sailor.

He knocks on the door of a white bleached cabin and skeletal trees blow in the wind. A bleached blond with dark eyes and a smug smile answers. Her name is Perdita (Isabella Rossellini), an 'old flame' of Sailors who assures him, falsely, that no-one has a contract out on him. Perdita provides her own flashback of the burning house.

Sailor: I didn't see nothing.

Perdita: Don't you know that Santos burnt your little girl's daddy?

Marietta returns to Sailor's flashback, just to remind him, 'so maybe one night you got too close to a fire and maybe you got burned.'

Flies take off a pool of vomit as Sailor opens the door to the motel room where Lula lies prostrate on the bed. 'My favourite shot in the film,' relates Lynch, who, during the course of the plot, has mother and daughter (both in the story and in real life) throw up.

The Big Tuna sequence is a study in Lynchian 'abjection' - the place itself is abject from the social mainstream, 'cast up' from social normality. It is the antithesis of Lynch's suburban white picket fences, new cut lawns and yellow tulips. There are no families in Big Tuna - only social outcasts and misfits.

Lula vomits because she is pregnant and in the isolation of the motel room the 'abject' scenes of her past are cast up like the contents of her stomach; the rape by her 'Uncle Pooch' and the subsequent abortion in which the red embryo is cast into a stainless steel repository. Later Lula writes out a note to Sailor telling him she's pregnant. Sailor responds by lighting two cigarettes with one match. He gives one to Lula (solidarity), and says;

Sailor: It's OK by me peanut.

Lula: I'm not so sure it's OK by me.

Sailor and Lula have been copulating wildly across the southern states of America but their sex life comes to a brisk halt in Big Tuna, where sex is as 'abject' and repulsive as everything else. Apart from Bobby Peru's mock seduction of Lula, which is linked to his urinating, and his use of the word 'head' for toilet ('I'm not gonna piss on your head, I'm gonna piss in the toilet'), sex in Big Tuna is a dirty business.

At night Sailor and Lula drink beer with the locals, an underworld ensemble from the residence of Ben in Blue Velvet. 'People over there making a pornographic movie,' one of them says, and the film team walks by beneath a string of coloured lights, thin men in suits and wide brimmed hats, accompanied by Fellini-esque oversized women who parade their nakedness lewdly before the nocturnal gathering.

Jack Nance (Frank Booth's cohort, Paul, in Blue Velvet) tells an absurd story about his dog. What kind of dog do you imagine, he asks; 'perhaps you might even picture Toto,' Dorothy's dog from The Wizard of Oz.

A man introduced as Bobby Peru ('like the country') joins the company, and as he recollects his participation in a Vietnam massacre it becomes clear he is unhinged - a deformed Lynch psychopath with a protruding lip and a pencil line moustache over jagged teeth imbedded in a mass of pink gum. (In 1992 Lynch published a book of photographs of just teeth and gums). Bobby Peru's use of obscenity is more colourful than Frank Booth's, and his utterances are accompanied by a permanent snide grin. Bobby Peru shows no anger - just the deranged giggle of pleasure in the style of the Richard Widmark psychopath in Kiss of Death (Hathaway, 1947).

'I hope seeing that girl didn't jinx us,' says Lula when they arrive in Big Tuna, recollecting the car accident as an ominous sign. Sailor sits beside her and this time he sees the Wicked Witch. He gives Lula a candy necklace, 'four different colours - one for each reason I love you.'

Later, when they both have their secrets to conceal (Lula's seduction, Sailor's planned hold-up) Sailor tells Lula; 'I promise I ain't gonna let things get no worse. Not in a million years.' The Wicked Witch laughs in the distance; Big Tuna, as Sailor observed on their arrival, is 'not exactly Emerald City.'

Over the rainbow

Sailor goes out to fix the car and Bobby Peru forces himself upon Lula. Then he joins Sailor and invites him for a beer. At the bar a man in the background is singing to a guitar and Bobby Peru proposes a robbery at the Lobo foodstore. Sailor says no.

Outside Bobby shows Sailor the armoury in his car trunk. 'How much you got,' he asks. 'Forty dollars,' says Sailor. Through the opaque glass of a crystal ball Sailor says OK; 'The money will get us a long way down the yellow brick road.' A woman's hand drapes across the crystal ball - the hand of Marietta, 'moira', manipulating Sailor's fate from disaster to catastrophe.

Sailor returns to the motel room where Lula sits in bed and smokes. Sailor lights up his own cigarette - each has betrayed the other - they are alone.

Lula: That Bobby Peru is a black angel - don't get mixed up with him.

Sailor: I love you but I gotta get some sleep now.

Lula: This whole world is wild at heart and weird on top. (Crying) I wish you'd sing 'Love Me Tender.' I wish I was somewhere over that rainbow.

The following morning Sailor has his regrets, but it's too late for him to extricate himself from the hold-up. Perdita is Sailor's perdition and she drives the car.

Inside the grain store Bobby Peru and Sailor hold up the two shopkeepers, while outside a policeman stops to chat with Perdita. Bobby takes the loot, shoots the two men behind the counter, points his double barrelled shotgun at Sailor and smiles. 'You're next.' Sailor dives through the door to the waiting sheriff, Bobby runs out, gets shot once and blows his own head off with the shotgun. The contents of his skull are spilled over the desert ground, as Bob Ray Lemon's head was split open at the beginning of the picture. Sailor's mouth is in the dust. 'Lula, I really let you down,' he says.

Inside the grain store the two men, blood streaming from their wounds, search for one man's shot off hand. 'Don't worry,' says his colleague, 'They can sew them back on again.' A dog runs out the door with the hand in his mouth, an image from Kurosawa's film, Yojimbo, and imitated in Sergio Leone's 'spaghetti westerns.'

Sailor is behind bars and Marietta and Santos come to take Lula home. 'Can you give your old friend Santos a hug?' says Santos and hugs her. Lula screams.

'Five years, 10 months, 21 days later' reads the text, superimposed over a gold framed photograph of Lula in front of red velvet curtains.

Lula, with their nearly six year old son, Pace, drives off in her open top convertible to pick up Sailor after his release from prison. Their journey is interrupted by a grisly car accident, where blood and internal organs colour the roadside and a delirious bleeding male victim attempts to converse with Lula. The accident may be a foreboding token of ill-fortune, as Lula perceived the delirious girl accident victim en route to Big Tuna nearly six years earlier.

Sailor stands at the station with a stuffed lion in his hand, Lula and Pace join him, and for a brief moment there is a family in the couple's otherwise family-less lives. Marietta, at her place, in front of a picture of Lula and with a martini in her hand, screams no!

And sure enough, as they drive down the road, Sailor stops the car, tells Lula 'it don't feel right,' bids farewell to Pace, picks up his suitcase and walks away.

In the middle of an empty street Sailor is suddenly surrounded by nine punks. He takes out a Marlboro cigarette and lights up with studied deliberation. 'What do you faggots want?' he says, and gets soundly beaten. As he lies on the ground, Glinda the Good Witch descends in a luminous bubble and tells Sailor that Lula loves him. 'Don't turn away from love,' she says three times, in the same hypnotic tone with which Bobby Peru made sexual advances towards Lula.

Sailor gets up with a swollen nose, apologises to the punks for calling them homosexuals and sprints down the road, running over cars stuck in a traffic jam, finally planting himself on the bonnet of Lula's convertible. They embrace. 'I just met the Good Witch' he tells Lula, then sings 'Love Me Tender.'

Do we 'buy' Lynch's ending? Or is it as 'gratuitous' as a number of disparate scenes that intersperse the plot? The Sight and Sound critic, Jonathan Rosenbaum writes that 'Lynch is only interested in iconography, not characters at all', and the happy ending 'seems sadly to demonstrate only the desperation of a surrealist vaudevillian stuck for a finish.'

On the one hand Lynch purports to embrace the convention of the form - a Hollywood movie must have a 'happy ending'; on the other hand, the parodic nature of the ending can be interpreted as a send-up or a cynical commentary to the narrative's singular lack of resolution.

Apart from Sailor singing 'Love Me Tender', and the demise of Bobby Peru, not a lot is resolved. Santos is alive and kicking, unpunished for the murder of Johnny Farragut, Perdita is back in the purgatory of Big Tuna, and if Mr Reindeer was ever the Wizard of Oz, he remains 'undebunked'. Marietta's photograph may have

disappeared in a puff of smoke, but Marietta herself is more unhinged than ever, and, assumedly, more adamant that Sailor and Lula don't remain together.

The loose threads of matters undisclosed lies at the heart of Gifford's novel; Sailor taking off alone is just one more loose thread. The very artifice of Lynch's ending may suggest the opposite of its intention. For Lula and Sailor, Emerald City is the prospect of playing 'happy families', a game where, according to the David Lynch book of rules, everyone loses.

Lynch's ending to *Wild at Heart* is a playful departure from 'road movie' genre conventions. Traditionally, the couple on the run, whether from the law, or from the underworld, meet an ill-fated conclusion. What happened to the Hollywood 'happy ending' we may ask...

Firstly, the 'happy ending' is a misnomer. The Hollywood film purports to provide the most gratifying ending to the maximum audience. Under the studio system the 'maximum audience' was defined by the studio heads, who adhered to a hegemonic model of meeting market demands. Bogart walks away from Bergman at the end of *Casablanca* - the ending may not be 'happy' but it was good box office.

Secondly, the low budget noir film of the 1940's and early 1950's, frequently directed, written or photographed by European exiles, eluded the Hollywood pressures; being (a) low budget and (b) absorbing a pessimism of the post war period and consequently finding a market. The 'road movie' - or the couple on the run, often comes into this category.

*You Only Live Once* (Fritz Lang, 1936) relates less to the American social cinema of the 1930's than to the French noir cinema of Carné and Prévert. Their films depict 'the worker-hero rejected and penalised by society, the girl who identifies herself with his plight, their attempts to find happiness together frustrated by poverty and an inescapable past.'

The summary describes *Wild at Heart* as much as the many successors to *You Only Live Once*, which ends with Eddie (Henry Fonda) set up by the law to rejoin his wife, only to be gunned down.

The protagonists of *They Live By Night* (Nicholas Ray), *Gun Crazy* (Joseph Lewis), *Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard), *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn), all die violent deaths. In Godard's *Pierrot le Fou* (1965), *Wild at Heart*'s generation old 'cousin', Ferdinand (Belmondo) retrieves the bullet strewn body of his girl, Marianne (Anna Karina), ties two rows of dynamite sticks around his head and lights the fuse.

Lula and Sailor are spared, family intact, ready to partake the mad consumerism they observed from the front seat of their open top convertible. Their driving days are over.

*Young at heart*

'I miss dancing and talking and specially the other,' writes Lula to the imprisoned Sailor, which summarises the extent of their relationship. When Glinda the Good Witch intones 'Don't turn away from love,' three times to a broken nosed Sailor, the subtext intones Bobby Peru's hypnotic thrice commanded, 'fuck me.' When Bobby Peru holds Lula, he is intoning the words of the Good Witch, 'Don't turn away from love.'

David Lynch describes Lula and Sailor as 'struggling in darkness and confusion like everybody else... The idea that there's some room for love in a really cool world is really interesting to me.'

Awarded the Palme d'Or at Cannes 1990 for its cinematic virtuosity, *Wild at Heart* is a 'film film', says Lynch, with no other purpose than being just film.

The Wizard of Oz's dedication to all those who are 'young at heart', applies to David Lynch's *Wild at Heart* - to the contemporary 'young at heart' who absorb the fragmented narratives of rock videos and television advertising, uninterested in resolved intrigues and plot development. The loose ends can stay loose. Isn't that what 'love in a really cool world' is about?



## Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me (1992)

*"She was a maiden of rarest beauty, and not more lovely than full of glee. And evil was the hour when she saw, and loved, and wedded the painter." Edgar Allen Poe: The Oval Portrait*

Special FBI Agents Chester Desmond and Sam Stanley are sent to Deer Meadows in Washington state to investigate the murder of a young woman named Teresa Banks. In the course of his enquiries, Desmond mysteriously disappears, and Agent Dale Cooper is sent to investigate. Cooper has a premonition of the next victim in what appears to be the work of a serial killer. A 17 year old school girl, foresees Cooper, sexually active and taking drugs — a description of half the schoolgirls in the United States, his colleague suggests.

A year later, in the community of Twin Peaks, just such a girl is on her way to school, Laura Palmer, and sniffs cocaine before the day's lessons begin. She is the homecoming queen, much loved by all, but her innocent looks conceal a hedonistic life style. She keeps a record of her sexual encounters with a character named 'Bob', who has been 'having her' since the age of 12. She is shocked to discover that 'Bob' is her father, Leland.

After two nights of sexual depravity and drug excesses (on the first of which her friend Donna attempts to follow in Laura's footsteps so she may lose her innocence), Laura is kidnapped by her father and beaten to death. He wraps her body in plastic and pushes it into the river.

Within a mysterious place in the forest, called 'the lodge', a place Laura has already visited in her dreams, she sits in an armchair with Agent Cooper by her side, and smiles and watches a white dressed angel ascend into the heavens.

Few viewers of the film are unaware of Laura Palmer's fate, which has been the subject of 30 episodes of a television series, stretched over two seasons and broadcast in 60 countries. The series became a 'media event', the fate of Laura Palmer became material for newspapers, magazines, TV chat shows and radio programmes. The intrigue of the film lies not in 'what' happens to Laura Palmer, nor even 'when and where', nor 'how' or 'why' - these questions have already been answered. What remains is the way in which David Lynch shows these events - information becomes pictures; abstractions are made concrete.

*Portraits of Laura*

The focal point of the film and the television series is the 'image' of Laura Palmer - both figuratively and literally. Her photographic portrait is an icon of 'the feminine' which pervades Lynch's previous films; John Merrick's mother in *The Elephant Man*, Princess Irulan in *Dune*, Dorothy Vallens in *Blue Velvet*. The portrait of Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee) stands framed in the Twin Peaks High School glass cabinet along with school medallions and trophies. Laura is a prize. Bobby Briggs (Dana Ashbrook) trips into the corridor, gloats before Laura's picture, presses his lips to the glass and says, 'You're all mine baby.' In the television series Laura's picture is an image of ambiguity that pervades not only the high school corridor, but the Palmer residence; the bedroom of her best friend, Donna; the home of the introspective Harold Smith; the outsider, James Hurley, and the desk of Twin Peaks' elder, Benjamin Horne. Laura belongs to everyone.

The smiling portrait of Laura is the image of youthful beauty and innocence - she is the pride of the Twin Peaks community, the homecoming queen, (the face of Glinda the Good Witch in *Wild at Heart*), an 'American sweetheart' straight out of a 1950's copy of *True Romance*. Laura and Laura's image, dissected extensively through 30 episodes of television melodrama, is the principle subject of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* - her character oscillates violently from predatory vamp, to sorrow strewn incest victim, to raging junkie, to wayward innocent.

Laura's problem, which soon becomes the film's problem, is that she has no identity, only an image. The creator of the image, David Lynch, claims he made the film 'because I love Twin Peaks. Twin Peaks is a land of mystery...' He is a painter beset with his painting, and 'evil indeed is the hour' when 'the painting' weds the artist. A portrait of Laura is also central to the film noir *Laura* (Otto Preminger, 1944). The name of the painter is Jacoby, the name of Laura's analyst in Twin Peaks. According to the story's narrator, Waldo Lydecker, 'Jacoby was in love with her when he painted it, but he never captured her vibrancy, her warmth.' Similarly, it transpires, Jacoby the Twin Peaks analyst, and his verbal portrayal of Laura fails to capture 'her vibrancy, her warmth.' Jacoby, like other residents of Twin Peaks, knows Laura primarily through her image. As with Laura Palmer of Twin Peaks, Laura is the story of a 'dead' woman and the affect her 'image' has on men.

Her portrait dominates her apartment, an image which dominates the men which come into her life. The power of the image becomes most apparent when Laura is believed dead. 'The power to incite murder which is visually ascribed to Laura's magnificent portrait is revealed to be a product of the neuroses of the men around her, not of the power she wields.' Film critic, Janey Place, is describing here the Preminger film, but the observation is as valid applied to Laura Palmer, who functions as a catalyst to perverse forms of male desire.

Bobby Briggs covets the 'school prize' ('You're all mine babe'), and 'daddy', consumed by an 'evil spirit', bears sexual desires which culminate in murder. The men in between include bar drifters and drug pushers (Jacques Renault, Leo Johnson), the customers of the whorehouse across the border, young innocents (James Hurley, Harold Smith) and the man 'who owns the town', Benjamin Horne. The sanctity of the image is countered only by the depravity of its subject, and its power contrasts to the weakness of the beholder. The sexual 'victims' of Laura Palmer not only lack moral fortitude - they are men corrupted, either by power, drugs or sex. Only the 'law' is above reproach. Special Agent Dale Cooper foresees her plight, and through dreams, tries to warn her.

In Preminger's *Laura* the director's name is used as a means of identification, rather than authorship. Rouben Mamoulian began directing the picture, and some of his scenes remain in the final print - including the characteristic Mamoulian opening. Three writers are credited to the screenplay, based on Vera Caspary's novel. Her image is glamorous and Laura herself a poor imitation. When Laura Hunt appears from the 'dead' to the detective investigating her 'murder', she stands before him a drab figure in a raincoat; wet, bedraggled and unpainted. Her portrait shows her made-up to an ideal of sexual allure, with naked shoulders, painted lips and a helpless 'come-hither' glance.

The detective, Mark McPherson, has already fallen in love with Laura's image, and when she turns up alive, he must abandon the preconceptions suggested by the picture in order to be involved with the real Laura Hunt. Janey Place describes the portrait of Laura as an 'impotent powerless form, powerless to move or act,' a form in which 'the sexual woman is no threat to the film noir man.' In her photograph, displayed alongside the high school trophies, Laura Palmer is safe, passive, controlled, but in real life, declines to comply with the fantasies inspired by the image. She is the picture of innocence concealing guilt, an icon of purity that incites murder.

The 'enantiodromia' of Laura Palmer, the conversion from one extreme to the other, Lynch completes in two scenes; from her walk to school with best friend, Donna - to her retreat into a toilet cubicle before lessons where she hastily sniffs cocaine. This is hardly a revelation however; Laura Palmer's cocaine habit was revealed by Cooper in the first episode of the television series. In fact there is no information in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* that hasn't been disclosed in the television series, and Lynch makes it clear from the start that the film and the TV melodrama are inextricably linked.

*Exploding a television myth*

The film begins with a haunting subdued melody, with the resonance of 'Smoke Rings' or the theme to Chinatown, playing against a pulsating blue grey haze - a close-up of television static. The title credits appear against this nebulous background, white on grey, and as the 'Directed by David Lynch' credit appears, the camera pulls back to reveal a television set. No sooner has the text faded than an axe plunges through the screen and Leland Palmer's mad face appears.

A body wrapped in plastic floats down a river, the body not of Laura Palmer, but Teresa Banks; a river not in Twin Peaks, but in Deer Meadows. The first words we hear and the first face we see, belong to Lynch himself, in the role of FBI Regional Supervisor, Gordon Cole.

These three disparate shots are familiar territory - images plundered from the television screen, as indeed most of the film is. Leland Palmer has been identified as Laura's murderer, and the 'bearer' of Bob's evil spirit. (II.6) Leland met his demise in Episode Nine of the second season, and his funeral was held in Episode Ten. The floating corpse we associate with Laura - the opening shots to the first episode when Pete Martell discovers the plastic enshrouded corpse on the river bank. We have also seen Laura's cousin Madeleine despatched in the same manner.

David Lynch as Gordon Cole has appeared intermittently; along with Cooper, Sheriff Truman and others, a further example of the inviolate upholder of the law. But in the role of a hard-of-hearing supervisor, Lynch plays the role of a boss who goes his own way regardless, a benign fellow deaf to the ideas and criticism of subordinates. A malfunctioning hearing aid becomes a convenient excuse not to have to listen to anyone.

Leland Palmer's axe through the television promises that *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* will be a radical departure from the television medium, but it is a promise unfulfilled. The film ploughs through an already harvested crop, serving new versions of familiar material.

Cole's meeting with agents Desmond (Chris Isaaks) and Sam Stanley (Kiefer Sutherland) on a Dakota airstrip provides us with some eccentric exposition - a woman in a red dress, contorting and grimacing irregularly, transpires to be a semiotic coding of plot detail which the two men decipher on their drive from Oregon to Washington State. Cooper's Tibetan detection method (I.3), was wittier and less gratuitous an eccentricity, as well as a delightful satire on television's means of contriving plot and character summaries in each episode in order to refresh the viewer's memory.

But the most presumptive exploitation of the television series occurs 25 minutes into the story, when at the end of the Deer Meadows prelude, the familiar chords of the Angelo Badalamenti theme resonate over the Twin Peaks highway sign, population... the establishment coda for each one of 30 television episodes. From now on the viewer is in familiar territory - the characters, the locations, the situations - all readily identifiable.

In spite of the savage axe of the opening sequence, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* is the sound and vision of TV not cinema. The film is 'David Lynch's first since *Eraserhead* not shot in wide-screen Panavision (2:35:1 ratio); the film's 1:85:1 ratio, photographed by Ron Garcia, the principle photographer of the television series, is pre-packaged for television transmission.

Also, this is the first feature film in which Lynch has not collaborated ('with sound designer, Alan Splet. Sound design on *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* is attributed to Lynch alone; in the words of William Blake, 'the sound is forc'd, the notes are few.' Following the moody and nostalgic chords of Badalamenti's opening theme, the soundtrack quickly descends into a cacophony of sudden shocks and blaring noise, lacking the subtlety and finesse of the earlier Alan Splet sound designs. Screeching tyres and blasting engines which accompany the one armed man's pursuit of Leland in mid town traffic only serve to highlight the banality of the images, and the dramatic weakness of the situation. As for 'Bob'; that we have grown accustomed to his face on the television necessitates thunderous roars to accompany his menacing look. It's easy to sneak up on someone in the dark and say 'boo' in order to get a fright, but it's not very clever.

### *Demystifying the feminine*

The story begins in Deer Meadows, North Dakota. Special Agent Chester Desmond investigates the murder of Teresa Banks. 'A drifter...' according to the local sheriff, 'no-one knew her'. Despite local hostility, Desmond, with the aid of Agent Stanley, conducts his own autopsy, in the provisional morgue, a wooden shed behind the sheriff's office.

Teresa Banks, 'Bob's' murder victim 12 months prior to the murder of Laura Palmer, is dissected upon a marble slab. Repeated blows to the head are 'cause of death', and a ring is missing from a dirt-ingrained finger. Her painted mouth and eyes are open wide in the obscene pose of rubber doll manufactured for male gratification. Her unruly mop of artificial bleached blond hair intensifies her synthetic appearance. Stanley removes one of her red varnished fingernails - the varnish scratched and faded - to recover an implanted letter, a 't'. The body of Teresa Banks is the body a discarded sexual object, to be dissected by a coroner's

scalpel as if by cutting her open men in suits and white coats could comprehend the nature of sexual desire.

The autopsy scene of Laura Palmer in the television series turns into 'a wild parody of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, as FBI pathologist, Albert, resolutely wields his electrical saw above Laura's cranium. The protests of outraged *Twin Peaks* officials, Dr Hayward, Sheriff Truman and Deputy Brennan result in a near brawl over Laura's corpse, prevented only by the intervention of Agent Cooper.

Transgressing males in a Lynch film meet their demise through violence; their split open skulls invariably spilling brain matter (Bob Ray Lemon and Bobby Peru in *Wild at Heart*; a Canadian drug courier in *Fire Walk With Me*). Transgressing women are beaten to death, then taken apart in autopsy. Lynch pries behind a smiling portrait to expose ugliness, strips away flesh to expose vital organs, removes the skull to examine brain matter. Yet his delving beneath surfaces in an unholy quest for knowledge, his attempts to divine the mystery of the feminine through dissection, yields only blood and organs. Similarly, Laura's promiscuity reveals that sexual knowledge provides no knowledge. When she tells Harold Smith that 'Bob' has been 'having her since she was twelve', the implication is 'possession' rather than 'having sex'.

### *Diner by Night*

Roadside diners feature consistently in Lynch's pictures; usually in the clear light of day; Arlenes Diner in Lumberton (*Blue Velvet*) where Jeffrey and Sandy first plan, then later analyze Jeffrey's intrusion into the apartment of Dorothy Vallens; Normas Diner in *Twin Peaks* the 'heaven where cherry pies go to', and Bob's Diner in Los Angeles where David Lynch and daughter, Jennifer, executed a daily two thirty ritual of coffee and hamburgers for six years, from 1978 to 1984. Lynch claims his inspirations were jotted down on Bob's Diner 'paper serviettes; outlines to forthcoming film scenarios. That agents Desmond and Stanley visit Haps Diner in the darkest hours of night is singularly appropriate in a place like Deer Meadows, the dark twin of *Twin Peaks*.

A flickering blue neon light casts sinister shadows over all who leave and enter; Sam and Chester drink coffee. Behind the counter Irene describes the death of Teresa Banks as a 'freak accident'. An obese male customer with a pretty waif of a girl interjects constantly but has nothing to say. 'Three days before she died,' says Irene, 'her left arm went numb.' Three days before Cooper disappears into a patch of forest outside *Twin Peaks*, his arm turns numb and trembles, Pete Martell's arm trembles, Benjamin Horne's arm trembles and the third last episode of the

television series ends with the extended left arm of 'Bob' dangling in the woodland night air, his body is concealed within the so-called 'Black Lodge.'

The David Lynch diner is the setting for the mandatory rite of coffee drinking, a hallmark of the television series, in which the quality of coffee is a measure for the quality of life. In the Lynch world the worst that can happen to a cup of coffee is the presence of a fish in the percolator (I.1), so it's little surprise that coffee at the Fat Trout Caravan Park doesn't meet with FBI standards. (Sailor and Lula smoked cigarettes in Big Tuna, no doubt avoiding the possibility of inferior coffee as soon as a fish reference arises).

When Desmond and Stanley investigate the caravan of Teresa Banks, caretaker Carl Rodd (Harry Dean Stanton) prepares a pot of 'joe', which becomes both the subject of a prolonged conversation and a male initiation rite ('Strong enough?' 'Yuh!' 'Whoa!', etc). In between they scrutinise a polaroid snap of Teresa Banks, and confront the mute stares of an eccentric old lady, a sinister version of the Twin Peaks 'log lady.'

Their presence in Deer Meadows, from their arrival onwards, provokes local antagonism mediated through the coffee pot. 'Help yourself to the coffee,' says the deputy. 'I'm sure it's fresh... like two, three days old...' as the two agents are kept purposely waiting. When Desmond goes to the attack, by twisting the deputy's nose, he suggests, 'time to start with that fresh pot of coffee.' So sacrosanct indeed is coffee, that when the Twin Peaks series ends, the gold framed portrait of Laura is replaced by a cup of solidified coffee (presented to Cooper inside the 'lodge') upon which the image of Laura is gradually superimposed.

### *The Feds*

The Federal Bureau of Investigation is a division of the US Department of Justice and was created in 1908 to investigate violations of federal law. These include espionage, sabotage, bank robberies, fraud, kidnapping and in special cases, such as serial killings, murder. Under the directorship of J Edgar Hoover (1924 - 1972) the FBI came under increasing attack for political activities and interfering in the constitutional rights of US citizens, and is still an organisation regarded with some suspicion within Democratic Party circles.

David Lynch's portrayal of a Bureau of sympathetic well dressed males, eccentric but goodhearted, can be attributed to a degree of poetic license, but more to the underlying conservatism of the Lynch world. Men working within the law are 'white' and those outside the law are 'black'. The White Lodge is reserved for FBI agents, local lawmen and air force majors. The Black Lodge is for psychopaths.

David Lynch's Philadelphia FBI consists of regional supervisor Gordon Cole (played by himself), an eccentric romantic who finally falls for Shelly, the waitress at Norma's Twin Peaks Diner; the brilliant but belligerent pathologist, Albert Rosenfield, who, after a number of altercations with the slow-thinking Sheriff Truman, embraces and declares his love to the bewildered lawman; the sexually confused but capable transvestite, Denis(e); and, Dale Cooper, mystic, dreamer, resolute, incorruptible.

The FBI is also a place of mysterious and inexplicable goings on; Cooper must confide in Gordon Cole; it's 10:10 am on February 16th, and Cooper is 'worried about today because of the dream I had.' A missing agent, Phillip Jeffries (David Bowie) appears, utters a few words in an appalling parody of a southern accent, and disappears, though his image, together with the image of Cooper, fastens itself to the electronic impulses of a video monitor.

In the hazy time-warp between his coming and going, a brief insight into the red velvet chamber - 'Bob' appears, the young Chalfont boy, and 'the man from another place', the dwarf, who says, 'we live inside a dream.'

Cooper, investigating Desmond's disappearance in Deer Meadows, finds the agents car, upon which the words 'Let's rock' are daubed in red - words uttered by the dwarf to Cooper as he dreams the name of Laura Palmer's murderer in his room at the Great Northern Hotel, Twin Peaks, one year later. (I.3)

### *Red Velvet*

The familiar chords of Angelo Badalamenti's theme and the Twin Peaks road sign returns us instantly to television - Laura walks to school with her best friend Donna, says hello to a parade of familiar characters in the school corridor, and disappears into a toilet cubicle to sniff cocaine. The following few scenes quickly establish Laura's dual character; the traumatised incest victim and the vengeful predator unleashing her venom on unsuspecting male victims. But she is not one character nor the other © she attempts to fulfill and subvert the ideal of her photographic image displayed prominently publicly (the school prize cabinet), and domestically (placed conspicuously in the Palmer household living room).

When she discovers the missing pages in her diary she visits a young man, an introspective wayward soul, Harold Smith, whom she has befriended, and confides with him her fears. She breaks down and weeps as she shows him her diary with pages torn asunder.

Harold: But who would do that?

Laura: Bob!

Harold: But Bob's not real.

Laura: He IS real. He's been having me since I was twelve.

Laura turns into fierce red gummed red eyed vampire and hisses 'Fire walk with me,' then breaks down and weeps. Laura cannot be one character nor the other - she is victim and persecutor; Harold both sympathises and yet fears her. Laura has no identity; she is both traumatised and possessed by an 'evil spirit.' She asks Harold to hide her diary, and as she leaves, turns in the doorway, crying; 'I may never come back.' The shot dissolves to red velvet curtains as a premonition of Laura's destiny. Like a sleepwalker, Laura walks to her inevitable death. But first she must meet with those who dwell behind the red velvet curtains; instruments of fate that usher her on her way.

Laura promises to help out on the Meals on Wheels round when an old lady and a young boy approach. The old lady gives her a painting which shows a half open door in a room decorated with floral wall paper. 'This would look nice on your wall,' she tells Laura. Then the boy looks up and says; 'Someone is looking in your diary now.' Laura runs home and sees 'Bob' in her bedroom, tearing out pages of the diary.

The old lady and the boy are the Chalfonts referred to by Carl as the people who left the Fat Trout Caravan Park immediately after the disappearance of Chester Desmond. They appear again in the television series (II.2), when Donna covers Laura's Meals on Wheels round trying to uncover details about the mystery surrounding her death. Now their name is Fremont, and the little boy performs magic tricks while the old lady tells Donna about Laura's secret diary hidden in the home of the introspective Harold Smith, next door. When Laura takes Cooper to meet them, they have disappeared, and no-one has ever heard of such a couple.

The little boy appears before Leland Palmer shortly before he murders Teresa Banks in Deer Meadows. He wears a white mask and hops up and down like a kangaroo. And they appear again to Laura, inside her dream, inside the painting the old lady gave to her.

Laura, having discovered 'Bob' is her father, visits Donna and weeps uncontrollably. At the dinner table that evening, Leland grabs Laura's hands; 'You haven't washed your hands - look your hands are filthy - there's dirt way under this fingernail,' he says, prying at the fingernail beneath he will later insert a letter 'R', in the manner that the letter 'I' was inserted under the fingernail of Teresa Banks. Laura's mother, Sara, interjects, but Leland persists. He pulls the broken heart locket from Laura's

neck; 'Did you get this from your lover?' he demands. Laura runs to her room weeping.

Subdued, Leland goes to Laura and consoles her; 'Laura I love you - goodnight princess,' he says, and leaves. Laura cries (her two modes of expression throughout the film consist of hysterical weeping and hysterical laughing) and looks at a painting on her bedroom wall. It shows a white dressed blond haired angel feeding a group of children seated around a table. 'Is it true?' she asks, then places the painting she received from the old lady on the wall.

As Laura sleeps she is absorbed into the painting. She enters the room and meets the old lady and young boy once more, as they beckon her through other doors, and finally into the room lined with red velvet curtains and the presence of the dwarf, 'the man from another place.' Cooper sits beside the dwarf, and next to them is a table, on top of which lies a ring bearing a mysterious emblem. It's the same ring which Desmond picked up beneath the Chalfont's caravan in Deer Meadows prior to his disappearance, and the same ring worn by one-armed Mike as he shouts at Leland Palmer, warning Laura; 'It's him. It's your father.' As Laura approaches Cooper says: 'Don't take the ring Laura. Don't take the ring.'

Laura 'awakens'. She is in her bed, but next to her lies the body of a girl covered in blood. The violation of nocturnal sanctity is a recurring Lynch anxiety. In *Eraserhead*, Henry Spencer awakens first to find the departed Mary next to him, executing an entire range of connubial irritations, and then discovering she is 'giving birth' to a bed full of severed umbilical cords. In a later scene, Henry embraces the girl from across the hall, and they both submerge into the watery depths suddenly opened up from the middle of the bed. Laura's bed companion introduces herself: 'My name is Annie,' she says. 'The good Dale is in the Lodge and he can't leave.' When Laura awakens, the ring she was not to have touched, is on her finger.

This enigmatic line, spoken by an even more enigmatic character, only makes sense in connection with the final episode of the television series. Dale Cooper has fallen in love with ex-convent girl, Annie - she is kidnapped by Cooper's adversary, Windom Earle and taken to the 'Black Lodge'. Cooper enters the lodge and in return for Annie's life yields his soul to the evil spirit of 'Bob'. The Dale that has left the lodge is 'evil', and Annie's few brief words are a consolation to *Twin Peaks* viewers left with the final image of the 'pure' Dale Cooper transformed into the psychopathic 'Bob'.

The red velvet chambers of the lodge make up the arena for the 'psychomachia' between Cooper and 'Bob', but also the consoling scenes between Cooper and Laura, and later Laura's vision of the ascending white angel. The old lady and the

boy act as functionaries leading chosen souls into this otherworldly dimension - a place where dreams and reality collude. Guests of 'the man from another place' have included Leland Palmer, Windom Earle, Cooper, Major Briggs, Annie and Laura Palmer. It's a safe bet that future guests will include the missing Chester Desmond, and the enigmatic Phillip Jeffries.

That it is a place where men go by choice, and women go to be murdered, suggests 'the place where women fear to go' in *Dune*, the place where Paul (later the face of Cooper), not only 'goes', but conquers, in order to become the 'supreme being of the universe.' The emergence of the character Annie refers to as the 'good Dale' may have similar implications.

However, for all of Cooper's warnings, for all the forewarnings and omens that forebode the fate of Laura Palmer, there is no avoiding fate. When the 'lord of the underworld' summons, Laura responds.

#### *Persephone's descent into Hades*

Laura drinks a large whisky in front of her gold-framed photograph as homecoming queen, before heading off for The Gun Bar, unaware that her friend Donna has followed her. Outside the entrance, Margaret, the 'log lady' warns Laura that 'all goodness is in jeopardy.' Inside Julee Cruise is singing a wistful ballad, 'She would die for love' (lyrics by David Lynch), Laura sits at a table and weeps.

Donna watches from a distance as the barman, Jacques Renault, sends over two men to Laura's table. She is now composed and greets them with a smile and a challenge. 'So you want to fuck the homecoming queen,' she says, leaving little doubt as to how she finances her cocaine habit. Donna approaches and shows she is determined to join in Laura's 'games', and together they seduce the two men.

They move into an inferno like discotheque, drink spiked beer, and dance provocatively. Laura discards her jacket onto the floor and dances bare breasted - Donna, whose resolve fails her, picks up Laura's jacket and ties it around her waist. She is now imbued with the valour to have sex with her partner on top of a beer table. Laura sees her, and in tantrum of fury, has her thrown out. Laura cannot share the secrets of her nights, nor can she share her journey. She is the lone traveller into her own darkness.

The next day, as father and daughter take the car into town, Mike, the one armed man, a 'messenger from the underworld', warns Laura, pointing at Leland and saying: 'Miss, its him; its your father.' Mike wears the ring which Cooper told her not to pick up. As Laura dissolves into hysterical shrieking, Leland recollects his

encounters with Teresa Banks at the Deer Meadows' motel room, ending with him beating her to death. The flashback is crosscut with Laura's screaming, as though she is witness to her father's memories and deeds.

Back at school Bobby promises Laura a fresh supply of cocaine - he has arranged a meeting in the forest that night. The forest as a place of dark secrets is a recurring Lynch theme, and several sequences of the television series feature the suggestive play of torchlight over trees. Laura and Bobby giggle in a half drunken stupor as Laura casts eerie shadows over the swaying branches, and she continues to giggle as the courier approaches with a bag of cocaine. He pulls a gun, but Bobby shoots first and kills him. Laura regards the brain matter oozing from the dead man's skull, and giggles all the more uncontrollably.

The next day James Hurley talks to Laura outside the house as Leland watches from doorway. In her bedroom Laura sniffs cocaine, while her mother, Sara, envisions a white horse in the living room. (A casual reference to heroine? or a Lynch touch of the surreal? The image recurs several times throughout the series, and Sara's role as medium becomes clear when we share her visions of, among other things, Laura's missing necklace, and the face of 'Bob'.)

'Bob' crawls serpent like through Laura's bedroom window, and as they copulate on her bed, she demands several times: 'Who are you?' When 'Bob's' face becomes the face of her father she screams loud and long. How do we account for her reaction when she has already seen that 'Bob' is her father? This can only be attributed to Laura's denial of reality. 'No, it can't be,' she kept telling herself as she watched her father leave the house, after having witnessed 'Bob' tear pages from the secret diary hidden in her room. They are both obviously one and the same person, yet Laura denies the truth, choosing to live in self manifested illusion. 'Victims of incest... learn secrecy and subterfuge in order to conceal the extent of their pain even from themselves...' writes analyst, Claire Douglas. 'Victims of incest need help in calling things by their real names...' For all the films shortcomings, the portrayal of an incestuous father/daughter relationship is a credible one - Laura creates a bestial face to her nocturnal intruder rather than associate it with the face of her father, she leads a duplicitous life of drugs and promiscuity; drugs to avoid facing reality, and a promiscuity borne of the 'separation' from her body.

Laura's perception of reality dissolves into vagaries - school is a haze of dutch angles and blurred images. The monster of her dreams has erupted forth into her waking life, to drag her down into the underworld. Just as Persephone, the maiden of spring in Greek mythology, voluntarily eats the fruit of the underworld, the pomegranate, Laura's 'addiction', is just one more means of surrendering her identity to the darkness. Persephone (her name means 'bringer of destruction') is

the virtuous maiden, untouched by life, until Hades, the lord of the underworld, takes her down to his subterranean realm and rapes her.

The myth of Persephone's rape is also a key to understanding the nature of the 'beast' - for it is her image of unblemished innocence which incurs the savage desire of Hades. Persephone yields to her fate, but, according to the myth, the compassion of the gods allows her to spend two thirds of her time in Olympus with the gods, while the other third she must fulfill her conjugal obligations and remain in the underworld. In psychological terms above ground represents the 'conscious' and below ground, the unconscious; or the states of 'wakefulness' and 'sleep'. For Laura, her period of 'sleep' is the one third of her life dominated by 'Bob'; but now he has come to claim her 'conscious' state as well.

*Laura's last night*

Laura sniffs coke, puts on her sexiest underwear and half-heartedly arranges to meet James Hurley outside the house. Before she leaves she looks upon her bedroom picture of the angel feeding the children. The angel disappears before her eyes and she weeps bitterly. Leland watches from the window as Laura disappears on the back of James' motorcycle. They stop on the roadway in the middle of the forest:

James: What's wrong with us. We have everything.

Laura: Everything but everything.

James: You always hurt the one you love.

Laura: Or the one you pity.

Laura vacillates from nasty to kind; they embrace and she runs off into the forest, with James calling after her. In the forest she meets Jacques, Leo Johnson and Ronnette Pulaski. They go to Jacques place, sniff cocaine and Laura strips off and dances in her underwear. To the accompaniment of overpowering euphonic discord, Jacques ties up Laura on the mattress, and in the process she gets bitten on her shoulder by a caged bird named Waldo. ('Waldo' is the name of Laura Hunt's would be murderer in *Laura*, 1944). These details are all pieced together later by Agent Cooper.

Leland watches the sordid proceedings through the cabin window and when Jacques walks outside the cabin to relieve himself, Leland slugs him over the head. When Leo comes out in a drug induced stupor, and sees Jacques, unconscious and bleeding, he gets in the car and drives off. Leland takes Laura and Ronette. One armed Mike gives chase.

Leland ties up both the girls inside a disused railway wagon, and before Laura he transforms into Bob. Laura screams but then sees her ascending angel © the murder becomes a sacrificial rite - father must sacrifice the daughter to appease the gods of the underworld. 'Forgive me', he says, as he clubs her to death. Leland throws Ronette's unconscious body out of the compartment, then disappears into the patch of forest known as the 'Black Lodge.'

Laura's body, shrouded in plastic, floats down the river, to be washed up on the shore and discovered the following day, as portrayed in episode one of the television series. Laura herself is seated in an armchair in a chamber lined with red velvet curtains. 'Bob' is here, her father, Leland, one-armed Mike and 'the man from another place', the dwarf. 'All I can give you is 'garmonbozia' - sorrow and grief,' he tells Laura in his backward spoken language. Cooper stands beside her, his hand on her shoulder, as she gleefully observes the white angel from her bedroom picture, ascending into the sky.

The final image of Laura's smiling face in misty half tones - an icon that precedes his earlier films, shows that for all his efforts to demystify the feminine, David Lynch remains confounded and his women have survived endless dissections, prevailing as the unknowable 'Other.'

### *The Beast devours Beauty*

The sacrifice of Laura by her father, is the scenario of Beauty and the Beast - La Belle et La Bete (Jean Cocteau, 1946). The father has plucked a rose from the garden of the beast, and for that he must forfeit his life, or sacrifice his daughter. For the sake of the father, Belle sacrifices herself; she presents herself to the beast at his enchanted castle.

Leland Palmer, at a point prior to the murder of Teresa Banks, has transgressed in the garden of the Beast, and is consumed by a spirit that embodies evil. He carries the Beast within himself, and Laura sacrifices herself to it, for the sake of the father. Linda Leonard in *The Wounded Woman*, writes 'the father-daughter sacrifice has its roots in the dominance of masculine power over the feminine. When the masculine is cut off from feminine values, when it does not allow the feminine principle to manifest itself in its own way out of its own centre, when it does not allow the feminine its manifold number of forms but reduces it only to those which serve masculine ends, it loses its relation to the values of the feminine realm. It is then that the masculine becomes brute like and sacrifices not only the outer woman but also its inner feminine side.' The story of Persephone, the beautiful young maiden, who is dragged down to hell by Hades and raped, is several thousand years old; the fairy tale of La Belle et La Bete can be traced back

to the 1700's, but the narrative ingredients of the father - daughter trauma recur in contemporary recountings; *Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984) and *Paperhouse* (Rose, 1989) are two recent examples. In these films the father figure of the girl's respective dream worlds is a terrifying force, associated with death. In both instances the adolescent girls become 'warriors' in order to fight back and defeat the threat that lurks in their sleeping, 'unconscious' chthonic state.

In *La Belle et La Bete*, Beauty not only confronts the beast but tames him, and transforms him into the prince. It is the story of a young girl's initiation, symbolising her release from the father so that she integrate her own erotic 'animal' nature. The Prince and Beauty are united and ascend into the heavens together. (The film was criticized for its explicit overstated and excessively sentimental 'happy ending', but doubtless won over Lynch who describes Cocteau as 'the heavyweight of the surrealists'). In *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, the equally explicit and overstated 'happy ending' has Laura's angel ascending alone, and Laura, herself, a ghostly presence in a ghostly place, also alone. Seen figuratively, she has been unable to heal the traumatic wound - the separation from her erotic side caused by the incestuous relationship with her father. As long he remains 'the beast', she is unable to integrate the 'animal' side of her nature, which prevents from her from having a reciprocal relationship with a man.

The story of *La Belle et La Bete* follows the transformation of the beast; at the outset he is a heartless monster demanding the life of any that trespass his garden. But just as the story concerns Beauty's awakening to her femininity through accepting the beast within the masculine, it also concerns the beast's change through his love for Beauty. The 'beast' of *Fire Walk With Me*, is forever a beast - there is no possibility of redemption or transformation. 'Bob' is an all consuming evil spirit - through Leland he has claimed Teresa Banks, and now the perfect maiden, the embodiment of Persephone, Laura. Later he will consume Laura's cousin Madeleine, Leland Palmer himself, and, finally, his 'pure' counterpart, Cooper.

Unfortunately the story fails to resolve the dramatic problem of a submissive protagonist and attempts to compensate through sequences of depravity and revulsion. (Teresa Banks autopsy, Laura at The Gun Bar, Leland's roadside dementia, etc). The passive 'goalless' character arouses not sympathy, not empathy, but indignation. Discussing the commercial failure of his film *Patty Hearst* (1988) writer/director Paul Schrader said that, 'the definitive problem... is that it deals with a passive protagonist. Movies are about people who do things. The number one fantasy of the cinema is that we can do something - we are relatively impotent in our own lives so we go to the movies to watch people who are in control of their lives. *Patty Hearst* violates the cardinal rule of the cinema.'

When Laura watches her white dressed angel ascend into the heavens, she is just one cardboard character gleefully observing another; a character without an identity, without a story.



## Twin Peaks (1989 - 1991)

*'It is spring, moonless night in the small town, starless and bible black.'* Dylan Thomas: *Under Milk Wood*

**A seventeen year old schoolgirl, Laura Palmer, is found murdered on the river bank of a small community in NW USA. FBI special agent, Dale Cooper, links the girl's death to previous killings elsewhere and his investigations uncover realms of narcotics, prostitution and perversity otherwise incongruous with the town's tranquil appearance. Through a series of revelations and visions Laura Palmer's murderer is revealed to be a deranged psychopath, 'Bob', an evil spirit who has consumed Laura's father, Leland. Leland murders Laura's cousin, Madeleine, but when he dies 'Bob's' spirit lives on. Cooper enters an other-world dimension in order to confront this evil, only to be consumed by it himself.**

Twin Peaks is so conspicuously a part of the David Lynch oeuvre it's omission would be tantamount to neglect. For all the attention Lynch has received in the film world, that he has become a household name is due to two seasons, totalling thirty episodes, of Twin Peaks. Such is the impact of television.

Like a renaissance fresco painter conceives a 'work' and allows his understudies to paint the details, or, a more appropriate analogy in view of Lynch's background; like the animator draws the first and last leaving his colleagues to complete the intermittent frames, Twin Peaks is a David Lynch 'work'. 'Created by Mark Frost and David Lynch,' claims the series credit, and Mark Frost, with his background as a television scriptwriter, has provided a story line and characterisations which allow Lynch to exercise the full reign of his visual prowess.

Of the thirty episodes, David Lynch has a director's credit on six, most conspicuously on the first and last episodes, and his writer's credit extends to the first three episodes, and the first episode of the second season. Lynch is a 'choirmaster' to a group of collaborators which make up some of the more interesting talents working within American film and television. Among the fourteen directors is Tim Hunter, who directed *River's Edge* (1986 - the film begins with a high 'school girl drowned in a river in a small American town; see *Blue Velvet*); Diane Keaton, whose directorial style in *Twin Peaks* was already evident in her highly original feature film debut, *Heaven* (1989); Tina Rathborne, who

directed Lynch and Isabella Rossellini in *Zelly and Me* (1987), and Duwayne Dunham, Lynch's editor on *Blue Velvet* and *Wild at Heart*.

Mark Frost's writer's credit extends to ten episodes; the other regular contributors (among the total of nine different writers) include Robert Engels (co-writer of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*) and Harley Peyton. Under Lynch's direction and inspired by his predilection for the 'odd', they created a series which revitalised the ailing genre of the American television series drama. Series which had dominated audience ratings up until the late 1980's had folded; *Dallas*, *Falcon Crest*, *Dynasty*; all entrenched in the television drama style of the 1970's.

Whereas the feature film, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, is television made for the cinema, the *Twin Peaks* television series is cinema made for television. (European viewers are unhindered by the fade outs to commercial breaks that are the hallmark of US television drama). Although the interiors are recorded in the modest Los Angeles City Studios, *Twin Peaks* features a generous proportion of exterior location shooting (Snoqualmie, near Seattle, in Washington State), and shot on 35mm film. Principle cinematographer, Ron Garcia, avoids the usual flat television lighting in favour of soft hues and suggestive chiaroscuro.

Picture composition refrains from television's favoured 'talking heads' shots and three camera set-ups. In *Twin Peaks* the homes have ceilings, as if to scorn the standard three loose wall studio set of television drama and situation comedy.

Angelo Badalamenti's haunting theme weaves through the narrative with the resonating certainty of a feature film soundtrack rather than a television production. The song as leitmotif, which Lynch employs in his feature films, is equally effective in *Twin Peaks*, in contrast to the slapdash, even vulgar plundering of hit parade successes in the formula Michael Mann style of television production, such as *Miami Vice*, *The FBI Story*, and others.

*Twin Peaks*, however, is not just well-produced television drama. *Twin Peaks* succeeds because it is not just television drama. It is television, all television. It is soap opera, melodrama, murder mystery, situation comedy, high school romance - *Twin Peaks* is the unabridged collection of television clichés. It's *Peyton Place*, *Gibbsville*, *Days of Our Lives*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, *The Blackboard Jungle*, *Columbo*, *The Prisoner* and much more besides.

*Casablanca* became a cult movie because it is not one movie... it is "movies", suggests Umberto Eco. *Twin Peaks* is 'cult television' for 'the same reason. Eco maintains that using just a few of the formula 'from a repertoire that had stood the test of time... the result is simply kitsch.' *Casablanca* is the accolade of the

Hollywood system because its authors have 'used wholesale' the 'repertoire of stock formulas.'

Twin Peaks does not use the entire repertoire of television formula, no one programme could, and is shamelessly kitsch. Television is ephemeral and the cinema endures. Casablanca has survived fifty years and may well survive another fifty years. If Twin Peaks does not simply disappear into television's depository of ephemera it may well be due the programme having gone beyond television cliché and extracting chunks of film history.

It is 'the murder mystery', with Holmes and Watson (Cooper and Truman) in pursuit of an archfiend, Moriarty (Windom Earle). There are elements of 'black comedy'; Bobby and Shelly conducting their clandestine love-affair before the salivating and incapacitated Leo Johnson. Dick Chamberlayne and Andy Brennan's charge of a six year old boy, whom they are convinced is a murderer.

It is 'the romantic drama'; doomed love between James Hurley and Donna Hayward, between Norma Jennings and Ed Hurley, between Audrey Horne and her millionaire boyfriend, John.

Twin Peaks is also film noir, screwball comedy, melodrama and gothic romanticism. It is *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Peyton Place*, *Frankenstein*, *Sunset Boulevard* and *Blue Velvet*. It is also 'surrealistic', in that 'the imaginary tends to become real, transgressing the established modes of television narrative. Measured against US television's interminable output of television drama, Twin Peaks is decidedly 'odd.'

### *'Odd'*

The first indication of 'odd' in Twin Peaks occurs a few minutes after the opening, when Pete Martell telephones to Sheriff Truman, to tell him he's found a body washed up on the river bank. The switchboard operator, Lucy, connects the call. In prolonged and agonizing detail she describes to the sheriff which telephone not to use, by way of indicating which telephone, should, in fact, be used. Lucy is as eccentric a character that ever graced that most American of film genres, the screwball comedy. Soon afterwards, her boyfriend, Deputy Andy Brennan, breaks down tearfully while photographing the body of the drowned Laura Palmer. He is another of Twin Peaks 'odd' characters. 'Is this going to happen every time?' Sheriff Truman admonishes the grief stricken deputy.

'Odd' is convincing in Twin Peaks, especially in the first series of eight episodes, because 'oddness' is a sparse contrast to the 'normal.' (In the second season

'oddness' is considerably less sparse). Of the 22 plot-bearing characters presented in the first 25 minutes of episode one, only Lucy and Andy, and the eye-patched, curtain-obsessed Nadine, are distinctly 'odd.'

Howard Hawks discussing his film *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) maintained; 'The picture had a great fault... there were no normal people in it. Everyone you met was a screwball... In *Twin Peaks* the odd is juxtaposed against the normal, the eccentric against the conventional. Some of the initially 'normal' characters become 'odd'; Leland Palmer, Major Briggs, Benjamin Horne; while other decidedly 'odd' characters are introduced as the plot develops; Dr Jacoby, Laura's analyst, Margaret, the 'log lady', FBI forensic scientist, Albert Rosenfield, supervisor Gordon Cole, 'the man from another place', the giant - and as many others as the series progresses. But the majority of characters are identifiable from any number of American television dramas. Sheriff Truman from *The Andy Griffith Show*, Dr Hayward from *General Hospital*, the high school students from *Blackboard Jungle*, and so on.

The 'tragic' characters of the series (James Hurley, Josie Packard, etc) are contrasted against 'malevolent' characters - Leo Johnson, Jean and Jaques Renault, later Windom Earle, and others.

But the unifying character is FBI Special Agent, Dale Cooper, and the 'psychomachia' of the series is between Cooper and 'Bob'; as purely white and purely black as any two opposing characters are likely to be.

Cooper is paradoxically the most straightforward character, and the most complex. He represents the Lynch 'whole body', without blemish either physically or morally. As an outsider he has no dark secrets; indeed his function is to cast light on the 'darkness' of others. He is odd - in expressing his individuality; normal - in performing his public role.

That believable characters are matched against 'unbelievable' characters, is an ironic subdivision based on what decades of television drama has established as 'believable'. Is Sheriff Truman more believable than Andy Brennan, or simply more recognisable?

*Twin Peaks* 'oddness' relates to situations as much as characterisations. Normal procedures are imbued with strangeness which is explained in tangibles. In the first episode Cooper and Truman visit the bank where Laura has had a bank deposit box. A deer's head lies across the table, its open glass eyes staring upwards. 'It fell down off the wall', explains the bank manager's assistant, 'and there was nowhere else to put it.' When Cooper and Truman examine Laura's body at the morgue, the

flickering light casts eerie shadows across the room. Sorry, apologises the hospital porter. Must be something wrong with the light globe, he says.

Visual contrasts at Cooper's breakfasts at the Great Northern Hotel, are provided by singing and boisterous Icelanders, to uniformed 'majorettes, to visiting Scotsmen. In its second series, *Twin Peaks* 'oddness' becomes more pronounced, more outré. In the episode directed by Diane Keaton (II.15) Donna arranges to meet James at roadside bar in a town outside *Twin Peaks* - the bar is lined with soldiers in what appear to be German uniforms of the second world war. They sit, stand, drink and sing German songs in unison, in a pastiche of a musical parade number. The most pertinent visual 'oddness' of *Twin Peaks* is the programme, 'Invitation to Love.' In Episode Three Lucy recapitulates plot points of *Twin Peaks*' favourite television soap opera, and excerpts are screened till the end of the first season. 'Invitation to Love' is the 'same sinister shadow to *Twin Peaks* as the Mrs Beaumont's television set in *Blue Velvet*'s Lumberton. Safe on the sofa of her suburban home, Mrs Beaumont sips coffee watching TV: a figure bearing a gun ascends a staircase. This televisual 'shadow' becomes a reality for her son Jeffrey at the end of the film, who hides himself in a wardrobe, as Frank Booth ascends the staircase outside, gun in hand, seeking him out.

Episodes to 'Invitation to Love' begin with the facial close-ups and interminable dialogue of daytime soap opera, as played out by the programme's four principle characters: Jade, Chet, Montana and Jared. It becomes more macabre, more sinister as it develops, correlating to the escalating violence in *Twin Peaks*. In the penultimate episode (I.7), as the Johnson household's television screens Chet shooting Jade, Shelly shoots Leo, who flees wounded into the forest. No-one watches television in Dallas. *Twin Peaks* fearlessly parodies its own genre.

### *Seventy Little Stories*

*Twin Peaks* begins where *Blue Velvet* ends; a robin on the branch of a tree. We see a waterfall, a timber yard, the forest and a river. An Asian woman paints her face before a mirror - her gaze is solemn, her countenance ethereal. A middle aged man in a logging jacket picks up his fishing tackle and mutters to himself: 'Gone fishing.' He walks down to the river and the edge of the flowing stream he notices some plastic wrapping. Closer examination reveals the body of a girl shrouded in plastic.

The hunt for a killer becomes an excuse to visit small town America with its idiosyncratic characters, and sub-surface perversities. The heightened absurdity of specific plot and character contrivances periodically reduce the validity of the 'place' to parody and pastiche. Consequently, the series is imbued with the dynamic of the unexpected, where absurdity contrasts the conventional. It is television in

which the viewer is denied a 'reading' (dream sequences, 'lodge' sequences) amidst television in which the viewer is thoroughly familiar.

The polarising of opposites prevails throughout the series, and the development of key characters provide examples of Lynchian 'conversions' (enantiodromia). Nearly thirty plot-bearing characters are presented in the first episode, most of whom undergo the conversion from one extreme to another. These make up stories within the story, which reflect the essence of the main narrative, and a theme which recurs throughout Lynch's films. As we go beneath the image of the pristine Laura Palmer, we uncover someone else; the person who is Laura Palmer's shadow - promiscuous, predatory, drug addicted: defiled.

Leland Palmer is the grieving father, 'a highly respected citizen of the community,' according to Sheriff Truman (II.4). Leland becomes deranged through grief, his hair turns grey and he begins to 'dance out' his madness. He is transformed into a 'vengeful' murderer, and suffocates the injured Jacques Renault in his hospital bed, the man suspected of Laura's murder. Finally, he is the 'psychopathic' murderer, as he kills his niece, Madeleine, by beating her to death, and throwing her in the river as he had done with Laura. The conversion is complete: the persona ('mask') of his personality is stripped away to reveal the face of 'Bob', the embodiment of evil.

'Bob's' identity is not revealed until the second series (II.6) yet those who describe his appearance many episodes earlier, are Leland himself, his mediumistic wife, Sara, and Laura's cousin, Madeleine. 'Bob' remained within the family, until Leland had destroyed himself in a fit of rage, locked in a prison cell, beating his head against the stone wall.

Sheriff Harry S Truman, as stalwart a character one could encounter in the pantheon of American television drama, is, at the end of Episode One, revealed to be passionately involved with Jocelyn Packard, the beautiful Hong Kong widow of the sawmill owner, Andrew Packard.

His blind entanglement leads to his undoing. He ignores the evidence of Jocelyn's duplicity - her attempted murder of Cooper, and successful murders of underworld figures in Seattle, and her implication in her husband's attempted murder. Truman is finally a witness to another of Jocelyn's successful ploys as she shoots her former 'owner', Thomas Eckhardt, then, mesmerised by an unknown fear, dies before him. (II.16) Truman, as upright and steadfast as the president from which he takes his name, retreats into hiding, incommunicado, at the mercy of copious quantities of alcohol. Only an attempted murder by one of Eckhardt's envoys, the seductress Amanda, jolts him back to reality. (II.18) Truman's ordeal - the initiatory journey through a hell shaped by desire - is Lynch's more favoured narrative structure. It's the ordeal of Henry Spencer in *Eraserhead*, of Jeffrey in *Blue Velvet*, in recurs in

one form or other in other films, not least, *Twin Peaks*. The unsullied souls of Lucy Moran and Andy Brennan, Ed and Nadine Hurley, Eileen and Will Hayward, even Donna and James, make their respective descents into passion's darkness.

Lucy and Andy, well intentioned innocents, and as likely a pair of twin souls to be encountered in *Twin Peaks*, drift apart after communication failures concerning Lucy's pregnancy, and Andy's poor sperm count. Lucy's brief liaison with Richard Chamberlayne (!) leaves her uncertain as to who is the father of her expected child. There are dark moments for Andy and Lucy both, but finally she chooses Andy regardless (II.22) and the couple are reunited.

Ed and Nadine Hurley's relationship makes a similar cyclic return to its uneasy status portrayed in Episode One. Ed's clandestine affair with Norma, the owner of the Double R Diner, comes out into the open following Nadine's concussion, where she regresses into a seventeen year old high school girl. (II.1) She embarks on a high school romance with Donna's former boyfriend, Mike, whose 'conversion' is as drastic as Benjamin Horne's. From an unruly brawling delinquent (I.1), under the powerful ministrations of Nadine, he transforms into a well-dressed quietly spoken young man, with brylcreemed hair and open-eyed awe over Nadine's sexual prowess (II.20). After a second blow on the head, however, Nadine reverts to her 'true self', and reclaims her hold on Ed (II.22). Ed and Norma's marriage plans are abandoned.

Father daughter relationships constitute a particular complication in *Twin Peaks*, not least the incestuous relationship between Laura Palmer and her father. Audrey Horne, whose sexual precocity sabotages father's business deal (I.1), decides to investigate Laura's death herself, and secures a job at One Eyed Jacks, one of 'father's' more clandestine business ventures, by tying a cocktail cherry stalk into a pretzel with her tongue. Her first client is to be none other than the establishment's (and her) 'patron', a prospective encounter which teasingly ends the series' first season.

As the series develops the antagonism between father and daughter is displaced by clan loyalty, and following Benjamin's 'conversion' ('I just want to be good' II.16), they collaborate to do humanitarian 'good deeds'; saving the pine weasel and saving Ghostwood from redevelopment.

Meanwhile Audrey embarks on a brief romance with a young millionaire colleague of 'father's'; John Justice Wheeler, whom, at her behest, plunders her of her virginity in his private jet, just minutes before he takes off for South America (II. 20).

Her now unhindered alliance to father, results in her chaining herself to the vault doors of the local bank (in protest against the bank's involvement with the Ghostwood project: II.22), on the same day Andrew Packard, together with Pete Martell, comes to check the contents of a bank box left by arch-rival, Thomas Eckhardt. The bomb that kills all three is one of a number of barbed 'practical jokes' which make up the final episode.

Another, is the departure of Donna from the Hayward household, when she discovers her biological father is none other than Benjamin Horne (thus Audrey's half-sister). Benjamin's new found urge 'to be honest' discloses this jumbo-sized skeleton in the Hayward closet, so that Dr Will, too, undergoes the 'enantiodromia', from peaceful loving 'good father', to enraged and violent 'non-father'. 'We're so happy to have a daughter like you,' Dr Hayward tells Donna in the closing minutes of the first episode - in the final episode Donna leaves for destinations undisclosed.

The victim of the most savage 'practical joke' - and most drastic 'conversion' - is Leo Johnson. Leo Johnson is introduced by his vehicle (I.1) a murderous truck lifted from the storyboard of Steven Spielberg's *Duel*. When Bobby Briggs and Leo's wife Shelly drive to Shelly's place to pursue their amorous diversions, the sight of Leo's truck is enough to promptly cool their ardour, and send Bobby's hand to the gear stick's reverse position.

Leo passes his time by terrorising Shelly, and running drug deals across the border. He is involved with a catalogue of illegal activities and for all his jealous rages against Shelly, his own sexual entanglements are many. Laura Palmer's last night was spent with Leo.

Leo's shotgun wounds, on the eve of the sawmill burning down (fired by Norma's husband, Hank; I.8) leaves Leo mentally and physically handicapped - a drooling vegetable before Shelly and Bobby's ongoing affair (II.1). His sudden recovery scarcely enables him to reek his vengeance on the defenceless Shelly (II.13), and he flees wounded into the night, only to become a victim himself in the malevolent hands of a psychotic more demented than himself, Windom Earle (II.14). He becomes the tortured and demeaned victim he had made of his wife, a house slave, at the sadistic whim of Windom Earle. The fate of Leo Johnson (ultimately undisclosed) and the completed conversion from persecutor to victim, sees him the hapless dupe to Windom Earle's elaborately fiendish practical joke - he attaches a wire to Leo's teeth which is connected to an explosive device, set to ensure Leo's rapid demise with so much as an ill-timed twitch. Lynch fulfills the obligations of narrative drama's formal closure, with parodic brutality.

*The Beautiful Girl Across the Hall*

... was the credit for the seductress in Henry Spencer's tenement block, who lured Henry to his own bed and drowned him. This was one of Henry's many bouts of paranoia in the prolonged nightmare of *Eraserhead*, and the 'beautiful woman' is one of the many deadly females that inhabit the Lynch film.

The first image of the series shows Jocelyn Packard before a mirror painting her lips. The same evocative image recurs in her final episode (II.16), as she prepares for her meeting with Thomas Eckhardt at a room of the Great Northern Hotel.

The face of the seductress reflected in a mirror is a favoured icon of the film noir femme fatale, suggesting both duplicity and narcissism. Jocelyn Packard is a woman 'in two minds' - quite literally in 'doubt' (from 'double' - in two minds) about her identity. 'You don't know me,' she tells Harry. 'I was what you wanted me to be.' (II. 6) Harry was one victim among many, which included Thomas Eckhardt, 'the man who saved her from the slums of Hong Kong.' In *A Study in Scarlet* (1933, Edwin Marin) Sherlock Holmes suspects the beautiful Chinese widow to the supposedly murdered Captain Pyke to be harbouring 'dark secrets'. She has the sad doe-eyed face of Joan Chen's 'Josie'. Holmes reveals that Captain Pykes 'murder' was a hoax, just as the suspicious demise of Josie's husband, Andrew Packard, was a hoax. Andrew returns and Jocelyn has met her lethal match. As Cooper watches her in her death throes, he observes the manic face of 'Bob' behind her - the spirit from the 'evil place in the woods' claims one more victim.

Jocelyn's ruin was masterminded by a more subtle, more devious femme fatale, Andrew's sister, Catherine. From the first episode, as Catherine observes Truman and Josie embrace, and makes a mysterious telephone call (later revealed to be the supposedly deceased Andrew), it is apparent she is conspiring sinister deeds. Her motive is to take over the sawmill for the Ghostwood Project, a narrative element second only in significance to the murder of Laura Palmer in the full sweep of the *Twin Peaks* saga.

In an episode where Catherine plots an insurance fraud (I.7), she plays the Barbara Stanwyck role of Phyllis Dethfelsen from *Double Indemnity* (1944, Billy Wilder). Like Mrs Dethfelsen, Catherine conspires to deceive her husband, Pete, with the aid of an insurance salesman, Walter Neff (Fred McMurray's role in the same film) in an elaborate scheme of fraud and duplicity. In this instance however. Catherine fakes her death in the sawmill fire (I.8), only to reemerge in the guise of a Japanese businessman and swindle the project's initiator, Benjamin Horne (II.8).

Confused and love-torn, James Hurley rides out of *Twin Peaks* on his Harley Davison to encounter the most beguiling femme fatale of the series. He meets

Evelyn Marsh at a highway bar in another town. She persuades him to fix her husband's car; the husband is 'out of town'. She insists he stay, a guest in a large gothic residence, well hidden from the main road. 'There's a room on top of the garage,' she tells him, as James Hurley assumes the Joe Gillis (William Holden) role to Evelyn Marsh's Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson). This line, from the pages of the *Sunset Boulevard* screenplay (1950, Billy Wilder), has its origins in the Jean Cocteau film, *Orphée* (1949).

*Sunset Boulevard*, Gloria Swanson plays the alluring spider woman who ensnares Joe Gillis in her web of subterfuge, and ultimately devours him. In *Orphée*, the servant of death, lives in 'a room on top of the garage.' He works as a chauffeur. Death is a beautiful seductress dressed in black. 'How do you expect Death to look?' she asks Orphée. Herbetuse is an extant suicide with a transitory respite upon the earthly plane to act as 'courier' for his black dressed mistress, the ultimate femme fatale. She ensnares Orphée just as Gillis is the poor fool rushing toward his own death at the hand of femme fatale, Norma Desmond.

James Hurley, the 'noir male' so preoccupied with his past that there is little question of a future, having left the protective limitations of *Twin Peaks*, unwittingly offers himself to one more Lynchian femme fatale. Having drifted pitifully from one love-torn situation to another, he tells Evelyn Marsh; 'I loved a girl who died. Her name was Laura. I thought I knew her but I guess I didn't.' (II. 13) Like *Orphée*, he must leave his beloved behind in the underworld. 'Jean Cocteau,' says Lynch, 'is the heavyweight of the surrealists...'

### *Under Ghost Wood*

Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* is a lyrical portrayal of the inhabitants of a Welsh fishing village, Llaregyb. It was made into a film, directed by Andrew Sinclair in 1973, who pieced together 'seventy little stories...into one visual whole,' featuring the memorable characters of the blind Captain Cat (Peter O'Toole), Rosie Probert (Elizabeth Taylor) and the 'visitor', Richard Burton, whose voice narrates Dylan Thomas's verse.

According to Sinclair the main problem in bringing *Under Milk Wood* to the screen, was to 'give a unity to the film, a visual reason for all 'the marvellous speeches of the Voices...' Mark Frost, David Lynch's co-author to *Twin Peaks*, describes a similar undertaking in the formative stages of the television series. 'Not until a body washed up on the shore that we had a starting point for the story... The two detectives provide an access into everyone's lives - who all have secrets.' Sinclair in *Under Milk Wood* created two characters (inspired by Thomas's voices) who go back to Llaregyb to visit the same girl, Norma Jane Jenkins, a girl whom both men

had met in the war. At the end of the film Norma Jane walks away into the graveyard and we realise that she has been dead many years, and the two men who come to visit her are 'two visible spirits from the sea and the dark wood who have come back to relive their life in the timeless town and 'resurrect their lost love.'

This 'gothic' element pervades Twin Peaks - 'a timeless town', embracing the decades between 1950 and 1990. Just as the two 'spirits' enter into the lives of the townsfolk of Llauregyb as they search for a 'lost love' © Cooper and Truman search for the community's 'lost love' - the person behind the portrait of Laura Palmer.

Milk Wood is the mysterious place from whence spirits emerge and to where they disappear; Ghostwood, outside Twin Peaks, is a mysterious part of the forest where spirits and people alike, disappear and reappear. From Major Briggs to the husband of the 'log lady', Margaret, twenty years earlier.

The forest is the foundation of the Twin Peaks community; its timber is the town's lifeblood, yet as the story opens, the sawmill is running at a loss and Benjamin Horne and Catherine Martell attempt to hasten its bankruptcy in order to implement their redevelopment scheme. The scheme would mean the end of Ghostwood as a forest. Following Benjamin's 'conversion' (II.16) he determines to 'save' Ghostwood, at the same time protecting the local pine weasel.

More sinister powers are at work, regardless of Benjamin's and Catherine's schemes; Ghostwood is the 'unknown' and the 'unknowable' - the realm beyond the enclaves of civilisation. Ghostwood is 'nature' to Twin Peaks' 'culture'. Shots linking scenes consist of trees blowing in the wind © the forest; or traffic lights swaying over an empty road - the town.

Ghostwood is linked to an arcane past - Hawk, the native American deputy, describes a 'white lodge' and a 'black lodge' housed within the woods; 'the dweller on the threshold where you face your shadow', he says. (II.11) Following Major Brigg's disappearance (II.10), Cooper concludes 'there's a powerful force that exists in those woods.' (II.11)

The outdoors, especially by night, is a fearful place for Lynch and he admits there were prolonged periods in his childhood when he dared not venture outdoors. In *The Grandmother* the boy loses his companion in the film's only exterior scenes; once John Merrick in *The Elephant Man* leaves the security of his hospital chambers, the fury of the fates are unleashed upon him; in *Wild at Heart*, beyond the road, in the middle of nowhere and in the middle of the night, young people career off the highway and bleed to death. A casual stroll through a field uncovers a severed ear (*Blue Velvet*), and body parts dangle mid-air from the unseen boundary of the 'black lodge' in the middle of Ghostwood (*Twin Peaks II.20*).

*David Lynch Directs*

*"Laura"*

[Titles' are to facilitate an episode's theme and identification. Episodes as screened are neither numbered nor titled.]

Episode One, First Season. Written by Mark Frost and David Lynch. Directed by David Lynch. 1989. 90 minutes.

The 'Twin Peaks' episodes directed by David Lynch, distinguish themselves from the series' ensemble of directorial talent in two ways - the strength of the imagery, and the extremes of emotional provocation to which Lynch is prepared to go. The Lynch episodes are the most violent, and the most shamelessly sentimental.

The profusion of striking images in the first episode include the initial portrait of Jocelyn, as she stares vacantly at her own reflection - regarding her own face yet looking faraway, somewhere else. She is waylaid by her own internal reflections, arrested in time, lost in an ethereal 'other' world, with the red brush that colours her lips dangling from her hand.

The next close-up, also of an attractive young woman, similarly shows a face 'lost' in another world. Laura Palmer is shrouded in plastic forming an opaque frame around her features. Even in death she is a portrait, but where the gold frame of her high school photograph accentuated her blond hair, the pale blue of the plastic wrapping matches the hue of her lips.

News reaches Sheriff Truman that 'the Pulaski girl has been found', and the camera gazes upward toward the iron girders of a railway bridge. A girl in a tattered slip, severed ropes around her bare wrists and ankles, staggers across the line, staring blankly before her. An old man fixing his car on the other side of the bridge, looks up and sees her. The continuity makes little sense (this is her first appearance, yet Truman's been told she's found), but the image is striking - the girl's tiny frame is dwarfed further by the imposing steel girders. Her staring eyes, her half naked body, and the severed cords, describe her ordeal as eloquently as the little girl who staggers out from the desert, muttering 'them! them!' (Them! Gordon Douglas, 1954).

The gyrating fan above the staircase of the Palmer residence, accompanied by the ominous low hum of its rotation, is the sound and image of a recurring motif, in the series, and in the feature film, casting uneasy premonitions of doom over the household. Lynch's scene structuring, like his picture composition, also show the skill of a masterly director.

Twenty five minutes of screen time following the discovery of Laura's body, the police arrive to inform her teacher. The scene takes place during the class's morning roll call, and with Laura's friend Donna as the focal point, traces her unawareness to when she realises Laura is dead. The scene, with a minimum of dialogue, and skillful shot-countershot editing, is essentially cinematic, using Donna's point of view to create tension, regardless that as a viewer having witnessed Laura's body, we can scarcely anticipate a denouement.

The scene begins and ends with Audrey - apparently the only person not to be affected by the growing anxiety in the class room, beginning with arrival of the policeman, and amplified by the girl running and screaming outside. The tension culminates with Donna whispering Laura's name. It lasts less than a minute and resonates through several more scenes (Bobby's interrogation, the principal's announcement), up to when Badalamenti's theme fades in over the principal dismissing classes, and concluding with a close-up of Laura's photograph in the high school prize cabinet.

Even more sentimental is the desperate love scene between James and Donna when they meet in the woods at night to discuss the events of the previous evening, leading up to the time of Laura's disappearance. Amidst their anxiety they 'find' each other, and their prolonged moments of passion and tenderness are recorded in the style of close-up that Clarence Brown favoured when shooting love scenes between Garbo and Barrymore in films like *The Flesh and the Devil* (1927). The intensity of sentiment in both cases is excruciating.

In contrast to this scene, and another, though more discrete scene of passion between Sheriff Truman and Jocelyn Packard, the episode ends with the clairvoyant vision of Laura's mother, Sara. A gloved hand picks up a half-heart locket from a mound of earth buried in the woods. The locket belonged to Laura. Her scream echoes over the end credits.

### *"The Man From Another Place"*

Episode Three, First Season. Written by Mark Frost and David Lynch. Directed by David Lynch. 1989. 50 minutes.

So many characters and suspects had been introduced in the first two episodes, that Lynch needed an effective yet discrete means of providing the viewer with a resume of the plot and the characters involved. Agent Cooper's 'Tibetan detection method' was a stroke of genius. He lists the names of the characters onto a blackboard and casts stones at a glass bottle as each name is called out.

But the most striking sequence of the episode, indeed of the entire series, was Cooper's encounter with 'the man from another place.' 'Twenty five years later', [2014?] proclaims the subtitle, and a grey-haired Cooper sits in an armchair, surrounded by drapes of red velvet. 'The birds sing a pretty song,' the dwarf tells Cooper, in the backward language of the dream world in which Cooper is a passive observer. 'Let's rock,' says the dwarf, and dances to the chords of an up-tempo Badalamenti instrumental piece. Laura leans over to Cooper and whispers the name of her murderer into his ear. Cooper awakens in his room at the Great Northern Hotel, and telephones to Sheriff Truman. 'Harry, I know who killed Laura Palmer,' he says. Only by the next episode, he's forgotten.

### *"Bob"*

Episode One, Second Season. Story by Mark Frost and David Lynch.  
Teleplay by Mark Frost. Directed by David Lynch. 1990. 90 minutes.

The first season concluded with Cooper shot in the chest by an unknown assassin. The feature film length opening to the second season begins with Cooper, wounded in the chest, and incapacitated upon the floor. While an ancient hotel room service waiter agonizes over the delivery of Cooper's glass of warm milk, the giant appears to Cooper and provides him with fresh clues. One of them enables him to later rescue Audrey from One Eyed Jacks.

Audrey, in the guise of a hooker, investigating Laura's death, is about to become a free sample to her father's unscrupulous desires. Concealed behind the mask of a cat, her father is about to uncover her subterfuge, when he is called away on an errand.

Laura's cousin, Madeleine, who shares the mediumistic abilities of Laura's mother, sees 'Bob' behind the sofa in the Palmer household. Lynch's 'Bob' sequences, though only slight variations on an ongoing theme, continue to unnerve, right up to his final 'appearance'.

### *"Donna"*

Episode Two, Second Season. Written by Harley Peyton. Directed by David Lynch. 1990. 45 minutes.

James sings a song entitled 'You and I', with Donna and Madeleine singing the supporting vocals. The song becomes a coda for the pain of youthful love. As he

sings Donna looks at him, then at Madeleine, and senses James passion rekindling before the girl who resembles Laura. Despite unfortunate continuity problems with Donna's red lipstick (lipstick in close-up, no lipstick in medium and long shots), the scene is another of Lynch's sentimental excesses which works because it is excessive. Donna breaks down but cannot divulge her jealous misgivings.

In her attempts to uncover details of Laura's last few days, she takes on her 'meals on wheels' round and meets Grandmother and boy, characters that return in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*.

### *"Madeleine"*

Episode Seven, Second Season. Written by Mark Frost. Directed by David Lynch. 1990. 45 minutes.

Television viewers were warned of 'excessive violence', which meant that Lynch's director's credit was a foregone conclusion. Also the song as motif is only evident in the Lynch episodes; in this case the discovery of Harold Smith's body amongst his prize orchids, is accompanied by Louis Armstrong's 'What a Wonderful World.' The song is a perverse juxtaposition against the lonely character's suicide. It continues to play into the next scene as Leland tells Madeleine, 'We're going to miss you very much.' Following the rift she has caused between James and Donna, Madeleine has decided to return home.

Alas, Leland has been revealed as the human form housing the psychopathic 'Bob' - the figure Madeleine has sighted several times in her mediumistic state, always within the Palmer household. This is her last evening and she is alone in the house with Leland. Earlier Leland's wife, Sara, envisioned a white horse in their living room.

With the arrest of Benjamin Horne for Laura's murder (he was another of her secret lovers), Sheriff Truman and the Twin Peaks community feel their town is secure once more. He and Cooper watch Julee Cruise singing at the roadhouse. The lights dim and Cooper finds himself in a trance - the giant appears before the billowing red velvet curtain and proclaims: 'It's happening again.'

The scene is cross cut with Leland's transformation into Bob, and the prolonged and brutal slaughter of Madeleine as Leland beats her head bloody against the living room wall. A heightened sense of horror is achieved with a roaming spotlight and hand held camera, and loud roars which evoke a wild beast hunting scene. Leland's transformation to Bob owes more to the vampire film genre than Jekyll and Hyde sequences.

Cooper is still lost in his trance at the Twin Peaks roadhouse, and the giant shakes his head sadly and disappears. An old man waiter approaches Cooper and also shaking his head sorrowfully, tells him: 'I'm so sorry.' Julee Cruise continues her melancholic ballad, and the atmosphere of loss and inevitably affects Donna and James, who sit holding hands in a nearby booth. Donna weeps, and James is visibly moved. The red velvet curtain billows as invisible shadows pass by.

*"Cooper"*

Episode Twenty Two, Second Season. Written by Mark Frost, Harley Peyton and Robert Engels. Directed by David Lynch. 1991. 50 minutes.

As the final episode of the series a good deal of tension is supplied by wondering how just so many loose ends can be tied up. Lucy and Andy are consoled in the pre-credit sequence - Andy is to be the father of Lucy's child - which bodes well for a restoration of order and return to harmony.

Other loose ends are hastily tied up in short sequences which intrude into the principle narrative path - will Cooper enter the 'lodge', save Annie Blackburn and defeat Windom Earle?

Naturally Cooper finds the mysterious entrance in the middle of the forest and enters the lodge, only to become lost in a labyrinth of red velvet. Someone sings 'Under the Sycamore Tree', and Cooper is seated in an armchair. 'Some of your friends are here', the dwarf tells him. Laura appears. 'I'll see you again in 25 years,' she says, then disappears. The giant appears, sits next to the dwarf and explains to Cooper that they are 'one and the same.'

Cooper's showdown, with Windom Earle, then Bob, culminates in a deal that for Cooper's soul, Annie is allowed to live. Cooper and Annie are found in the forest, and later at the hotel, in a bathroom mirror, Cooper reveals his 'conversion' into Bob.

The series ends here, but there is a heartening message in Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me, when Annie appears in Laura's bed and tells her that the 'good Dale' is stuck in the Black Lodge. The finality of the closure suggests that a Return to Twin Peaks, on television at least, is unlikely. The resurrection of the place and the characters for a larger screen may provide the opportunity for Cooper to wage contest with the dark soul in himself. In addition to the 'good Dale' inside the Lodge, it seems likely that Chet Desmond and Phillip Jeffries (Chris Isaaks and David Bowie in Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me) are in there too. Someone is going to have to go in there and get them out.

## Conclusion

With half a dozen feature films and an internationally successful television series, what David Lynch's career lacks in profusion is compensated by its diversity. His work virtually covers the gamut of visual expression available to the contemporary artist. He has made the transition from painter to animator, from working with the smallest of budgets to the largest, from experimental films to mass-market television productions, with a panache unequalled in contemporary film history. From a viewing public consisting of an eclectic moon-bleached, urban, midnight art house clientele, to the television audience of the world, the story of David Lynch is as beguiling and as multi-layered as his films. His benign demeanour and public 'persona' reveals little, if anything, of the psychotic processes at work in his films. As in the Magritte painting, Lynch's reflection shows nothing of his face, only the well trimmed cut of his suit.

Lynch is the most original talent in American cinema at present, but is this because he is a genius, or because American cinema is wallowing in a profound crisis, where any revitalisation is laudable? Is Lynch a cinematic surrealist bringing some 'art' into cinema? or a 'primitive' that has burst into film then television by default, with the novelty of outrageous naivety? Is he a James Ensor or a Henri Rousseau? Is he a genius or just pulling our leg?

Does it even matter, or do we simply embrace the paradox? Both Ensor and Rousseau (or Dali and Magritte, or Max Ernst and Joan Miro) developed innovative styles that have had far reaching consequences for contemporary art. Lynch has invigorated a flagging Hollywood cinema.

His two 'personal films' *Eraserhead* and *Blue Velvet*, are cinematic masterpieces, and these two films alone have secured Lynch a permanent place in the annals of film history. *Dune*, a fiasco on release, is already gaining a 'cult' reputation, and finding a post-release audience, just as Lynch's much loved *The Wizard of Oz* finally gained recognition 17 years after its initial screening. The faults of *Dune* should not be overlooked, however; it remains the single most overpriced 'compromise' of the 1980's. Lamentably, it is unlikely Lynch will fulfill his intention of piecing together his four hour long 'mood poem' from the surfeit of material that never left the cutting room.

*Wild at Heart* is a scintillating trip into the film medium apart from anything else; its television commercial 'look' will provide film historians an insight into the dying breath of the 1980's decade of consumer madness of jeans, cigarettes, red cars, blue skies and fancy editing. It is the 'film' statement of '89, as Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) emerged as the 'film' statement 25 years earlier. *The Elephant Man*, in retrospect Lynch's most conventional picture to date, remains a finely

honed 'bio-pic'; orthodox, predictable, yet exemplary in its execution. The film verifies beyond any doubt that Lynch is a director of extraordinary ability.

If the Twin Peaks feature film was an indulgence, the Twin Peaks television series remains a milestone in television drama, confirming that Lynch could assimilate one more visual form, along with the diversity of his cinema accomplishments, each imbued with his own shameless romanticism, his own bleak pessimism.

*American Gothic and the Post-Modern Dis-ease*

Gothic is an atmosphere coloured black. 'Dark secret...' says Lynch 'the sound of it is so beautiful.' Gothic pertains to the past - the 'achievement of The Elephant Man is the credibility of the world Lynch creates. It is believable because it is a world that Lynch has made his own, just as Eraserhead was his adopted world. They are places filled with 'dark secrets' and unresolved mystery. The gothic tone in Lynch's films suggests a return to an undefined past, and a return to the values of a past, both undefined and idealised.

A closer reading of Lynch's films reveals an old fashioned wolf in post-modernist sheep's clothing - strip away the wool and Lynch emerges as a staunch conservative ill at ease in a loosely structured modern world. The forced smiles of the 1950's US family, beaming from magazine advertisements and television screens, are as much allure for Lynch, as they are a subject to malign. The family unit represents structure, order, stability - authority and respect for authority. There are no Democrat voicings of dissent or social critique in the Lynch world. Sheriff Truman is as true to his name as to the values of the president he was named after. Not even under the jurisdiction of J Edgar Hoover himself has the FBI been so lovingly portrayed as before the camera of David Lynch. The threat is infiltration from outside, such as when a 'false' Canadian mountie instigates FBI internal affairs to discredit Cooper (Twin Peaks, II.10), or a colleague becomes psychotic and goes over to the opposition, as in the case of Windom Earle (Twin Peaks II.2).

Twin Peaks is a homage to 1950's values and life style, where the unity of the family precedes the will of individual - a hidden away enclave of safe untarnished America, locked up in a time warp of black coffee and blueberry pie, roadhouse diners and high school proms. The threat is in the times - the post 1950's 'dis-ease' that brings narcotics and corruption, promiscuity and degeneracy, which lure vulnerable school girls to their decline.

Post-Modern breaks down structures, not consciously, but surreptitiously. It is the era when the imagination goes high street shopping for relics of the past and fragments of the present. The essence of the Post-Modern is irreverence for

history, 'the breakdown and disintegration' for us 'the children of a post-Christian world.' This is Lynch's quandary, that he is both 'out of time', yet of the times - a romantic and a melodramatist in an age that shuns both. Cliché and parody are the means at hand by which an 'old-fashioned country boy' garbs his anxieties and yearning for the stability and structure of times gone by.

The 'shock' of Lynch's 'new' is not so much that it is new, but that it integrates, combining elements of the surreal and the everyday, of narrative and non-narrative, of sentiment and cynicism, to create films that, quite simply, no-one else could make. We find ourselves in a period of unprecedented film 'literacy' - producers, directors, writers and audiences alike. The first rush of stimulation from the Hollywood new-wave of the 1970's - Coppola, Scorsese, Schrader, even Woody Allen, and later, Jim Jarmusch, are directors whose point of reference is immersed in the cinema. Therein lies the risk that today's filmmakers are unable to extricate themselves from just other films. The Hollywood cinema, which was once a vast reservoir into which poured literature, art and drama, constantly renewing and revitalizing itself, languishes in film cliché.

The cinema is as engaging as ever, ironically even more so with its continual references to the past, but its vitality is ailing. The film industry is beleaguered with film school graduates whose life experiences consist of films and TV, skillful manipulators of second hand imagery that dazzle and beguile, but fail to resonate. Lynch's entry into the arena of contemporary American cinema is a vitalising force simply because he has more than just 'film' as a point of reference. The shortcomings of the Lynchian narrative are more than compensated by the boldness of his imagery and his delvings into the dark recesses of himself, rather than the cinema. His films are challenging, original, and 'non-cinematic' to the extent that they expand the bounds of the commercial cinema.

*They can suck out our dreams and look at them like television*

'I felt *Eraserhead*, I didn't think it,' says Lynch. Both *Eraserhead* and *Blue Velvet* are the two Lynch films 'cast out' from the darker realms of his psyche and most infused with his personal anxieties. In terms of emotional impact they transcend his other films by virtue of their honesty. *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* is so imbedded in *Twin Peaks* mythology and television marketing compromise, that critical denouncements of 'speculative!' and 'exploitative!' are scarcely surprising.

*Wild at Heart*, in contrast to *Eraserhead*, is a 'thought' film, affected with Lynchian ingredients of perversity, wild sex and abjection. This is not intended as criticism. The film is as wild and engaging as the title suggests, and little wonder the parade

of cineastes at the 1990 Cannes Film Festival found it the most 'cinematic' of offerings available.

Yet since *Blue Velvet* and *Wild at Heart*, Lynch has immersed himself in television, and television production. Should we anticipate a forthcoming *Twin Peaks II* feature film with relish or apprehension? Does the prospect of more generous roles for Kyle MacLachlan and David Bowie increase our fervour?

For the question is, just where does Lynch go from here? His television series, *On The Air* (1992), takes him deep into his much favoured epoch, the mid 1950's - a meta-television programme about a television programme. The final word in post-modernist despondency, as Lynch delves into the trivia of the collective and leaves self-analysis firmly in his own past. Yet the self-analysis which Lynch so vociferously avoids, is, within the framework of the cinema, just what he does best. His films are at one and the same time both the disease and the cure, and rather than destroy creativity (as Lynch maintains) self analysis can be the very driving force to creativity, as the cinema of Ingmar Bergman, Alfred Hitchcock, and Federico Fellini testify.

'Dreams are our greatest source of inspiration', says Wenders, referring to his film *Until The End of The World* (1992). 'Everybody who is doing something creative has to rely on his dreams. Dreams are very sacred. They are the base of our identity. They are more of a mystery than even people who have figured them out want to admit. Claire and Sam's 'road journey' across the globe is an exploration of themselves, their values and global values. If Wenders lapses into unmodish sentiment, Wenders is unconcerned; it's 'a story from the heart.'

'Whatever story you want to tell,' says Wenders, 'you have to be willing to live the experience of that story.' In *Wild at Heart*, Sailor and Lula dare not delve beyond the surface of their own vulnerable relationship, and fail to scratch the surface of the America viewed from the inside of an open top convertible. This is the relationship Lynch describes as 'a modern romance.'

Despite the commercial failure (and critical disparagement, even misreading) of *Until The End of The World*, it marks Wenders' conscious effort of contending with the barrage of images that inundate our field of perception. Lynch is using them, content with their surface, when his gift is delving beneath surfaces.

'They can suck out our dreams,...' says Sam in *Until The End of The World*. For Wenders the idea of a technology that transforms private dreams into the domain of public entertainment is the unacceptable outrage of his future world. David Lynch, one suspects, would be tantalised rather than outraged.

Lynch's excursion into television - preoccupied with surfaces and wary of anything that may conceal something else - incurs the risk that he remains there, when he is still the most significant figure of the contemporary American cinema.



## *Notes*

### *The Alphabet*

Rolling Stone interview 6.9.1990

Monthly Film Bulletin, April, 1987/

### *The Grandmother*

Rolling Stone interview 6.9.1990

### *Eraserhead*

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*Twin Peaks*

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Andre Breton: *Discours sur le Peu de Realite*. Quoted in Anna Balakian: *Surrealism - The Road to the Absolute*, George Allen and Unwin, 1959, p. 13.

Arena, 1987.

Andrew Sinclair: *Under Milk Wood, A Screenplay*, Lorrimar (London,) 1973, p. 6.

Mark Frost interviewed in For One Week Only Jonathan Ross Presents: David Lynch.

Sinclair: *Under Milk Wood: A Screenplay*, p. 6.

Rolling Stone interview, 6.9.1990.

The scene (Ep 1, Season 1) runs:

1. CU Audrey's red shoes - tilt up to her face. The teacher's voice/ over reads out the roll call.
  2. MS teacher at the desk, a young attractive woman calling out the students' names; 'Donna Hayward'
  3. CU Donna; a raise of the hand and a compliant smile'
  4. CU Audrey; nonchalant, impudent: 'in inverted commas' hand gesture
  5. CU James Hurley: 'Yob!'
  6. MS teacher - she smiles benignly
- The three close-ups of the principal characters, each less than two seconds long, are rich in characterisation; Donna is well-behaved, Audrey is 'here', but not 'here', and James Hurley is a conscript marine responding to a military roll call.*
7. MS A policeman at the door; looking for Bobby Briggs
  8. MS Teacher
  9. MS Policeman
  10. CU Donna - looks up, something's up
  11. MS Teacher
  12. CU Donna
  13. MS Police 'Can I talk with you...'
  14. MS Teacher - camera follows as she joins policeman in doorway. Conversation inaudible; 2-shot beneath American flag and picture of Abraham Lincoln
  15. CU Donna - looks worried OFF: scream. Donna turns
  16. POV Through window - a girl runs across the courtyard, screaming
  17. CU Donna - looks to policeman
  18. MS 2-shot; policeman and teacher whisper; a second policeman arrives
  19. CU James Hurley - he looks up
  20. MS 2-shot teacher, policeman
  21. CU teacher - she 'smiles' nervously
  22. CU Donna - she looks across
  23. POV An empty chair
  24. CU Donna - she looks across the room
  25. POV LS James Hurley - returns gaze
  26. CU Donna; bites her lip and holds her shoulders
  27. CU James
- This close up image of James Hurley is the only static image in the sequence. Although the shots are between one and two seconds, they all contain movement - eyes seeking contact, exchanging a glance, or moving to focus on a person or object.*
28. CU Donna - she looks down and whispers; 'Laura!' She begins to cry.
  29. CU James - looking at Donna
  30. MS Teacher, nervous; 'There'll be an announcement...'
  31. CU James
  32. CU Donna; crying uncontrollably
  33. CU Audrey nonchalant

### Conclusion

Attributed to Arnold Toynbee. See Charles Jencks: Post-Modernism The New Classicism in Art and Architecture, Academy Editions (London), 1987, p.13.

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