

# **Envyng Laura Palmer in *Twin Peaks: The Return*: Episode 8 and the Fantasy of the Salvific Woman**

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**Résumé :** The great virtue of David Lynch's narratives is that their complexity, despite sometimes appearing inscrutable, always has some significance. By constructing worlds that operate according to the logic of fantasy, Lynch uses a complicated narrative form in order to provide unparalleled insight into the functioning of the psyche. In Lynch's works, it is the complexity of the psyche that demands the complexity of the narrative. Although all of his films and the first two seasons of *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991) delve into a fantasmatic world that defies the exigencies of social reality, this process reaches its apogee in the key episode *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2018). Episode 8 uses fantasy to depict the relationship between the logic that underlies the relationship between phallic authority and the enjoying woman, a relationship that explains the emergence of male violence toward women.

**Mots clés :** *Twin Peaks*, David Lynch, fantasy, enjoyment, misogyny

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## **The Hazards of Complexity**

Narrative complexity confronts spectators with an impossible dilemma. It demands that we respect it as a challenge to the patterns of straightforward narration, while at the same time it invites us to try to make sense of it, a sense that inevitably involves reducing the complexity to a simpler

signification. Respecting the complexity for its own sake militates against discovering an interpretation that uncovers what the complexity signifies. This dilemma leads Thomas Elsaesser, in his essay on the puzzle film, to point out that puzzle films “suspend the common contract between the film and its viewers.” (Elsaesser, 2009: 19). Caught between respecting complexity and reducing it to significance, the spectator must find a way to see the complexity itself as a signifier, rather than as a veil that obscures the text’s true significance.

We can see a step in this direction in the thought of Jason Mittell, who confronts new complexity in television narration as a fundamental shift in the nature of the text. According to Mittell, the narration of shows such as *The Sopranos* and *Mad Men* stands apart from what television used to be and thus earn the moniker “complex TV.” As television began to showcase series with narrative structures that defied conventional expectations, a new form emerged, a form that had more in common with the novels of William Faulkner than with earlier television shows such as *Star Trek* and *All in the Family*. The turn to increased complexity suggests that how the text says what it says is at least as important as what it says, which leads theorists such as Mittell to explore the structure of complex narration rather than its significance.

Mittell labels his approach to narrative complexity one of poetics. In *Complex TV*, he notes that “the guiding question for poetics looking at a cultural text such as a television series is ‘how does this text work?’ This focus on poetics is different from the more common questions of interpretation, which seek to answer ‘what does this mean?’” (Mittell, 2015: 5). For most critics who examine complex narration such as Mittell, the question of “how” typically trumps the question of “what.” By avoiding the question of meaning, the critic solves the dilemma that complex narration produces by opting for one side at the expense of the other. But there is something unsatisfying about the solution. While it evinces respect for complexity by refusing to

reduce complexity to a simple interpretation, it radically lessens the stakes of complexity. This approach never considers the possibility that the question of “how” necessarily implies a certain “what.” That is, diving into the how and forgetting the what causes one to miss the why of the how, to miss the reason for constructing a complex narration in the first place. One cannot take refuge in the how and just ignore the what. To do so is to abrogate the task of interpretation and to leave open the question of why people are paying attention to these works in the first place.

### **The Poet of Fantasy**

The great virtue of David Lynch’s narratives is that their complexity, despite sometimes appearing inscrutable, always has some significance. In Lynch’s works, formal complexity never exists for its own sake but is always purposive. Because Lynch deploys his texts as explorations of a psychic landscape, the structure of the narrative offers a roadmap to the structure of the psyche. By constructing worlds that operate according to the logic of fantasy, Lynch uses a complicated narrative form in order to provide unparalleled insight into the functioning of the psyche. In Lynch’s works, it is the complexity of the psyche that demands the complexity of the narrative. Although all of his films and the first two seasons of *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991) delve into a fantasmatic world that defies the exigencies of social reality, this process reaches its apogee in the key episode *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2018). Episode 8 uses fantasy to depict the relationship between the logic that underlies the relationship between phallic authority and the enjoying woman, a relationship that explains the emergence of male violence toward women.

The first two seasons of *Twin Peaks* revolve around the murder of Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee) by her father Leland Palmer (Ray Wise) and its aftermath. The series chronicles the investigation into this murder led by FBI Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan). During his

investigation, he uncovers not just Leland's culpability but a hidden obscenity lurking everywhere in the apparently quiet small town of Twin Peaks. There were drug dealers, prostitution rings, and murder alongside tasty cherry pie, local quirkiness, and genuine friendliness. Most importantly, however, the series showed a force of evil in the figure of BOB (Frank Silva), which manifested itself in Leland Pamler's sexual violence. In *Twin Peaks: The Return*, the town takes on a much more sinister flavor as the series expands to show the wider dispersion of malevolent forces. The most significant development in this new season is that Dale Cooper's doppelganger Mr. C becomes the latest embodiment of BOB. The figure of evil spreads to the representative of moral purity from the first two seasons.

*Twin Peaks: The Return* depicts Mr. C as the mastermind of a vast criminal conspiracy responsible for various outbreaks of gruesome violence, including decapitations and mass murders. This season of the series centers around two opposed trajectories: on the one hand, Dale Cooper becomes trapped in the form of Dougie and attempts to emerge as himself, and on the other hand, Mr. C resorts to extreme measures to stop Dale's return. Their conflict comes to a head in the Twin Peaks Sheriff's Station near the end of the season. But the key to understanding Mr. C and BOB occurs earlier, in episode 8.

### **An Episode from Hell**

If one regards fan websites and other sources of popular opinion, it seems safe to say that more David Lynch fans loved episode 8 of *Twin Peaks: The Return* than anything else he has created. Despite many spectators expressing their inability to comprehend what they had seen, the widespread reaction was astonishment at Lynch's formal audacity in the episode. It contains long dialogue-free sequences, no clear narrative through-line, and some of the most bizarre and

inexplicable scenes Lynch has ever filmed. It is Lynch at his most Lynchian. But even those who profess love for episode 8 love it for its inexplicability, its avant-gardist resistance to tidy interpretations. Its irreducibility to interpretation strikes them as the sign of its genius<sup>1</sup>.

The awe before the incomprehensibility of episode 8 is certainly understandable. Taken in isolation from the rest of *The Return*, it is undoubtedly one of Lynch's most obscure works, one of the most resistant to interpretation of any kind. It invites us to proceed in the manner of Jason Mittell and analyze the episode's poetic structure so that we can understand how it holds together. But if we examine this structure in its relation to the structure of fantasy, then we do not have to content ourselves with how the film's narrative work. By seeing how it works, we will also see what it signifies because the form that the structure takes on is in itself the film's significance. In episode 8 of *Twin Peaks: The Return*, Lynch shows that form has a content, that formal complexity signifies. Its signification becomes clear when we examine in light of the logic of fantasy.

Two related lines of thought can provide a way of making sense of the episode. The first is the role that temporal proximity signifies for causality in both dreams and films. That is, when events appear one after another in narrative time, the lack of a clear relationship between them shouldn't fool us: they exist in a relationship of cause and effect. Dreams and films often employ editing to make connections that would otherwise remain indecipherable. This is the basic idea of Freudian dream interpretation and Soviet montage. For instance, if my dream depicts an image of my father followed by the image of my gravestone, I can probably conclude that, according to the logic of the dream, my father has killed me. The temporal link expresses a repressed causality.

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the episode's resistance to interpretation, there have been many attempts to make sense of it, most of which are readily available on the Internet. One characteristic of almost all of them is that they treat the supernatural world that Lynch creates as if it is part of reality rather than a metaphorical depiction of psychic, social, and ontological structures.

Similarly, the Kuleshov effect in film illustrates how the mere juxtaposition of different images has the effect of changing how we perceive the second image. If we see a baby in the first shot, the smile of a man in the second shot indicates his kindness. On the other hand, if we see a woman in a bikini in the first, the smile of the man in the second suggests his lustfulness<sup>2</sup>. We interpret a causal relationship between the two images even when one doesn't necessarily exist. The role that editing sequences play in constructing sense increases almost exponentially as cinema becomes more experimental. It is commonplace for Lynch and essential for interpreting episode 8.

The second line of thought is recognizing the predominance of fantasy not only in *The Return* but in all of Lynch's creations. In the world of fantasy, characters find themselves able to relate to the object that triggers their desire in a way that transforms this object from an impossibility to a possibility. As Juan-David Nasio puts it, "The function of the fantasy is to substitute for an impossible real satisfaction a possible fantasized satisfaction" (Nasio, 2005: 13). Fantasy transforms an object that the subject desires but cannot access into a prohibited but accessible object. We invest in fantasy precisely because it offers the promise of obtaining what is structurally unobtainable. The logic of fantasy involves laying out a path to what would otherwise be impossible<sup>3</sup>.

Lynch's works constantly take up this logic. For instance, in Lynch's first film *Eraserhead* (1977), Henry Spencer (Jack Nance), although he lives a life completely bereft of enjoyment, ends up able to access his fantasy object, the Radiator Lady (Laurel Near). This event occurs in a

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<sup>2</sup> This is the example of the Kuleshov Effect that Alfred Hitchcock gives in a demonstration of what he calls pure cinema.

<sup>3</sup> Slavoj Žižek sees fantasy as a way of establishing the path for desire and solving the problem of desire at the same time. He writes, "fantasy provides a *rationale* for the inherent deadlock of desire: it constructs the scene in which the *jouissance* we are deprived of is concentrated in the Other who stole it from us" (Žižek, 1997: 32).

blinding flash of light for the spectator, which indicates the impossibility of what happens. The structure of fantasy that informs this early film becomes much more expansive in episode 8. By understanding the structure of this episode in terms of fantasy, the logic of its obscurity becomes clear.

The episode begins with a relatively straightforward sequence. After conspiring to have himself released from prison, Mr. C, the evil version of Dale Cooper, rides through the night with his accomplice Ray Monroe (George Griffith). Ray stops the car on the side of the road as part of a plot to assassinate Mr. C. When Mr. C pulls the gun that he had in the glove compartment and tries unsuccessfully to fire on Ray, Ray shoots him twice, in a way that initially appears fatal. But as Ray prepares to shoot the third bullet into Mr. C's head and finish the job, a white light flashes, and several Woodsmen arrive to attend to Mr. C. They appear otherworldly while they flicker in the image. Ray, who (like the spectator) has no idea what they are, is too stunned by their appearance to shoot Mr. C again. By dancing around his body, touching his wound, and then smearing the blood on his face, the Woodsmen effectuate a cure from what seems to be a fatal wound. At the moment they finish their operation, the camera pans to Mr. C's chest, where the face of BOB gradually comes into view. At the sight of this, Ray flees in horror, leaving Mr. C presumed dead but actually alive.

The fact that the face of BOB appears on Mr. C's chest at this moment provides an important clue into what happens next. The series has already made it clear that BOB has taken over Cooper and controlled his actions for 25 years. But by including this reminder, Lynch reminds us of this connection. When the Woodsmen heal Mr. C they do so in a way that brings BOB's presence to the fore.

The first two seasons of *Twin Peaks* and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (David Lynch, 1992) establish BOB as a figure of phallic authority. This structure continues in *The Return*. He is a psychic force rather than an actual person, which is why his appearance drives men to act according to their unconscious desire. The enjoyment that stems from the exercise of phallic authority drives BOB. He uses this authority to prey on women, especially Laura Palmer, the idealized feminine fantasy object. BOB's phallic violence incorporates a variety of male characters during the series, including Leland Palmer and Dale Cooper. When BOB inhabits them, their enjoyment of sexual violence becomes unrestrained. In this sense, BOB represents male investment in phallic violence, the enjoyment that men succumb to when they engage in this violence.

### **The Phallic Fantasy**

Episode 8, however, shows a radical change in BOB's relationship to Laura Palmer. It highlights not his violence toward her but his radical dependence on this fantasy object. Though he may destroy Laura Palmer, he cannot access her way of enjoying, which is why he constructs the elaborate fantasy sequence that makes up episode 8 after Mr. C recovers from his gunshot wounds<sup>4</sup>. Phallic authority always proclaims its absolute independence from any object. This authority stems from the illusion of independence that it promulgates. It is this illusion of the independence of phallic authority that Lynch aims to undermine in episode 8 of *The Return*. The entire episode after Mr. C recovers is the phallic fantasy of the emergence of the phallus itself and of the feminine object. It is only by understanding the episode's narrative complexity through the lens of fantasy that we recognize its significance.

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<sup>4</sup> For a more thorough analysis of BOB as phallic authority, see McGowan, 2007.



After a musical interlude by Nine Inch Nails singing “She’s Gone Away,” the show cuts back to Mr. C, who sits up without any lingering evidence that he has just been shot<sup>5</sup>. Lynch briefly depicts Mr. C and then cuts dramatically in time and space to 5:29 AM July 16, 1945 in White Sands, New Mexico. A countdown commences for the first test of an atomic bomb called “Trinity.” The explosion ultimately produces both BOB and Laura Palmer, which suggests that Lynch depicts the origin of both primary figures in the series in this episode. This would testify to its importance and give credence to belief among viewers that it holds the key to understanding *The Return* as a whole.

Given the visual excesses that come after the cut to the Trinity explosion, it makes sense that most people thinking about this episode tend to forget about the brief opening sequence. But it’s the opening sequence that tells us how to interpret the depiction of the Trinity explosion and its aftermath. The fact that Lynch begins the episode with the scenes involving Ray and Mr. C and then shows the figure of BOB suggests that what follows is the fantasy of BOB and Mr. C, whom he inhabits. The final shot before the long and bizarre sequence of the atomic explosion and its aftermath is the result of a cut from a shot of Mr. C looking contemplatively, as if he is ready to fantasize after his near-death experience. The near-death experience produces a fantasy of origins. This provides the crucial clue that the linkage between the Trinity explosion and the ultimate emergence of Laura Palmer is BOB’s fantasy, not a depiction of the social reality in *Twin Peaks*.

Since we can have no experience of our origin, we rely on fantasy to fill in this blank space. Fantasy is first and foremost a fantasy of origins. Even though BOB is a psychic force rather than

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<sup>5</sup> The lyrics from “She’s Gone Away” lament the loss of the feeling attached to a woman who has left. In the song, violence represents an attempt to restore the feeling. In the penultimate line, the song claims, “Cut along the length, but you can’t get the feeling back.” This expresses the situation of BOB, who finds himself still longing for the enjoyment he imagines attached to Laura Palmer.

a real person, Lynch gives BOB a fantasy in episode 8 in order to explore the fantasy the phallic authority has about its own origin. This is a structural fantasy that everyone who occupies the position of phallic authority accepts insofar as they take up this role. The fantasy undergirds the role and provides the basis for phallic enjoyment.

The fantasy of origins solves the enigma for the subject of where it comes from, an enigma especially pronounced for phallic authority, which conceives of itself as self-identical and non-lacking. In their treatise on fantasy, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis point out the salutary role that fantasy plays. They write, “originary fantasies ... claim to bring a representation and a ‘solution’ to what, for the child, appear as major enigmas; they dramatize as moments of emergence, as origin of a history, what appears to the subject as a reality of a nature such that it demands an explanation, a ‘theory’” (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1985: 67-68). The originary fantasy solves the mystery of the origin for the subject and offers a tidy scenario in place of what cannot be explained. In episode 8, the turn to BOB’s fantasy shows us the fantasmatic explanation for BOB’s origin.

After the Trinity explosion, the Experiment, an obscure malevolent force that violently appears first in episode 1 in the glass container in New York, emerges out of the explosion’s fireball. It spews out a long bubbly substance, and one of the bubbles that it produces contains the image of BOB’s face. Soon thereafter, the Fireman (Carel Struycken), who originally appeared to Dale Cooper in the first season of *Twin Peaks*, shows up in a room that leads to a movie theater. There, along with Senorita Dido (Joy Nash), he views the Trinity test and the creation of BOB. With the image of BOB on the movie screen behind him, the Fireman floats in the air and release a bright stream of glimmering lights from his head. One large translucent golden orb breaks off from the stream of lights and floats down to Senorita Dido standing beneath. The orb contains the

image of Laura Palmer. Senorita Dido sends the bubble with Laura Palmer in it down to Earth, where it becomes an egg that hatches in the desert, producing a frog-like insect creature that eventually finds its way into the mouth of a girl (Tikaeni Faircrest). This sequence seems to unlock the ultimate secrets of the series—the origin of both BOB’s evil and Laura’s goodness that complements this evil.

It is tempting to take this scene as a straightforward revelation of the relationship of the key psychic figures in the *Twin Peaks* series—BOB and Laura Palmer. If we take this sequence as a direct depiction of their relationship, then we must conclude that human flirtation with atomic destruction triggers the genesis of BOB and his phallic violence. BOB emerges with the atomic explosion, after which the Fireman sends Laura Palmer into the world as a response to BOB. If we are to take this sequence as a depiction of the social reality within the *Twin Peaks* universe, then charges of sexism made against the series would prove correct. It would be the case, at least in his conception of Laura’s relation to BOB, “Lynch celebrates the misogynist of American literature and cinema” (Plummer, 1997: 310)<sup>6</sup>. Whereas the first two seasons of *Twin Peaks* depict Laura Palmer as a passive object of violence, season three transforms her, at this moment, into the woman that saves men. But this interpretation of episode 8 is not the only possibility.

But rather than see the nuclear test at White Sands as the birth of BOB (or as a point where he gains renewed access to the world) and the Fireman’s creation of Laura as a response to this evil, we should view it instead as BOB’s own origin myth, the product of his own act of fantasizing. It is the necessary fantasy scenario that supports the position of phallic authority. Phallic authority is able to produce enjoyment on the basis of this fantasy of the woman’s enjoyment, an enjoyment

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<sup>6</sup> Sue Lafky follows up this line of critique. Describing Lynch, she states, “neither innovation nor talent erases the violence against women that is portrayed throughout his work” (Lafky, 1999-2000: 12).

that is inaccessible for the authority outside of the fantasy. When the Experiment produces BOB and the Fireman subsequently produces Laura Palmer, this creates the sense of a perfect complementarity between the two. BOB must believe that Laura comes from the light in response to his own creation, that she has the potential to give him what he lacks.

BOB requires the fantasy of Laura Palmer in order to exist. In *Fire Walk With Me*, Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee) reveals BOB's obsession with her to Harold Smith (Lenny von Dohlen). She tells him, "He says he wants to be me, or he'll kill me." Later, BOB tells her, "I want to taste through your mouth." BOB sees in Laura an enjoyment that promises to make him whole, just as phallic authority bases its enjoyment on the woman's. This analysis of BOB's motivation provides the key to the entirety of *Twin Peaks*, inclusive of *The Return*. BOB sees in Laura Palmer the embodiment of what he lacks. As he sees it, she has a way of enjoying barred to him. His violence is sexual violence, an attempt to unlock her enjoyment for himself. It is clear that the desire for Laura Palmer and what she appears to have animates BOB's existence. She represents the promise of a cure from lack, an access to an unlimited enjoyment. In this sense, she plays the role of the typical feminine fantasy object. But rather than revealing the investment of the series in this fantasy object, episode 8 reveals that is BOB's fantasy.

The hint that Lynch gives that scene of the Trinity explosion and its aftermath is a fantasy sequence is the shot that immediately proceeds it—the image of BOB appearing through Mr. C. There is no narrative reason given for the quick transition from Mr. C just after his recovery from the gunshots to the Trinity test. Had Lynch wanted simply to provide an origin story for the show's two principal figures, the decision to begin with the close-up of BOB superimposed on Mr. C makes little sense. The inexplicable cut from Mr. C to the Trinity explosion shows a relationship of causality. BOB's presence in the earlier scene indicates his fantasy operating in the subsequent

ones. Furthermore, if we fail to connect the first section of the episode with what follows and simply take what follows as the actual creation of evil and good, this leads to all sorts of contradictions that are impossible to resolve without extraordinary leaps of logic.

For instance, many viewers theorize that the teenage girl whom the frog-like insect enters must be the future Sarah Palmer, but there are complications to this reading. Sarah Palmer would have been eleven years old at the time while the girl is clearly older, and we have no sense that she grew up in New Mexico or is Latina like the girl. But in the logic of fantasy, the significance of these precise details evaporates. What is important is BOB's own origin, the origin of Laura Palmer, and the role that BOB plays in making her life possible.

### **“Got a Light?”**

The atomic explosion and extended creation scenes lead to the conclusion of the episode in the New Mexico town where a teenage boy (Xolo Maridueña) and girl walk home from what seems to be a date. After we see the teenage girl and boy walking, the show cuts back to the desert, where the first of the Woodsman floats down to the surface. Soon a swarm of them arrive and make their way to the local town. They first stop a car on the highway and confront the driver. Their smoke-covered terrifying look is accompanied with a single question that they repeat incessantly, “Got a light?” Lynch depicts them articulating the question by barely moving their mouths, and he distorts the sound to create a menacing tone for what is often a friendly (or at least never threatening) question<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> By turning the typically friendly question “Got a light?” into a menacing threat, Lynch alludes to the finale of Clint Eastwood's *Gran Torino* (2008). In the final shootout scene, the film's phallic authority, Walt Kowalski (Clint Eastwood), confronts a large group of gang members. He plots to send them to jail for his own murder in order to protect his new friend, Thao (Bee Vang), whom the gang threatens. Walt comes to the shootout without a gun and verbally accosts the

With this mindlessly repeated question, they prove their discipleship to BOB that they display when reviving him at the beginning of the episode. BOB is a figure who seeks the light or fire that he associates with Laura's unrestrained enjoyment. Just as BOB wants to access what he perceives as Laura's fire, the Woodsmen seek the flame that animates those they come across<sup>8</sup>. This association of fire with enjoyment not only links the Woodsmen to BOB, but it also reveals the basic error that both fall into relative to enjoyment.

The creation of Laura Palmer out of light from above the Fireman's head is one way that we know this episode is BOB's fantasy, a fantasy that evokes a mistaken conception of how enjoyment works. Laura's enjoyment is associated with light and fire only in BOB's imagining. When Lynch creates a film from Laura's perspective, he entitles it *Fire Walk With Me*, but he doesn't include any images of fire. Fire is the terrain of BOB and the Woodsmen because they believe that we must burn with enjoyment. Laura Palmer represents an alternative to this phallic fantasy: enjoyment through loss rather than through fiery destruction.

The Woodsmen play a crucial part in BOB's fantasy of Laura's emergence. They go so far as to facilitate Laura Palmer's instantiation as the daughter of Sarah Palmer when they take over

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gang members for their lack of masculinity. He then pulls out a cigarette and asks, "Got a light?" The gang members rightly take this question as an aggressive act, especially given the diatribe that precedes it. Thus, when Walt reaches into his coat pocket for his lighter, the gang opens fire and riddles his body with bullets. Rather than killing off the phallic authority (or showing its impotence, as Lynch constantly does), Eastwood reveals its invincibility. Even when he dies, the phallic figure has ultimate power over those who kill him, sending them to jail with his death.

<sup>8</sup> In a dream analyzed by both Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, a child burning seems to indicate the presence of enjoyment for the dreamer. In this dream, a father falls asleep in a room next to his son's deathbed. After dozing off, he dreams that the child is really alive. The son asks the father, "*Father, don't you see I'm burning?*" (Freud, 1953: 509). Freud believes that the interpretation of this dream is obvious: the father wishes that his son was still alive, and he dreams him in this condition. Lacan, however, adds much more complexity to this supposed obviousness. As he points out in *Seminar XI*, this dream involves father's confrontation with the trauma of his son's enjoyment—he is burning with enjoyment—and wakes up to avoid remaining within this encounter. See Lacan, 1978.

the local radio station and recite a poem that renders the girl unconscious, which allows the creature to enter into her through her mouth. As one Woodsman crushes the skull of the disc jockey, he repeats over ten times the words, “This is the water, and this is the well. Drink full and descend. The horse is the white of the eyes, dark within.” This poem promises satiation, a fullness through indulging oneself. In the fantasy structure of the episode, this fullness manifests itself in the marriage between Laura Palmer and BOB, between light and darkness, and between “the white of the eyes” and the “dark within.” But such a marriage of light and dark works only in the male fantasy of feminine complementarity. When given the chance to complement BOB in *Fire Walk With Me*, we see Laura’s defiance instead and her failure to provide the complete enjoyment that he seeks. Although the poem of the Woodsman succeeds in rendering the future Sarah Palmer unconscious and thereby paves the way for Laura, it does so only in the fantasy of phallic authority. The feminine object lacks just as the male subject does, and even a phallic authority like BOB cannot successfully fantasize away this lack.

The Woodsmen emerge in episode 8 in the scene before the birth of BOB out of the Experiment. Just as they revive BOB at the beginning of the episode, they pave the way for him after the Trinity explosion. We see them coming out of a convenience store, which is a crucial site in structure of the *Twin Peaks* universe. Lynch uses the convenience store because it is the site of American normalcy. Convenience stores populate the American landscape and tend to have only minor differences between them. The convenience store is a safe space in America in the sense that it always remains the same. Their homogeneity enables us to know what to expect. But as with the diner in *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001), Lynch also shows us the perverse underside of the convenience store’s normalcy. This normalcy includes the Woodsmen, who appear completely abnormal. They are also allies of BOB. Not only do they revive him at the beginning

of episode 8, but we learn in the first season of *Twin Peaks* that they have earlier housed BOB and MIKE (Al Strobel) above their convenience store.

Lynch's convenience store depicted in *The Return* differs radically from the typical image that we have of one. It's pretty clear that no one would want to shop there. Whereas the standard convenience store is well-lit even in the dark of night, the convenience store in episode 8 is shrouded in darkness. Rather than having a welcoming clerk inside, the Woodsmen populate it and transform it into a place of terror. It has ancient looking gas pumps, windows broken out, smoke bellowing from the front door, and flashes of blinding light from inside. In addition, it generates a loud crackling sound. When it becomes completely enveloped in smoke, we see the Woodsmen walking in front of it, but they walk as if they are not fully in the world, flickering in and out of the image as the light also flickers. Finally, the entire convenience store begins alternately to slip totally out of focus, to disappear, and then to reappear again, all in rapid succession. A concluding pan from the convenience store to blackness leads to the image of the Experiment spewing out the bubble containing BOB.

The Woodsmen look remarkably like the auto mechanics who populated the service stations that convenience stores replaced. Instead of dirty gas stations with mechanics who repair cars, we now separate the service station from the convenience store that sells gas. This separation is an act of the fetishistic disavowal of labor. In the convenience store, one doesn't see the grease-covered mechanic but just the cleanly attired clerk. This separation enables customers to fill up with gas without being confronted with the labor that keeps their cars running. They can believe that the cars run on their own and that capital proceeds without the exploitation of labor. This disavowal is at work each time one utilizes the convenience store to fill up. But *The Return* throws



a wrench in the smooth working of fetishistic disavowal. The exploited labor returns in the form of the Woodsmen who assist BOB.

Their appearance indicates their association with gas station mechanics. Grease from the work of the mechanic on cars covers their faces and clothes. They are the remainder of the repressed dirty past that haunts the cleanliness of the modern convenience store. The Woodsmen's convenience store, however, resembles a broken-down old gas station. We would only call it a "convenience store" because this is the name that its sign proclaims. The genericity of the name—there are very few eponymous convenience stores in all America—belies its dissimilarity to any actual convenience store. With this image of the convenience store, Lynch makes clear that even the most typical forms of capitalist modernity harbor the horrors of an unrelenting obscene enjoyment. He shows that what we take as a sign of modernity hides all our dirty little secrets.

From its first episode, *Twin Peaks* is a critique of the cleanliness of capitalist society. Capitalism creates a universe in which no one is guilty, in which the mass production of waste remains always out of sight, and in which phallic authority can operate in a subterranean way while rarely exposing itself as an authority. By depicting Laura Palmer's body wrapped in plastic, the opening episode shows what the appearance of cleanliness always covers—the clean plastic wrapping with the dead body inside. Just as the Woodsmen represent the disavowed labor of the auto mechanic, Laura Palmer's body indicates the price of plastic. The cost of plastic's cleanliness is the fact of the dead body. But the convenience store represents the sine qua non of this capitalist logic. Everything is conveniently available, and the grime of the service station disappears amid the enforced cleanliness of the well-lit store.

Like the Woodsmen, BOB represents a form of phallic authority that proliferates not in spite of capitalist modernity but through it. This authority operates through perpetuation of sexual

violence in an era that promises to put an end to it in the name of greater profitability. It operates even through the figure of Gordon Cole (David Lynch), who spends part of the time in *The Return* seducing younger women and bragging to colleagues about his sustained sexual prowess. But this authority cannot function when we lay its fraudulence on the table, which is exactly what *The Return* aims to do by depicting the fantasy of the feminine object that underlies the phallicism that BOB embodies.

### **Complex Narrative and the Enjoying Woman**

BOB and all those who desire her require a supernatural Laura Palmer. Although neither Bobby Briggs (Dana Ashbrook) nor James Hurley (James Marshall) fantasizes Laura's creation out of the mind of the Fireman, they nonetheless credit her with an unrestricted enjoyment that they seek to access, just as BOB does. In this sense, they too are BOB-like. BOB's activity in episode 8 reveals how he fantasizes the emergence of his fantasy object. By looking at the relationship between the episode's opening sequence and the nuclear drama that ensues, we can recognize that this drama is BOB's fantasy. In this fantasy, this object is an answer to his own inception. Male sexual violence is a form of enjoyment that depends on the belief that the woman's enjoyment can supply what masculine subjectivity lacks.

In order to show the role that fantasy has in the relationship between phallic violence and the woman's enjoyment, *Twin Peaks: The Return* has recourse to a complex narrative structure that makes this connection apparent. Episode 8 represents *Twin Peaks* at its most complex. Lynch turns to this narrative structure in order to indicate the fantasmatic construction of an enjoyment that goes beyond signification. The Trinity explosion and the invasion of the Woodsmen seem to defy signification altogether, but this is the way that they signify. Complex narration has the ability

to depict a realm of fantasy that functions through its irreducibility to sense. When we go beyond how complex narrative works and begins to think about why it occurs, we touch on what it has to say, which is the only thing that makes it worth our consideration. Thinking about narrative structure in terms of the logic of fantasy presents a possibility for uncovering significance amid the appearance of nonsense. Narrative complexity shows what the psyche can't explain to itself.

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