David Lynch’s Blue Velvet Essay, Research Paper

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David Lynch s Blue Velvet is an exploration of things above and below the surface. This surface is really a borderline between not only idyllic suburban America and the dark, perverted corruption that lies underneath but also between good and evil, conscious and subconscious, dream and reality. Although this division seems quite rigid and clean-cut some of the most important implications of the film stem from the transgressions of these borderlines.

In the initial scenes of the film Lynch introduces Lumberton, the typical small town in Middle America where the fireman waves at you, the children are well protected, the lawns are green and there is a smile on everybody s face. Naturally, the most important clich is also included we see the white picket fence with ruby red roses against a bright blue sky, making out the colors of the American flag.

There is, however, trouble in Paradise. First we witness a man who later turns out to be Jeffrey s father suffer a stroke and, after showing his helpless agony, the camera burrows into the grass revealing insects in a ferocious, predatory, and cannibalistic fight for life (Dirks, Blue Velvet (1984) , http://www.filmsite.org/blue.html). These pictures, made even more terrifying by the extreme close-up and the accompanying sounds, provide the first visual clue of the dive we are about to make into the subterranean world under the pastoral life of normalcy.

Our guide through this hell below and within is Jeffrey; an all-American boy who comes home from college to help out in the family business while his father is in the hospital. His finding a severed human ear is what sends him out on a journey to solve a mystery and eventually leads him to find out more about the world, and also about himself, than what he bargained for. As the main focalizing agent of the film Jeffrey becomes the central character, the hero on a quest. He has to solve the mystery, help a lady in distress, fight villains and find love and happiness. During his adventures he also has to face and defeat the greatest evil of all the evil within himself.

Jeffrey s journey into the underworld of Lumberton may also be seen as a journey into the subconscious of the human mind, into the Freudian id. This may be supported by the scene in which the camera zooms in on the severed ear and, going down the rabbit hole, it leads us inside like we were traveling into someone s mind. This is how the journey begins and when it comes to a close we leave the underworld through Jeffrey s ear by a reversal shot of that earlier one. Accepting this interpretation we may consider the normalcy of Lumberton to be Jeffrey s superego and the underworld, and particularly Frank, to be his id surfacing and trying to take control of his ego. The censor who struggles to keep the id suppressed is Jeffrey himself who finally succeeds by killing Frank and thus killing his evil, instinctive self putting his id back where it belongs. Sandy may also be seen as a censor-like figure for she is firmly rooted in the superego Lumberton world and represents all the purity and innocence and love that is missing from the underworld. According to Antulov Sandy s role in the film is to be the voice of reason and the only link to the normal world for Jeffrey ( Review for Blue Velvet , http://reviews.imdb/Reviews/155/15529). She, however, also embodies essential goodness, making the counterpoint to the forces of evil which are luring Jeffrey away from his secure position above the surface. Moreover, she is a source of love and as such, a possible source of deliverance.

There are other Freudian elements in the film as well; most of which are connected to Frank. Lost in his perverted sexual fantasies he relates to Dorothy both as her father and as her child. In her sexual connection to Frank Dorothy may be seen to represent the Female being assaulted by all the Male figures getting raped by the Husband who is also the Father and the Son. Jeffrey witnesses this abuse hiding in Dorothy s closet. According to Tim Dirks in a symbolic sense, Jeffrey as a child illicitly spies on the scene of seduction that his parents are having sexual intercourse Dorothy ( Mommy ) and Frank ( Daddy or Baby ) ( Blue Velvet (1986) , http://www.filmsite.org/blue.html). If we accept Dirks suggestion then we need to consider Jeffrey s sexual attraction towards Dorothy as a sign of a hidden Oedipus complex.

Frank s obsession with the song In Dreams may also have a Freudian significance, however, it may also be seen to imply that Jeffrey s journey is not into reality but into his dreams, which belong to the realm of the subconscious. The latter possibility is also suggested by the way Lynch shows us Jeffrey leaving Dorothy s apartment house after the first unsettling night then cuts straight to him waking up in his bed, his mind filled with random, distorted flashbacks. The night of the joyride ends in a similar fashion. Returning home after being brutally beaten by Frank reciting In Dreams , Jeffrey sits on his bed crying like someone who has just woken up from a nightmare. Yet again, the flashbacks appear so as to resemble the way the mind processes images in a dream.

However, it is important to note that while in the first set of flashbacks it is Frank who is brutalizing Dorothy in the second set it is Jeffrey doing the same. He wakes up to find evil in himself, to find that Frank is right when he says, You re like me . Since this last encounter with Frank almost cost his life or his soul Jeffrey decides to take action. He needs to distance himself from the underworld which is threatening to swallow him up and anchor himself firmly in the reality of Lumberton. He receives the moral support of the law from Detective Williams and the emotional support of love from Sandy. His superego thus strengthened he can resist the temptations of the dark side and is ready to face the evil in himself.

The final showdown between Jeffrey and Frank takes place, appropriately, in Dorothy s flat in the Deep River apartment house or in the deep, dark waters of Jeffrey s subconscious. Frank is not an enemy who is easy to beat. Just like the id would have access to the mind of the ego Frank also has inside knowledge of Jeffrey s movements through a police radio. He cannot be overpowered by sheer force it is only intelligence that can defeat instincts. Jeffrey s trick of hiding the radio allows him to close his mind to Frank and gives him the advantage of a surprise attack. He sends a bullet into Frank s brain to annihilate the monstrous dark side of his own self that has been contaminated by exposure (Dirks, Blue Velvet (1986)”, http://www.filmsite.org/blue.html). At the end of his quest Jeffrey becomes the victorious hero who has defeated the evil forces both outside and within and thus deserves happiness and the love of the chosen girl.

In a dream that Sandy described earlier she saw their world as dark and empty of love. Deliverance came in the form of thousands of robins bringing a blinding light of love . As the fight is over we see Jeffrey and Sandy embrace each other, then their figures melt into a bright, white light. Ultimately, Jeffrey s deliverance comes from the love brought by Sandy.

The underworld vanishes out of site as we are brought back through Jeffrey s ear into the light of sunny, bright, idyllic Lumberton. The darkness is gone and, as Sandy has prophesied, the robins arrive. One of them settles on the windowsill holding a big black bug in its beak. During the course of the film insects have come to symbolize evil under the surface. In the beginning they are seen hiding under the manicured lawn, later we discover them crawling on the severed ear. It is also quite suggestive that Jeffrey first enters Dorothy s apartment as an exterminator. Thus the robin eating the bug can obviously be interpreted as the victory of love over evil.

The film seems to end with the return of normalcy. Jeffrey s father is his old self again, the white picket fence is white as ever and even the fireman is there, waving at us as he drives by. Still, there is something unsettling behind all this perfection. The robin on the windowsill is so obviously artificial and fake looking that it is hard to believe in its ability to bring true love to the world. However, it may also be argued that, since the world of Lumberton is also quite artificial, a bird like that is only appropriate for the job. As we revisit the images of the town familiar from the opening scenes of the film it is impossible to ignore what we already know there is evil beneath the surface and it does not take much for it to reappear again. Although Frank, the drug-dealing gangster is dead, Frank, the evil within is still there hidden in the subconscious of happy, unsuspecting people waiting for his turn.

The film closes with pictures of Dorothy, now reunited with her son, sitting on a bench in a peaceful, sunny park. The perverted eroticism that used to ooze from her pores is all gone, replaced by the appearance of a caring, loving mother. There is, however, deep sadness in her eyes as we hear the last lines of her song and I still can see blue velvet through my tears and we know that she will never really be able to escape from the evil in her past.