3

Down the Yellow Brick Road: Two Dorothys and the Journey of Initiation in Dream and Nightmare

The Wizard of Oz, a universally admired child's classic, and *Blue Velvet*, a film offering textbook illustrations of sexual perversity, may seem an unlikely pair. Yet both are dream films, or more precisely one is dream, the other nightmare; both present journeys of initiation; and both, drawing upon the conventions of the horror genre, are rich sources of the grotesque. Of course, their differences are as important as their similarities. In *The Wizard* the threat presented by the grotesquely phallic Munchkins, the equally phallic Wicked Witch and her familiars, and the forest of menacing faces and arms is ameliorated by controlling tropes of littleness and light, and through the self-mocking humor of the dream figures. Both the lollipop kids and the flying monkeys would be as horrifying as anything in the Lynch film if it were not for their smallness, and the same would be true of the Scarecrow's dismemberment without the witty comment on his distress: "That's you all over."

In *Blue Velvet*, on the other hand, the world of light ironically echoes and emphasizes the terrifying distortions of the world of darkness, and although, like Victor Fleming in *The Wizard*, David Lynch punctuates his grotesquerie with humor, it has a distinctly dark, Freudian twist. Fleming's Technicolor Oz is a garden of fantastic flowers whose grotesqueness is mitigated by the rush of color and light; it is a daylight world of innocence and wonder, where the tiny Munchkins are drawn from the darkness of their hiding places into the open to dance and sing. Lynch, after quoting the daylight world of Oz through the closeups of intense red roses and equally intense yellow tulips, heightens his grotesquerie instead of mitigating it. Instead of following Fleming's lead of drawing monsters into the light of day, Lynch joins them in their hiding places where light is replaced by lurid shadow.

Fleming and Lynch also approach their audiences in radically different ways, nowhere more clearly seen than in their presentation of dream. In *The Wizard*, Fleming employs the conventions of dream—the bump on the head, the transportation of the house through the air, the transformed landscape—in a completely straight-forward manner so that there is never any doubt as to Dorothy's dream state. Lynch, by contrast, presents dream as ambiguously as Hawthorne in "Young Goodman Brown";

moreover, throughout the film he assumes the role of Freudian trickster playing elegant but sometimes dangerous games with his audience.

Source recognition is just one of the many games Lynch plays with his audience. This game is launched and played through numerous but elliptical quotations from primary sources such as *The Wizard of Oz*, and, of course, direct quotations from *The Wizard* pepper the film. One such quotation is the name Lynch gives to Isabella Rossellini's Blue Lady. Although it is almost lost in the welter of information conveyed, Rossellini's Blue Lady, like Judy Garland's innocent, is named Dorothy![1] A second quotation is the Wizard's hat. The Wizard's hat easily overlooked or misread as a child's party hat, appears at key moments in *Blue Velvet*, and through it Lynch accomplishes a crucial symbolic identification of Kyle MacLachlan's Jeffrey with Dorothy's son. While conducting his original search of Dorothy's apartment, Jeffrey looks into her bedroom and then the bedroom of her son, where a closeup emphasizes his first sight of the Wizard's hat. The Wizard's hat reappears at the conclusion of the first sadomasochistic sequence in Dorothy's apartment when Jeffrey, before leaving, discovers a photograph showing Dorothy's son wearing the very same hat. The Wizard's hat appears for a third time at the conclusion of Jeffrey's sexual initiation in Dorothy's bedroom. As Dorothy finishes dressing, a closeup reveals Jeffrey once again sitting on Dorothy's couch, but now with the Wizard's hat perched on his knee. Like Jeffrey the Wizard's hat has completed a journey. Having first appeared in the bedroom of Dorothy's son, then in the photograph, it now becomes a symbolic attribute identifying Jeffrey as Dorothy's son but also as the Wizard with newfound sexual power.

Moreover, through Lynch's symbolic modifications, the Wizard's hat becomes a synecdoche for the Fleming film. The propellor at its peaked top suggests flight through the air, the mode of transportation that has originally brought Frank Morgan's Wizard to Oz. Through its peaked shape, it conflates all of the peaked hats in *The Wizard*: the peaked hat of Margaret Hamilton's Wicked Witch of the West, the peaked hat worn by Ray Bolger's Scarecrow, the peaked upside-down funnel worn by the Tin Man, even the peaked ears of Bert Lahr's Cowardly Lion. Similarly, the hat's bright blue background, against which gaudy musical notes stand in relief, conflates both theme and imagery of the first song sung by Judy Garland's Dorothy: "Over the Rainbow." And, of course, there is a further repetition of the theme and imagery of this song in Sandy's seemingly parodic vision of an Eden populated by robins. This connection between Sandy's vision and that of Garland's Dorothy is important since the film's closure duplicates that of *The Wizard*.

Still another direct quotation from *The Wizard* is that of the yellow brick road. Jeffrey is forced to take two high-speed journeys in Frank's car. The first of these ends at Ben's place, where Dorothy's husband and son are being held captive, where Dean Stockwell's Ben assumes the role of the Sandman as he lip-syncs Roy Orbison's recording of "In Dreams," and where Jeffrey is menaced by a sawed-off Lynch Munchkin who keeps repeating as he circles Jeffrey, "I'm tall." During the second of these journeys, the camera twice jump cuts from closeups of the car's occupants to closeups of the yellow lines marking the center of the road, and each time the car's speed turns these into a solid yellow line, evoking the yellow brick road leading to the Emerald City.

Perhaps the most powerfully evocative quotation from *The Wizard* is Dorothy's ruby slippers. In *The Wizard*, Billie Burke's Glinda, the Good Witch of the North, magically transfers the ruby slippers to Dorothy's feet from those of the dead Wicked Witch of the East. These slippers are an object of desire for the Wicked Witch of the West, and by association, the innocent Dorothy becomes an object of that desire, a desire filmically presented by the shot of the Witch's threatening message written in huge letters of smoke across the sky: SURRENDER DOROTHY! Although Garland's Dorothy remains the sexual innocent throughout, the shift from black-and-white to Technicolor introduces a strong sexual undercurrent, nowhere more clearly present

than in the new, Technicolor Dorothy's glamorous red shoes and inviting red lips. Not only does Rossellini's Dorothy seductively reproduce the original's red lips and mouth, but, at the beginning of the extended sadomasochistic episode in her apartment, the red shoes as well. As the hidden Jeffrey watches from the closet, Rossellini's Dorothy, having partially disrobed, dressed only in black lingerie, or as Pauline Kael puts it "black bra and scanties" (100), walks about the apartment in red shoes that greatly emphasize her nakedness and sexuality. What titillates, or perhaps shocks, is not merely the sight of Rossellini's Dorothy walking about half-naked in high-heeled red shoes, but that she is Garland's innocent Dorothy transformed into whore.

Lynch continues to play his allusive game with the audience through direct quotation from a second primary source. Quotations from *Oedipus Rex*, like those from *The Wizard of Oz*, punctuate the film. One such quotation is the image of the father who has been struck down, the powerful image of the fallen father which opens the film. A second quotation is the blind man whose locus of action is the hardware store owned by Jeffrey's father. A third quotation is the riddling exchange between the blind man and Jeffrey in which Jeffrey, holding up four fingers, asks the blind man to correctly identify the number. Not only is there an echo of the Sphinx's riddle with its emphasis on number, there is also an explicit connection made through the blind man's name, Ed. Fourth and fifth quotations from *Oedipus* are present both in the monstrous, Sphinx-like face and the lion's roar which frame Jeffrey's dream repetition of his initiation into perverse sexuality. The lion's roar, of course, ironically echoes *The Wizard*'s Cowardly Lion, just as the triangles of spurting flame accompanying the sinister roar duplicate those illuminating the Wicked Witch's castle where Dorothy is held captive. Finally, *Oedipus* is also indirectly quoted through the triangular sexual relationship of Dorothy, Frank, and Jeffrey. As this relationship works itself out, Jeffrey is identified with Dorothy's missing husband but also with her son, so that like Oedipus, Jeffrey is both husband and son. Moreover, like Oedipus, Jeffrey at the film's conclusion destroys the terrible, threatening father in the guise of Frank.

A second game played by Lynch with the audience is dream recognition; that is, like Hawthorne in "Young Goodman Brown," he mixes dream with literal reality until the two are indistinguishable to all but the experienced game player. From this standpoint, except for one major difference, the whole of *Blue Velvet* becomes a quotation from the extended dream sequence of *The Wizard*. The difference is that, as Freudian trickster, Lynch presents an ingenious inversion of the original; instead of a phallic dream generated by the unconscious of the pre-pubescent Dorothy, the dream is that of the sexually mature but as yet uninitiated Jeffrey.

In both *The Wizard of Oz* and *Blue Velvet*, there is a surplus of father figures; however, in the first these figures are sexually benign, in the second monstrous. In *The Wizard*, with the exception of Charles Grapewin's Uncle Henry, Dorothy's dream sees the reappearance of all of the father figures of the film's opening: Ray Bolger's Hunk becomes the Scarecrow, Jack Haley's Hickory becomes the Tin Woodman, Bert Lahr's Zeke becomes the Cowardly Lion, and Frank Morgan's Professor Marvel becomes the Wizard. Three of the four begin the dream sequence as non-threatening, castrated fathers. These roles are emphasized throughout but particularly by the Scarecrow's dismemberment and his repeated falls, by the Cowardly Lion's useless phallus, the extremely limp tail with which he repeatedly and comically wipes his face, and by the Tin Woodman's cancelled genitals and his repeated inability to speak or move. Frank Morgan presents a more complex father figure since at the film's beginning, as Professor Marvel, he is the good father who protects Dorothy through his understanding and compassion; yet in Dorothy's dream he is both bumbling, castrated father and, as the Wizard, the threatening father who sends her on a life-threatening quest. A sign of this dual nature, appearing in one of the film's earliest scenes, is the death's head affixed above the door of Professor Marvel's caravan.

In Dorothy's dream the threatening phallicism ordinarily attached to the father is

transferred to the Wicked Witch and her familiars, the flying monkeys, and to the grotesquely phallic Munchkins. In this dream, Dorothy's desire to become sexually mature manifests itself in the glamorous, womanly, ruby slippers whose possession marks the beginning of her journey to the Emerald City. At the same time, the intense desire to remain a child operating in a world of polymorphous-perverse sexuality is manifested in two emphatic symbols: the basket which never leaves her arm and Toto, the irrespressible little dog who both gets her into trouble and saves her. Seen from the standpoint of pre-pubescent sexuality, the basket and Toto symbolically complement one another as tokens of a yet undifferentiated female and male sexuality. If the basket remains empty, a pre-pubescent female sexuality not ready for use, Toto as tiny, cute phallus remains extremely active. It is Toto's invasion of Miss Gulch's garden that initially gets Dorothy into trouble; it is Toto who unmasks the Wizard by aggressively pulling back the curtain behind which he hides. Neither can the irrepressible Toto be contained by Miss Gulch, from whose basket he escapes at the film's beginning, nor by the Wicked Witch's familiars from whom he also escapes. Moreover, having made good his escape, it is this active principle that directs the father figures to the Witch's castle, the site of Dorothy's imprisonment.

If castration fear informs the scenes organized around *The Wizard*'s father figures, it is also present in Dorothy's death scene, or the scene in which she is threatened with death. After kidnapping and imprisoning Dorothy, the phallic Witch, in what amounts to a thinly veiled assault on Dorothy's virginity, demands her ruby slippers. Dorothy is willing to exchange the womanly slippers for Toto who is once again imprisoned in Dorothy's basket but when the Witch reaches for them their magic proves too powerful. As the scene proceeds, the removal of Dorothy's slippers becomes a sign of an irrevocable rite of passage; if their possession indicates her desire to become a woman, their loss represents a sexual threat, the equivalent of death. "I should have remembered," exclaims the Witch, "those slippers will never come off as long as you're alive." Then in the language of sexual inneuendo, the Witch declares her intention to continue the assault: "But that's not what's worrying me; it's how to do it. These things must be done delicately, or you'll hurt the spell." In the language of dream, this can be seen as a clear expression of Dorothy's fear of being sexually wounded, of being herself castrated. On this level, the threat is an intensification of the one implicit in the loss of Toto. Dorothy is willing to give the Witch the ruby slippers in exchange for Toto, but because the rite of passage is irrevocable she must now on a dream level confront the loss of both Toto and slippers.

In Dorothy's dream the phallic principle splits, appearing as the threatening Witch and the non-threatening but mischievous Toto; in Jeffrey's masculine dream, the phallic principle also splits, but differently. It appears in the guise of the monstrous Frank, the sexual pyschopath who on a dream level functions as the terrible father and as Jeffrey's double, the projection of his own uncontrolled carnal desire; but it also appears as an attribute of the threatening, castrating witch/mother. As Jeffrey's dream/nightmare works itself out, both Dorothy as castrating witch/mother and Frank as the terrible father play important roles in Jeffrey's initiation into perverse sexuality.

At this level, the game of source recognition that Lynch plays with his audience becomes more complex as he begins to draw heavily upon the symbols, tropes, mechanisms, and jokes of Freudian dream. On a Freudian level, Jeffrey's dream/nightmare initiation into perverse sexuality develops in three stages. First, there is the child's worst nightmare come true, his witnessing of the primal scene, a sadomasochistic coupling in which the terrible father brutalizes the victim/mother. What makes Frank's nightmare appearance possible is the dream castration of the good father. With the good father rendered tongueless, impotent, powerless, it is possible for the terrible father to usurp his place. The severed ear found by Jeffrey introduces the motif of castration fear, and it is significant that Jeffrey does not find the ear until he has witnessed his father, powerless, in the hospital. The loss of the father's tongue/phal-

lus is now reinforced by a second loss, the loss of an ear by another of the film's father figures. Unable to restore power to the literal father, Jeffrey plunges into a metaphysical mystery. On a dream level, in attempting to solve the mystery of the severed ear, Jeffrey is attempting to demonstrate his own male power; he is attempting to reassure himself, to quiet the powerful castration fear provoked by the sight of his powerless father. The double loss of tongue and ear is compensated for through the emphasis on the eye's importance in solving the hidden mysteries of adult sexuality and ultimately the metaphysical mystery of good and evil.

In the dark enactment of the primal scene witnessed by Jeffrey, Frank's breathing apparatus, besides heightening the sexual grotesquerie, becomes symbolically significant in two ways. Since it duplicates in small the elaborate breathing apparatus of Jeffrey's striken father, it establishes a link between the good father and the terrible father. It suggests the Jekyll/Hyde nature of the father and of sexual mystery itself. On this level, Jeffrey is the curious son whose gaze enables him to penetrate into the heart of sexual mystery. However, it is more complex than this since Frank alternately acts the role of Daddy and baby. If he is the terrible father who demands to be addressed as "Daddy," he is also the baby who makes a desperate attempt to return to the mother's womb. Seen in this light the breathing apparatus takes on a different meaning. Now, it does not simply duplicate the good father's breathing apparatus; rather it now can be seen as an umbilical cord tying Frank's "baby" to the mother. His rage can be read as that of the frustrated, terror-stricken child who finds himself cut off, cut adrift from the protective womb. It is the meaning of Frank's cry, "Daddy's coming home." If this can be understood as Frank's vulgar expression of an anticipated orgasm, it can also be seen as the powerfully regressive utterance of the man seized by the death wish.

The second stage in Jeffrey's dream/nightmare initiation is completed with his seduction by Dorothy, in the role of Freudian witch/mother. Three emphatic symbols define Rossellini's Dorothy in this double role of seductress who is also castrator: voluptuous red lips framing threatening teeth, shown in innumerable extreme closeups, a Medusa's wig, only briefly removed during the disrobing scene, and the phallic butcher knife with which she commands Jeffrey to do her sexual bidding. Not only does she wound Jeffrey with her knife just below his offending eye, but also, throughout the seduction, Rossellini's Dorothy demonstrates her power as threatening, phallic witch/mother. This demonstration of power commences when she forces him from his hiding place in the closet prior to Frank's appearance, continues after Frank's departure when she offers Jeffrey sexual favors in return for sadomasochistic control, and concludes with Jeffrey's fourth visit to her apartment when, after manipulating him into Frank's role by commanding him to hit her, intercourse takes place.

The third stage of Jeffrey's dream/nightmare initiation involves an extended confrontation with the terrible father who in a grotesque repetition of the phallic mother's sadomasochistic manipulation of him, alternately threatens him with seduction and death. This nightmare confrontation, taking place over the course of the two Sandman sequences, again exhibits a powerful castration fear on Jeffrey's part. The first Sandman sequence, which begins in Frank's with the powerless Jeffrey being derided as a "pussy" and menaced by Frank's familiars, one of whom holds a knife to his eyes, ends at Ben's place, a kind of witch's castle where Dorothy's husband and son are held captive. In a grotesque echo of the Wicked Witch's assault on Dorothy, Frank and Ben sexually taunt Jeffrey; then with Frank looking lovingly on, Dean Stockwell's Ben lip-syncs Roy Orbison's "In Dreams" and the scene concludes. On a dream level, one signalled by the song's title, the terrible father has split into threatening and seductive selves, each calling Jeffrey's own masculinity into doubt.

The second Sandman sequence, like the first, begins in Frank's car with the powerless Jeffrey once again menaced by Frank's familiars, and ends in an open field where Frank, in another grotesque imitation of Rossellini's Dorothy, forces Jeffrey to play

another of his sadomasochistic games. While the Orbison song plays in the background and a dream-distorted temptress undulates atop the car, Frank, in his role as terrible father, reworks the lyrics of "Love Letters in the Sand" as a death threat directed at the powerless son's heart. To heighten the sexual grotesquerie of an already grotesque scene, Frank smears his lips with lipstick, brutally kisses Jeffrey, and then sadistically beats him about the body and eyes.

Lynch remains the Freudian trickster throughout the film, but he is at his playful best in his poetic games with symbols and tropes of castration fear. For instance, Lynch employs the trope of powerlessness, a major convention of nightmare, to key the alert audient to the first extended sadomasochistic sequence in Dorothy's apartment and to the two Sandman sequences. This powerlessness is first graphically presented in the speechlessness of the stricken father. Other examples are Jeffrey's speechlessness in Dorothy's closet, his speechlessness during the Sandman sequences, Dorothy's relative speechlessness during the sadomaschistic sequences, Ben's speechlessness as he lip-sync's Roy Orbison's "In Dreams," and the Yellow Man's speechlessness in the final sequence in Dorothy's apartment. Moreover, Lynch offers two Freudian jokes as keys to the equation of speechlessness with the powerlessness of castration. One is Jeffrey's apparently idle confidence to Sandy that he once knew a boy who had the biggest tongue in the world, an Oedipal joke that resonates with the good father's loss of his tongue. In the final sequence in Dorothy's apartment, Lynch returns to the joke and gives it a grotesque twist by producing the biggest tongue in the world in the guise of the blue velvet belt protruding from the mouth of Dorothy's dead husband. This grotesque Oedipal joke involving the useless, flaccid, tongue/phallus also includes Frank's fetishistic use of the phallic strips of blue velvet, since if he is, on the one hand, the father/phallus run amuck, he is, on the other, impotent.

The theme of powerlessness is also manifested in the film's sight imagery. There is the cancelled sight of Jeffrey during the original sexual encounter with Dorothy, sight cancelled by her command not to look at her. There is the cancelled sight of Dorothy during the sadomasochistic encounter with Frank, sight cancelled by his command not to look at him. There is the cancelled sight of Jeffrey during the second Sandman sequence, sight cancelled by Frank's command not to look at him. In addition there is the cancelled sight of the blind salesman in the Beaumont hardware store, and there is the cancelled sight of Jeffrey the morning after the Sandman sequences. This quick shot, focusing on Jeffrey in dark glasses as he waters his father's lawn, identifies Jeffrey with both the blind Oedipus and with his own powerless father.

Finally, Lynch manifests the theme of powerlessness through images of cancelled hearing. There is the cancelled hearing of Dorothy's husband, the man with the severed ear. There is the cancelled hearing of Jeffrey in Dorothy's bathroom, where the flushing water prevents him from hearing Sandy's warning signal. There is the cancelled hearing of Frank who, failing to detect Jeffrey's presence in Dorothy's closet, runs toward Dorothy's bedroom, ironically boasting, "I hear you, fucker!" This can also be seen as another of Lynch's Freudian jokes, since it is the mother's bedroom toward which he runs to find the son. Ironically, it is Sandy, Jeffrey's double, who overhears the details of the case of the severed ear from her bedroom and who subsequently leads Jeffrey to Dorothy. If Jeffrey sees things, Sandy hears them.

Lynch raises the stakes of his game with the audience by beginning the film after Jeffrey's dream/nightmare has already begun, and he is particularly playful at the film's beginning which through a mixture of slow motion and conventional shots he invites the audience to read as simplistic parody of small town life where the sunny exterior belies a dark, troubling underside. The slow motion shots of the fire truck and the crossing guard intermixed with conventional shots of Jeffrey's mother watching T.V. and his father watering the lawn contrasted to the extreme closeup of the fighting beetles in the dark underworld beneath the grass would seem to suggest parody. Instead the tracking shot into the beetles' underworld anticipates the tracking shot into the

severed ear, and both are tropes of entrance. For the experienced game player, both of these tracking shots provide clues to the dream game being played.

Moreover, unlike Fleming who employs the conventions of dream in a completely straight-forward way, Lynch, like Hawthorne, disguises them in the interest of his game with the audience. In fact, like Hawthorne in "Young Goodman Brown," Lynch withholds the key narrative information until the very end. It is only with the extreme closeup and reverse tracking shot out of the sleeping Jeffrey's ear that Lynch clearly suggests that the entire film can be seen as a mirror of Jeffrey's unconscious. As with Hawthorne, though, once the ironic frame has been established, the experienced game player can detect clues to the true nature of what he is watching from the film's opening to its close.

Clues to the film's dream structure abound. "In Dreams," the song providing the thematic key to the two Sandman sequences is perhaps the most explicit of these; the nightclub's name, "The Slow Club," with its suggestion of dream rather than literal time is another; the dream materialization of the naked Dorothy in front of Jeffrey's home is a third; the free-standing corpse of the Yellow Man in the climactic shoot-out in Dorothy's apartment is a fourth; the dream materialization of Frank as well-dressed man moments after his departure as Frank in the picture-taking sequence is a fifth such clue. Even the blind salesman who effortlessly solves Jeffrey's riddle and with equal aplomb rings up the sale of the axe to the woodsman in the apparently realistic hardware-store scenes can be read as a dream figure offering an important clue to the film's structure, and in this connection the axe can be read as one more dream symbol evoking castration fear. This dream axe is also metonymically present in one of the film's opening sounds, the sound of the falling tree employed by the radio announcer to mark the time. Moreover, this trope of falling is again repeated in the dream fall of the stricken father.

Of course, Lynch's most dangerously clever game with the audience is to take everybody's favorite, sun-drenched fairytale and turn it into nightmare. In this nightmare, the innocent Dorothy is replaced by Jeffrey, Toto by Sandy, and the Witch by the psychopathic Frank. More shocking still, and the true source of the film's most horrifying effects is the metamorphosis of Dorothy from fresh-faced innocent to lurid temptress. However, having turned fairytale to nightmare, Lynch relents and, like Fleming, opts for a classical closure. The monster is killed, the good father returned, and Dorothy's innocence restored. Only the bug in the robin's beak remains as a dark reminder of the fine line between dream and nightmare, of the horror within.

James Lindroth
Seton Hall University

Notes

[1] Lynch connects the Dorothy of *The Wizard* to his own Dorothy in an explanation of why he chose Dennis Hopper to play Frank. "Dennis was the perfect Frank," Lynch tells Lizzie Borden in a *Village Voice* interview, "because he's from Kansas. It's perfect that Frank would be from Kansas—because Kansas has something to do with *The Wizard of Oz* and Dorothy" (62). Betsy Berry, toward the end of an acute reading of *Blue Velvet*, also makes the connection between the two Dorothys but without fully developing its implications.

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