# The essential dreaminess of “Twin Peaks: The Return”

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*Summary*. This article reviews and analyzes the multiplicity of roles that dreams and dreaming play across the television series “Twin Peaks: The Return” (2017), a follow-up to the original “Twin Peaks” series (1992), directed by David Lynch. Dreaming is at least as important in the new series as in the original. Elements of dreaming appear in all aspects of the story, in ways both small and large, clear and obscure, hopeful and terrifying. The present article has three aims: 1) to highlight the most prominent dream elements in “Twin Peaks: The Return” and discuss their relevance to the overall story; 2) to examine the creative methods and techniques used to represent various qualities of dreaming; and 3) to reflect on the many philosophical issues that arise regarding the metaphysics, and meta-ethics, of dreaming. Considered as an aesthetic whole, “Twin Peaks: The Return” sets a very high artistic standard for dream-infused creativity in the 21st century.

*Keywords:* Dreams, dreaming, film, Twin Peaks, David Lynch

## Introduction

In 1992 the television series “Twin Peaks” premiered with an offbeat story about a murder in the Pacific Northwest and an FBI agent whose dreams guide him in the investigation. Although lasting only two seasons, the show was a critical and cult success praised for its emotional depth, creepy mood, kinky themes, horrific violence, and haunting beauty. The show also garnered attention because of its serious and sustained attention to dreams, visions, synchronicities, and spiritual experiences, none of which were common topics in mainstream American television at the time (Bulkeley 2003). In the third episode, FBI Agent Dale Cooper dreams of an otherworldly Red Room in which he appears twenty-five years older and meets Laura Palmer, the murder victim. In the last episode of the original series, Laura again appears to Agent Cooper in the Red Room and whispers that she will see him in twenty-five years. Exactly twenty-five years later, in 2017, director David Lynch and his co-creator Mark Frost presented “Twin Peaks: The Return.” Dreaming is at least as important in the new series as in the original, and maybe more so. Elements of dreaming appear in all aspects of the story, in ways both small and large, clear and obscure, hopeful and terrifying. Considered as an aesthetic whole, “Twin Peaks: The Return” sets a very high artistic standard for dream-infused creativity in the 21st century.

This article reviews and analyzes the multiplicity of roles that dreaming plays across the new series. A similar review and analysis could be made of other recurrent themes weaving through the story, such as electricity, coffee, or the color red. Because of the strong and enduring cultural impact of the original “Twin Peaks” (e.g., Hayes and Boulegue 2013, Lavery 1994), it seems worthwhile to examine the new series from a dream studies perspective, referring to both classic and contemporary sources of dream knowledge when helpful. The present article has three goals. First, to make this long and complex work (eighteen one-hour episodes) more accessible by highlighting the most prominent dream elements and discussing their relevance to the overall story. Second, to evaluate the artistic portrait of dreams in the series by examining the creative methods and techniques used to represent various qualities of dreaming, similar to other scholars who have explored the relations between dreams, creativity, and film (Eberwein 1984, Halpern 2003, Pagel 2008, Welt 2019). And third, to reflect on the many philosophical issues that arise regarding the metaphysics, and meta-ethics, of dreaming. The portrayal of dreaming in this fictional work calls forth a host of existential questions about our actual lives and identities. In “Twin Peaks: The Return,” dreams are portals to deeper realities and truths, bringing people into contact with tremendous beauty and joy, and also with profound sadness and primal terror.

## In and Out of Dreamland

The first two seasons of the original “Twin Peaks” and the prequel film “Fire Walk with Me” (1993) form the narrative context for the new series. A deeper background emerges with the appearance of key performers from previous David Lynch films, including Laura Dern (Diane) from “Blue Velvet” (1986) and Naomi Watts (Janey-E.) from “Mulholland Drive” (2001), along with a prominent role for Lynch himself (FBI Director Gordon Cole). The entirety of Lynch’s body of creative work as a director thus becomes part of the dense network of meanings and associations from which “Twin Peaks: The Return” takes shape. It would not be misguided (though it would extend beyond the bounds of this article) to interpret the whole series as David Lynch’s own dream.

The new series opens with Agent Cooper back in dreamland—in the Red Room, the interdimensional space he first accessed via dreaming in the original series (warning: many, many spoilers ahead). He is 25 years older than he was in the

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original series, which ended when the demonic entity known as Killer BOB trapped him in another region of dreamland, the hellish Black Lodge. Since then, an evil doppelgänger of Agent Cooper has been rampaging through the waking world, doing BOB's baleful bidding. Now the time has come for the "good" Cooper to return and force the "bad" Cooper back into dreamland. This sets in motion the primary narrative arc of the series, the Jekyll-and-Hyde conflict between the two Coopers, the good and evil parts of himself torn apart into separate bodies (similar in many ways to the original "Star Trek" television series episode "Mirror, Mirror" in which a faulty transporter splits the captain into a feckless good Kirk and a tyrannical bad Kirk (1967)).

From a dream studies perspective, what is most remarkable about this division of Agent Cooper's identity is how well it maps onto the phenomenology of hypnogogic and hypnopompic parasomnias. A *parasomnia* is a general term used for a variety of abnormal occurrences in sleep. A *hypnogogic parasomnia* refers to problems with the process of transitioning from waking to sleeping. A *hypnopompic parasomnia* refers to the opposite kind of problem, with the transition from sleeping to waking. Here are clinical definitions of these terms from a recent textbook of sleep medicine:

"Hypnogogic/hypnopompic hallucinations…are dreamlike REM sleep experiences, often frightening, that occur when falling asleep or waking up… Parasomnias are unpleasant or undesirable behaviors or experiences that occur during entry into sleep, during sleep, or during arousals from sleep… Parasomnias typically manifest themselves during transition periods from one state of sleep to another, during which time the brain activity is reorganizing. Activities associated with parasomnias are characterized by being potentially violent or injurious, disruptive to other household members, resulting in excessive daytime sleepiness, or associated with medical, psychiatric, or neurological conditions." (Colten and Altevogt, 2006, 84, 88)

These are exactly the dynamics of consciousness at work in "Twin Peaks: The Return." Bad Cooper embodies, in his behavior and impact on others, a long hypnogogic nightmare. Good Cooper, by contrast, is effectively trapped in a long hypnopompic dream. Neither one seems fully conscious, or entirely part of this world. They are liminal beings from opposite ends of the sleep cycle whose very existence has disrupted the natural balance of reality.

To make the transition from the Red Room back into the waking world, Good Cooper must temporarily inhabit the body of another doppelganger, this one an insurance agent from Las Vegas named Dougie Jones. Over the course of several episodes, Good Cooper struggles to wake up in Dougie's body, while Dougie's family, co-workers, and enemies wonder what has happened to him. His wife, Janey-E., teasingly refers to him as "Mr. Dream-Weaver," and an assistant at his office, with unwitting accuracy, jokes, "Are you still in dreamland, Dougie?" He seems pleasantly dim, distracted, and oblivious to his surroundings. He cannot initiate his own speech, and can only echo other people's words. Nor can he initiate his own movement, requiring others to guide him through doors, in and out of cars, and even to use the bathroom. He is like a baby, newly born to this world, naïve and helpless, all of which makes for several very funny scenes of mundane misfortunes. And yet somehow he is also *more* than a normal person. In Wordsworth's poetic terms, he enters Dougie's body "not in entire forgetfulness, and not in utter nakedness, but trailing clouds of glory." His amnesia is not total; he slowly remembers bits and pieces of who he really is. He does not arrive naked, but attired in Agent Cooper's sharply tailored black FBI suit (minus the shoes). And despite barely knowing how to use a fork, Dougie displays several supernatural abilities that have astonishingly benevolent effects—the ability to predict slot machine jackpots, identify lies and conspiracies, and react "like a cobra" when attacked by a vicious assassin. His transitional condition of existence apparently enables him to convey positive energies and good fortunes from the realm of dreaming into the waking world. He may be as feeble as a baby, but he is also a powerful conduit for transformational, almost miraculous positivity towards everyone he encounters.

As his polar opposite, Bad Cooper acts as a conduit for destructive, demonic negativity towards everyone he encounters. He, too, has amazing abilities—freakish strength, insensitivity to pain, phenomenal skills with phones and computers. But he uses these abilities to make people's lives worse, bringing carnage, horror, and death wherever he goes. At one point in a conversation with his criminal partner Ray (episode 2), Bad Cooper defines the core of his own character: "There's one thing you should know about me, Ray. I don't *need* anything. I *want*." Bad Cooper is pure libidinal desire, the will-to-power unbound, Jung's shadow made manifest, Plato's "worst of men" releasing into waking life the raging instinctual beast that should always remain confined within our dreams (*The Republic*, Book IX).

The two Coopers embody processes of consciousness that have fallen dangerously out of balance. The hypnopompic awakening has stalled, while the hypnogogic nightmare has escaped sleep and is spreading into the waking state. Sending Bad Cooper fully to sleep and helping Good Cooper fully awaken is necessary not only to restore the integrated identity of Agent Cooper, but also to protect the rest of the world from the maelstrom of malevolence stirred up by his BOB-possessed doppelgänger.

## The Dream in Laura's Diary

The first episode includes a scene in which an elderly woman, the Log Lady, relays an odd warning to Deputy Hawk of the Twin Peaks Sheriff's Department: Something is missing from the files of the Laura Palmer murder case, something having to do with Hawk's heritage as a Native American. This mysterious message, from a piece of wood the Log Lady cradles like a baby, sets in motion an extensive search that takes several episodes to resolve. Both the Log Lady and Deputy Hawk are familiar and reassuring characters from the original series, and both have shown the capacity to perceive extraordinary dimensions of reality and fight courageously against the forces of darkness they find there. In the world of Twin Peaks, it is perfectly normal for a woman who talks to logs to share a cryptic alert with a law enforcement officer, and for him to take it seriously.

After many false leads, Deputy Hawk finally discovers what has been missing from the files—several pages from Laura's diary, torn out and hidden in a very unlikely place. The key passage from the diary is a dream in which Laura receives a bizarre command:

> *"This came to me in a dream last night. 'My name is Annie. I've been with Dale and Laura (me??!!!). The good Dale is in the Lodge and he can't leave. Write it in your diary.' That's what she said to me."*

Deputy Hawk and his boss, Sheriff Truman, ponder this dream at length and struggle to interpret its meaning. Laura was already dead when Annie Blackburn, a waitress at the Double R diner in Twin Peaks, developed a romance with Agent Cooper, only to be kidnapped and held captive in the Black Lodge. Deputy Hawk and Sheriff Truman find it hard to believe that Laura could have dreamed about people she never met, talking about things that would not be relevant until 25 years after her death. Yet they know the Black Lodge is indeed real, if not part of *this* reality, and they know Annie was taken there and then came out again with a person they assumed was Agent Cooper. But Annie's message via Laura's dream indicates that the "good Dale" is actually still confined in the Lodge. What does that mean? Hawk recognizes the grim implication: "So, it was not the *good* Cooper who came out with Annie." Via this long-lost dream text, the authorities of Twin Peaks discover on their own, independently of the FBI, the truth of what has happened to Agent Cooper. Somehow Cooper has been divided into two beings, with the good part still trapped in dreamland and the not-good part loose in the waking world.

During the original series, Laura mentioned her weirdly significant dreams and discussed them with her therapist, Dr. Jacobi. In the new series, even though she has long been dead, Laura's dreams continue to mystify, perplex, and ultimately enlighten.

## Episode 8

Near the midpoint of the series, an episode appears that dramatically heightens the existential stakes of what has come before, and what is yet to come. Filmed almost entirely in black and white, with nighttime settings and very little dialogue, the episode (titled "Gotta Light?") can be interpreted as a surreal meditation on evil, a visual poem of aesthetic abstraction, and/or the backstory to the whole Twin Peaks mythos. The episode also reveals a horribly obvious and virtually indefensible means by which the cosmic powers of evil enter our minds and bodies—through our sleep.

This becomes clear following the long, breathtaking scene of the first atomic bomb detonation, in a forlorn New Mexico desert in 1945. The scene then shifts to 1956, also in New Mexico, as a teenage boy and girl walk home at night along a dirt road. They share a brief kiss outside the girl's house before he leaves. She then goes up to her room, where she lays on her bed, turns on the radio, and smiles in first-love happiness. The song on the radio is "My Prayer" by the Platters, which includes this verse: "My prayer is to linger with you/At the end of the day/In a dream that's divine."

This romantic reverie is interrupted by two evil entities born from the bomb. The first is a disgusting little creature, a bizarre cross between insect and amphibian, crawling out of the blast site and slithering with disturbing intentionality toward the girl's house. The second is a "Woodsman," a charred and sooty man from the Black Lodge. He, too, emerges from the detonation zone, and shambles toward the radio station playing the "My Prayer" song. After murdering the receptionist, and while murdering the disc jockey, the Woodsman stops the song, takes control of the microphone, and in a gravelly monotone recites over and over again a brief, demented poem: *"This is the water and this is the well. Drink full and descend. The horse is the white of the eyes and dark within."* Other people listening to the radio, when they hear these words, fall fast asleep—instantly, abruptly, violently. They literally collapse on the ground as if knocked unconscious.

The girl in her bedroom hears the Woodsman's poem on the radio, and she, too, suddenly falls asleep. As she does so, the loathsome creature from the desert finally reaches her house, drags itself up to her window, climbs onto her bed, and burrows its way into her mouth and down her throat. The episode ends with the image of the girl laying asleep in bed, her eyes moving under their lids.

What does all this mean? From a dream research perspective it certainly appears that, immediately following her forced ingestion of the creeping creature, the girl enters a phase of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. The original scientific research on REM sleep and its relationship with dreaming was published in the early 1950's (Aserinsky and Kleitman 1953, 1955), just after the first bomb blasts, and just before the time of this particular scene. This might be merely coincidental, or it might be an intentional association between the dawn of the atomic age and the dawn of the modern science of sleep and dreaming. Either way, at a metaphorical level the final scene of this episode suggests an ultimate toxicity at the heart of the "American Dream." More than that, it highlights the profound metaphysical vulnerability of sleep. Sleep is a time of vulnerability to evil entities that can attack us without our even knowing it. We assume we are simply resting with our minds turned off, but in fact we are defenseless against crafty, otherworldly beings who want to possess, manipulate, and corrupt us. This is how the malevolent forces unleashed by the atomic bomb have infected everyone, even the purest, most innocent of people; this is how those dark energies have gotten "into" us.

## The Mitchum Brothers

If dreams were important to the Twin Peaks universe before episode 8, after it they become absolutely vital. The pitched battle between good and evil increasingly takes place in and through dreaming. In episode 11, a prophetic dream literally saves Dougie's life. He had been targeted for death by the Mitchum brothers, Bradley and Rodney, the gangster owners of the Silver Mustang Casino, after Dougie's inexplicable string of jackpots had cost them over $400,000. The day has finally come when they plan to kill him, and during breakfast Bradley mentions a strange dream he had the night before. He cannot remember it very well, but it was very intense, and he knows it was about Dougie. "I hate him so bad," he moans to his brother over their bowls of cereal, "I can't *wait* to kill him."

On the drive into the desert to deal with their Dougie problem, Bradley suddenly remembers another part of his dream: a cut on Rodney's face, acquired during a recent fly-swatting mishap, has healed completely. Rodney is skeptical, but when they peel off the bandage, the cut is miraculously gone. "There's *more* to the dream," Bradley says in frustration, "but I can't remember…"

Now Dougie arrives, with a cardboard box in his hands. Bradley reacts with shock and urgently pulls Rodney aside. In one of the most beautifully composed shots of the entire series, Bradley says he finally remembers the whole dream:

B: You see that box that he's holding?
R: Yeah.
B: That was in my dream.

R: Aww, f****.
B: No, listen to me, listen to me. There's something in that box. And if that something is what I saw in my dream, we can't kill him.
R: What the f*** are you talking about?
B: No, I'm not kidding, Rodney! If he's got this one certain thing, that's in that box, it means we can't kill him.
R: Why?
B: It means he's not our enemy, Rodney.
R: How the f*** do you know that?
B: I'm just telling you what was in the dream! But it's got to be this one certain thing.
R: What?
B: Rodney, it's a million to one shot, but if it's in there, you gotta promise me, listen to me, we gotta be together on this.
R: Okay.
B: We won't kill him.
R: Okay, enough. What is it?
[Bradley whispers something in Rodney's ear. Rodney furiously pulls out his gun, walks over to Dougie, and levels the gun at Dougie's head.]
R: Okay, what the f***. In the box there, is that a cherry pie?
D: Cherry pie.

Bradley goes over to check the box in Dougie's hands, and inside is exactly what he dreamed—a cherry pie. But the miracles are just beginning. Bradley frisks Dougie and finds in his jacket pocket a check for thirty million dollars, made out to the Mitchum brothers from Dougie's insurance company, as payment for a legitimate claim their criminal rivals were trying to deny them, a plot that Dougie had single-handedly uncovered. In a flash, the Mitchum brothers are completely transformed. Negativity switches to positivity. Their anger becomes joy, their murderous hatred becomes the most generous friendship. Like a classic experience of religious conversion, they have been struck in the desert by a startling revelation that initiates them into a greater awareness of true reality. The radiant impact of Good Cooper's otherworldly compassion and benevolence extends even to brutish, sinful men like the Mitchum brothers.

Bradley's prophetic dream might seem like a contrived plot device, a clumsy *deus ex machina*. But within the context of the Twin Peaks universe, dreaming is no more or less than a way for all people, from all walks of life, to perceive deeper truths and connect with trans-dimensional energies. The contents of certain dreams might be strange, but the *fact of dreaming* (Borges 1980) is a normal part of life, and accessible to everyone. In the case of the Mitchum brothers, a vivid dream that accurately predicts the future might be one of the few things that could accomplish such a radical change in their attitude and outlook. It takes some time for the dream and its significance to filter all the way into Bradley's waking mind, but once it does, it carries the power of absolute conviction. And it is only this conviction that enables him to stop Rodney from shooting Dougie until they look in the box, find the cherry pie, and then win their own jackpot.

## Another Monica Belucci Dream

Episode 14 opens with Sheriff Truman telling FBI Deputy Director Cole about the recently discovered pages from Laura Palmer's diary, with the dream message about two Coopers. Director Cole, who already knows about the troubling situation with his bifurcated buddy, thanks the Sheriff but offers no further comment. This seems a rather disappointing end to the lengthy investigative efforts of Deputy Hawk, Sheriff Truman, and the others. Their painstaking work turns out to be superfluous, apparently adding nothing new to the case. However, their deep review of Laura's murder does have the effect of alerting them to the dark storm rapidly approaching their town, thus preparing them to play their essential role in the final battle to come. Not officially, but at the more important level of dreams and intuitions, the FBI and the Twin Peaks Sheriff's department have now joined forces. When the moment of trans-dimensional truth arrives, everyone will be ready to play their part.

Later in the episode, Director Cole meets with his FBI team, veteran agent Albert Rosenfield and newcomer Tamara Preston. Cole tells them about his conversation with Sheriff Truman. Then, without any further prompting, Cole reports the following:

"And last night, I had another Monica Belucci dream. I was in Paris on a case. Monica called and asked me to meet her at a certain café. She said she needed to talk to me. When we met at the café, Cooper was there, but I couldn't see his face. Monica was very pleasant. She had brought friends. We all had a coffee. [A tear appears on her right cheek, though Cole does not mention it.] And then she said the ancient phrase: *'We are like the dreamer, who dreams and then lives inside the dream.'* We are like the dreamer who dreams, and then lives inside the dream. I told her I understood. And then she said: '*But, who is the dreamer?*' But who is the dreamer? A very powerful uneasy feeling came over me. Monica looked past me and indicated to me to look back at something that was happening there. I turned and looked. I saw myself, I saw myself from long ago, in the old Philadelphia offices. Listening to Cooper telling me he was worried about a dream he had. *'Gordon, it's 10:10 am on February 16th. I was worried about today because of the dream I told you about.'* And that was the day Philip Jeffreys appeared, and didn't appear… And while Philip Jeffreys was apparently there, he raised his arm and pointed at Cooper. And he asked me, *'Who do you think that is there?'* Damn, I hadn't remembered that! Now this is really something interesting to think about."

Director Cole pauses for a few moments after sharing this dream. Albert says he, too, remembers that day in the Philadelphia FBI office (approximately a week before Laura Palmer would be murdered). Then the episode goes on with other scenes and plotlines, and the dream itself receives no further discussion or interpretation. Left open are questions about Cole's relationship with Belucci (a famous Italian actress, not otherwise referenced in the series), the Paris café setting (also not referenced elsewhere), the double presence of Cooper (at both the café and the 1989 FBI meeting), and the import of Cooper's dream-within-a-memory-within-a-dream, with its brief, startling appearance of a disheveled Philip Jeffries (played by the late David Bowie).

The "ancient phrase" recited by Belucci has distinct echoes in Greek and Egyptian mythologies, the philosophies of Plato and Descartes, religious traditions like Daoism and Hinduism, theatrical works by Shakespeare and Calderon de la Barca, the fantastical writings of Lewis Carroll and Jorge Luis Borges, and recent books by Jungian analyst James Grotstein and scholar of Jewish mysticism

Elliot Wolfson, to name just a few (Borges 1964, Bulkeley 2008, Calderon de la Barca 2006, Carroll 2009, Descartes 1960, Grotstein 2000, Plato 1961, Shakespeare 1963, Wolfson 2011). Humans have indeed from ancient times recognized that we cannot definitively distinguish dreaming from waking. The widespread experience of intensely realistic “big” dreams almost inevitably raises existential questions about the ultimate nature of perception, identity, and the cosmos. This can feel deeply destabilizing and frightening, often in proportion to the strength of our attachment to the status quo of waking reality. But such dream-inspired questions can also lead to a spiritual liberation from externally imposed limits on the growth of consciousness. Mystics, philosophers, and artists through history have emphasized the importance of dreaming itself as a modality of perception and insight into dimensions of reality we cannot otherwise access.

In Director Cole’s dream, Monica Belucci brings this line of oneiric inquiry to its metaphysical climax. If all of life is a dream, then whose dream is it? Who is the dreamer dreaming this dream? We might want to say “*I* am the dreamer,” but even people who rarely remember their dreams recognize the fundamental *otherness* of dreaming, its wild independence and unpredictability, its ultimate origins far outside the sphere of normal waking consciousness. Perhaps the only thing we do know, the only statement we can make with psychological certainty, is that “*I* am *not* the dreamer.”

## The Audrey Dance

Not until episode 12 of “Twin Peaks: The Return” does Audrey Horne make her first appearance. A fan favorite from the original series, Audrey was a teenage classmate of Laura Palmer’s who fell in love with Agent Cooper when he first arrived in Twin Peaks to investigate Laura’s murder. In the second episode, Agent Cooper and Audrey are together at the Double R Diner when she selects a song from the jukebox, closes her eyes, and begins swaying in a mesmerizing, subtly sensuous way. “God, I love this music,” she whispers to Agent Cooper while she dances, “Isn’t it too dreamy?”

The original series ends with Audrey in a coma, on the edge of death following a horrific bomb blast. Now, more than halfway through the new series, she appears alive and beautiful still, but extremely upset, on the verge of hysteria. She is screaming at a man named Charlie, apparently her husband, begging him to take her to the Roadhouse to see if Billy is safe. She had a terrifying dream about Billy, bleeding from his nose and mouth. Billy, it turns out, is Audrey’s lover, about whom she is contemptuously unapologetic with Charlie. This is a lot of information for the audience to take in, and at first it seems that perhaps Audrey is mentally ill. Yet at one point she asks in a plaintive voice, “But dreams sometimes harken the truth, don’t they?” In the world of Twin Peaks, that is a golden insight, suggesting Audrey’s concerns may have more substance than might otherwise be assumed. She uses an antiquated, almost Biblical way of phrasing the question, like something a child might have heard in Sunday School. She clearly has a strong intuition that her dream is connecting her to something important, to powers greater than herself, but she also feels her sense of reality and personal identity falling apart, and she desperately seeks some sign of comprehension or reassurance from Charlie. Alas, she finds none.

By episode 16, when the arc of Audrey’s plot abruptly ends, several new details have emerged that cast her in a much more tragic light. First, her dream was right: another character reports that two days previously, Billy ran into her house with blood all over his face, then ran out again. So Audrey’s dream *did* harken the truth, while pointing at an even more frightening uncertainty—what *did* happen to Billy? How did he get hurt like that? Second, we learn that a sociopathic monster named Richard is actually Audrey’s son. Third, the long-unknown father of Richard is revealed to be Bad Cooper (who raped and impregnated Audrey while she was comatose in the hospital (Frost 2016)). Fourth, Charlie clearly knows more than he is saying about Billy’s disappearance, which raises even more worrisome questions about secrets, jealousy, and revenge. Sadly, Audrey has legitimate reasons for feeling that the world is crumbling around her, that nothing makes sense and she can trust no one. This is why it is both reassuring and alarming when everyone clears the floor at the Roadhouse, the dreamy music starts to play, and Audrey begins to dance her dance. Reassuring, because this brings her back to the happiest energies at the core of her character; alarming, because in the context it seems hallucinatory and potentially psychotic. Suddenly a man in the crowd angrily shouts, “Stay away from my wife!” and starts a vicious fistfight with another man, shattering Audrey’s dancing/dreaming space. She looks in panic to Charlie for help—but suddenly finds herself alone in a stark white room, in a hospital gown with no make-up, staring into a mirror.

It remains unclear if Audrey has finally lost her mind, or is still in a coma, or Charlie did something to her, or she has been transported to another infernal dimension within the Black Lodge (like Cooper at the end of the original series), or some combination of the above. All we know is that the dreamy dance is gone, and now she is trapped in a living nightmare. Beginning in the original series as a teenage girl of sweet desirability (“you’re everything a man wants in his life,” Agent Cooper warmly assures her in the first season), Audrey ends the new series a frightened, broken woman overwhelmed by horror and negativity. In Twin Peaks, not all dreams end well. Some end very, very badly.

## We Live Inside a Dream

The central conflict of the series reaches its point of maximal tension in episode 17, in Sheriff Truman’s office in Twin Peaks. Moments later, after the smoke clears and the world again has but one Cooper in it, another sudden metaphysical transformation occurs. An enormous image of Agent Cooper’s head floats across the scene, superimposed over everyone in the Sheriff’s office. The head intones in a slow, deep voice, *“We live inside a dream.”* This directly echoes what Monica Belluci said earlier in Director Cole’s recurrent dream, but here it suggests that this is now *his* dream, Agent Cooper’s, and where things go from here will follow the dreaming impulses of his newly integrated self. Having finally completed the hypnogogic and hypnopompic processes and restored the proper balance between waking and sleeping, Cooper is healthy and whole and ready to complete his mission.

The mission, now and always, is to save Laura Palmer. Agent Cooper wants to rescue her from death, bring her back home, and restore the original innocence of her life. With this intention in mind he walks into the darkness, journeys through various dimensions of time and space, and finally reaches Twin Peaks 25 years earlier, on the night before Laura's death. All is shadowy black-and-white. Just before Laura goes to meet the villains who will drug and abuse her before she is murdered, Agent Cooper intercepts her. At first Laura is frightened by his uncanny appearance, but then realizes that perhaps she *does* know him. "I've seen you in a dream," she says with wonder, *"in a dream."* She takes his outstretched hand, and he leads her through the primeval forest, away from the vortex of violence about to consume her. The scene gradually shifts from black-and-white to a rich, vibrant color as they move deeper into the forest. It seems that Agent Cooper has succeeded in his heroic quest to rescue "the little girl who lives down the lane," but a moment later she is suddenly, inexplicably gone—his hand is empty, Laura is nowhere to be seen, and all he hears are her faint screams echoing through the trees.

Cooper makes one last effort to save Laura in the concluding episode, but rather than restoring a world of prelapsarian goodness he only encounters more chaos and negativity, and by the end he is no longer sure of where or even *when* he is. The final image of the series returns to the opening image of the first episode, back in the dreamland space of the Red Room, with a young, beautiful Laura Palmer leaning down and whispering something in Agent Cooper's ear. As the magician Prospero says in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, "We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep" (IV.i.156-158). Agent Cooper's investigative and existential journey through the eighteen episodes of "Twin Peaks: The Return," is rounded with a profoundly mystical sleep of surreal dreaming, nightmarish fear, aching sadness, and eroticized wonder.

## Conclusion

This article has focused on direct references to dreaming in "Twin Peaks: The Return," and only on the most significant of those. Several other dream-related comments are scattered through the episodes, including lyrics of the music, all adding to the pervasive dreaminess of the series. Dreams and dreaming are a vital part of the ambient environment in Twin Peaks, the natural psychic background to everyone's character and behavior. This oneiric atmosphere manifests itself in nearly all aspects of the series. There is a visceral sense that anything can happen at any time, from shocking violence to tender beauty, from slapstick comedy to agonizing loss, from raw desire to spiritual illumination. The pacing varies from slow and contemplative to lightning fast; the settings tend to be dark and shadowy; the sound design is drenched in reverb, evoking a sense of cavernous space. Many of the characters are walking archetypes who embody primal virtues and/or vices. Specific dates and numbers appear, seemingly significant, but obscure and possibly random; but then is anything really random? Synchronicity reigns over all. Time and space are elastic—bending, curving, and twisting in response to the battle between good and evil raging within each soul.

The series is hardly flawless. Some scenes fall flat, and others seem extraneous or indulgent. The large cast is very diverse in some ways, and not at all in others. Many of the distracting tics of contemporary cable television are present—heads are blasted, breasts bared, products placed. Digressive cameo appearances disrupt the narrative flow. However, if one has sufficiently suspended disbelief and made it through the first few episodes, these blemishes fade as the Twin Peaks mythos emerges more fully and distinctly over the course of the series. A deeper psycho-spiritual coherence among all the artistic elements slowly comes into view, a coherence crafted by David Lynch and Mark Frost and deriving ultimately from the chthonic creativity of dreaming itself. "Twin Peaks: The Return" is best understood, not only as cleverly creative television entertainment, but also as a beautifully rendered metaphysical mapping of the dynamic dreaming duality at the heart of human nature.

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