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In this thesis, I examine the ways in which the television series Twin Peaks represents the feminine through a textual analysis of the character Audrey Horne. Using reader-response theory, I seek to show that while the series conforms to patriarchal media conventions such as the male gaze and narrative stereotypes such as the fairy tale princess, there also exists within the text resistance to these normative conventions, which provides pleasure for a feminist audience. The concept of the ideological problematic, in which a text can be shown to hold multiple and contradictory meanings, is applied to a close textual analysis of the character Audrey Horne.
Twin Peaks and the Ideological Problematic of Feminine Representation: An Examination of the Character Audrey Horne

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Susan Wood, Author
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Chapter One: Twin Peaks as Pop Culture Phenomenon

The pilot episode of the television series Twin Peaks aired on ABC in April of 1990. The executive producers were Mark Frost and David Lynch, who between them wrote or co-wrote thirteen episodes and directed six. David Lynch also acted in the series as F.B.I. agent Gordon Cole. The series ran for twenty-nine hour-long episodes, but was interrupted in February of 1991 following episode twenty-three when ABC announced the series would be put on indefinite hiatus. After a letter-writing campaign organized by a group called C.O.O.P. (Coalition Opposed to Offing Peaks--wordplay based on hero Agent Cooper's nickname) resulted in over ten thousand letters sent to ABC, and after the series won multiple television awards, including being named the year's best show by the Television Critics Association, and being nominated for fourteen Emmys, ABC aired the last six episodes, and then cancelled the series permanently (Lavery 2).

There is much discussion as to why the series was put on hiatus and then finally cancelled, especially after having garnered so many positive reviews even after its initial hype. Twin Peaks was referred to as "the year's best show" by Entertainment Weekly, "the wingdingiest thing to make it onto network television in many a full moon" by the Village Voice, and was even compared to Bunuel's The Discrete Charm of the Bourgeoisie in the New Yorker due to its surreal visual and narrative qualities (Rosenbaum 24). Laura Palmer, the character around whom the mystery of the series revolves, was named “Woman of the Year” by Esquire magazine, despite (because of?) the fact that she is raped and murdered as of the first episode of the series. Clearly, this was meant to be a tribute to the popularity of the
series, yet it underscores the presence of deeply-rooted misogyny to name a raped and murdered figure "Woman of the Year." The primary reason for the eventual cancellation of the series is largely understood to be the decline in interest after the mystery of who killed Laura Palmer was solved in episode seventeen, midway through the second season. Twin Peaks has now been off the air for over fifteen years and is considered a cult classic. In the Twin Peaks fanzine Wrapped in Plastic, on the Internet in discussion groups, at the annual Twin Peaks Festival in Washington, and within the academy, people continue to engage with the series. This is in part due to the fact that Twin Peaks is associated with film-maker David Lynch and has a cult following but also from the sheer pleasure derived from becoming involved in the complex world of Twin Peaks.

In the introduction to a collection of critical essays on the series, David Lavery discusses Twin Peaks as a cultural phenomenon using three of Umberto Eco's criteria for cult status. "Living textuality," in which the text seems to exist without an author, is the primary criterion for cult status (5). Seemingly in opposition to this, Twin Peaks is synonymous with David Lynch because the visual style and the ethos of the series are similar to earlier Lynch works, such as the film Blue Velvet. According to Lavery, this authorial presence does not diminish the living textuality of the series because so much of the dialogue, characterization, and narrative seem "...spun intertextually out of (cloned from?) precedent texts and thus cultic in origin, authority, and appeal" (6).
The second criterion discussed by Lavery is that a cult text must appear as a "completely furnished world so that fans can quote characters and episodes as if they were aspects of the fan's private sectarian world..." (Lavery 7). Lavery notes the many products available for purchase from the series, perhaps most importantly, in terms of creating "a completely furnished world," the book *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer* by Jennifer Lynch (David Lynch's daughter), which was available for purchase at the end of the first season. The diary functioned for fans as "an ancillary text" (Lavery 7) through which fans of the series could look for clues to solve Laura's murder along with F.B.I. Agent Dale Cooper (the detective hero of the series) and the "citizens" of the "town" of Twin Peaks.

Lastly, Lavery writes of the criterion of "detatchability" (11), through which aspects of a cult text can be dislocated, "so that one can remember only parts of it, irrespective of their original relationship with the whole" (Eco, qtd. in Lavery 11). Such examples include tag lines and "quirks" of the series, such as Agent Cooper's love for coffee ("damn fine cup of joe!") and Nadine Hurley's odd fascination with draperies ("I've invented the world's first 100%, completely silent drape runners!"). Elements like these made *Twin Peaks* a television phenomenon.

I started watching the series when my high school freshman year English teacher introduced my friends and me to the series and lent us the recordings she had made of the episodes already aired. We watched the tapes in one night to catch up and then began to watch the series every week. We watched actively, trying to decide what elements were clues to the mystery of Laura Palmer's murder and what
elements might only be what seemed to be weirdness for weirdness’ sake. The series was released on VHS in 1999, and I revisited Twin Peaks from a critical feminist perspective. Watching the series critically didn’t make it any less enjoyable, perhaps because I was already so immersed in the world of Twin Peaks. Much of my enjoyment stems from a sentimentality for the series, but also from the complexity of the narrative, the quirky characters, the weird beauty, the moments of humor, and in particular, the overriding melancholy pathos and ultimate tragedy of the series. As Sheriff Truman tells Agent Cooper about the town, “Twin Peaks is a long way from the world,” and this sense of fantasy is beautifully played out. The combination of small town life and a haunted forest is magical.

In addition to the gorgeous fantasy of Twin Peaks, I am also compelled by the dynamics of coming to an understanding of the meanings produced by the series in regard to hegemonic and/or liberating notions of gender and society. Twin Peaks represents a very complex web of relationships and events which offers itself to critical examination. It is also considered to be representative of a definable moment in television history in which postmodernism became almost mainstream. Overall, it is a fascinating TV show with a unique style.

The questions I would like to address in my examination of Twin Peaks are: how does the series reflect patriarchal ideology, and are there moments in which this is challenged? I will use the concept of the ideological problematic to explore what it is about Twin Peaks that sustains interest in its potential meanings, as well as to seek an understanding of my own enjoyment of the series as a feminist. In particular,
I will examine the themes of the male gaze, as well pornographic and fairy tale conventions through an exploration of the character Audrey Horne.
Chapter Two: A review of the literature on *Twin Peaks*

The television series *Twin Peaks* has inspired scholars to produce a body of criticism published in journals around the world and in an anthology, as well as two dissertations and several conference papers. Critical approaches include audience analysis (Brown) and textual semiotic analysis (Hirschman) and cover topics such as the nature of fandom (Macor) to analyses of the marketing of the series (Palmer). Cultural studies critiques tend to view the series as reactionary: for example, Pollard, who argues that the series is a conservative reaction to the threat of destruction of the small-town, middle-class, 1950s-era ideal. Lafky also considers the series reactionary, arguing that *Twin Peaks* “continues a tradition of art that depends upon recurring themes of rape, incest, domestic violence, murder, and necrophilia” (5). Both of these analyses stem from textual analysis of the setting, visual style, character, dialogue, and narrative. The bulk of the criticism revolves around three major themes that I will review in detail: the debate on the series as postmodern television, genre study, and the way the series presents violence against women and women’s sexuality. I would first like to review the assessment of *Twin Peaks* as postmodern television because it is an over-riding theme in much of the critical work on the series.

*Twin Peaks* as Postmodern Television

*Twin Peaks* is often viewed as a postmodern television series due to such stylistic elements as its temporal confusion (its visual style is reminiscent of the
1950s) and its intertextual allusions to a variety of cultural texts from different periods (Reeves, et al 176), its combination of the tragic and the absurd in narrative elements and its parody of soap opera conventions (Carroll 294), and its unique musical score (Kalinak), among other elements. Postmodernism is an important element to address because of the possibilities it creates in terms of reading the text critically and creating meanings that do not conform to the status quo, and also because it locates the text within the stylistic development of television and mass media. The hallmarks of a postmodern fictional text in terms of style according to Jim Collins in “Postmodernism and Television” include irony, self-consciousness, pastiche, appropriation and rearticulation of popular symbols, and intertextual references to other fictional works. Postmodern style destabilizes dominant meanings and creates space for a variety of readings because it allows audiences to engage with the text in a way which counters realism. Lafky in her essay “Gender, Power, and Culture in the Televisual World of Twin Peaks: a Feminist Critique,” identifies two definitions of postmodernism which in general serve to shape the discussion about postmodernism and the series. These are

…the postmodernism of reaction, which repudiates yet ends up reinforcing the dominate ideology; and the postmodernism of resistance, whose aim is to deconstruct both modernism and modernity so as to change the social context itself as well as its privileged objects and creations. (8)

Rather than reproducing grand narratives then, a postmodern text can work to undermine them. In this lies the possibility that a text can provide emancipatory meanings for its audiences by foregrounding its own constructedness, creating
distance between the text and the audience, and countering realism and grand narratives. For example, in constantly referencing other fictional works, a text draws attention to its own fictional context, which counters the notion that it and its messages are an exact reflection of reality, natural, and thus truthful (Collins 336). Intertextual references create distance between the text and the audience and may jar the audience into awareness that the text is a creation from a particular point of view rather than a window on the world.

*Twin Peaks* is described as postmodern television in terms of its visual style and musical score, both of which serve to disrupt familiar television conventions, thus unsettling the audience and creating distance from the text. Kathryn Kalinak in "Disturbing the Guests with This Racket: Music and *Twin Peaks,*" notes that the score is neither completely diegetic nor non-diegetic. In other words, at times the background score (nondiegetic) is suddenly exposed as coming from within the narrative (diegetic), rather than as background music "audible" only to the audience and not the characters. For example, in episode two, we see the character Audrey Horne alone in a room, swaying in one place to what the audience must assume is an inner-prompting, only to see when the camera angle widens out to include the sides of the room, that she is actually moving to music coming from her stereo, music which we have assumed (until that camera shot) is background music, as we are already familiar with it as the background score from previous scenes (85). In this way, the musical score disrupts the conventional ways in which audiences know to respond to musical cues within visual texts.
Kalinak also observes that when the score is positioned as background music only in the series, rather than suddenly moving from outside to inside the narrative, it does not always provide the emotional cues we might expect for what we are viewing. For example, in the pilot episode in which Laura's body is discovered, the background music accompanying the scene in which the sheriff rolls the body over does not reflect the horror of the moment for which the visual cues have prepared us (for example, close up shots of the blue-lipped face of Laura and the slow tracking of the camera as the Sheriff reaches for the body). Instead of hearing a stinger, "chords played at increased volume and with deliberate attack" or other conventional form for which we have been prepared by the visual cues, we hear "...a syrupy, lushly orchestrated melody exploiting standard techniques for romance..." (Kalinak 88). In this way, Kalinak argues, a single dominant emotional reading of the series is denied to the audience, subverting the general purpose of a background score and offering a variety of ways to make meanings of what we are watching.

Likewise, the photography of the series captures a surrealist quality associated with postmodern art, and it is in this aspect that the series, although visually inventive for network television standards, is seen as a self-serving text rather than a progressive one. Jonathan Rosenbaum in "Bad Ideas: The Art and Politics of Twin Peaks," takes issue with the comparison of Lynch's vision to the art of Buñuel. Rosenbaum argues that "...surrealism as an organized movement began largely as social protest....Lynch, by contrast, has never shown the slightest inclination toward social commentary, much less protest" (24-25). Rosenbaum goes on to compare
David Lynch with Walt Disney, claiming that Lynch's foray into television is based purely on finding a wider audience. In his estimation, Lynch is "...an artist who likes to hang his work--his arresting compositions, weird ideas, and haunting sounds--in the biggest museums he can find; prime time TV, baggage and all, offers the biggest museum in the world" (25).

Whether the postmodernism of Twin Peaks can be seen as having a liberating quality in which multiple subjectivities are given voice and dominant ideology is challenged, or as simply recreating dominant discourse even as it plays with television conventions, is the subject of several discussions. These discussions investigate the question of whether the series' postmodern qualities exist only on the level of style, or if the text is progressively postmodern in foregrounding its own construction to the point that a variety of meanings can easily exist. Lafky argues that the series is reactionary rather than progressive because its representation of women is "basically essentialist" (11) in that they are uniformly powerless in the face of violence. She writes, "women [in the series] who by nature do not have the phallus, are depicted as having little real power" (11). She also sees the violence as being misnamed—it is not defined as patriarchal but as supernatural and individual (Laura's murderer is discovered to be her father who committed the crime because he is inhabited by a murderous demon named Bob), and despite the series' main theme of incest, the word itself is never spoken (15).

In "Postmodernism and Television: Speaking of Twin Peaks," a transcribed conversation with eight participants, the function of postmodernism in Twin Peaks is
debated. The intertextuality of the series is given much attention in this conversation, in particular, its allusions to past popular texts, including the 1940s film *Double Indemnity* (in episode seven, an insurance agent introduces himself as Walter Neff, the name of Fred MacMurray's insurance agent character in the film) and the 1960s television show *The Mod Squad* (Peggy Lipton, who plays the part of Norma in *Twin Peaks*, and Clarence Williams III who plays an F.B.I. agent, both of the *Mod Squad* series, are reunited in one brief scene together in episode eighteen that has no particular purpose in the narrative of the series, and thus exists only as an in-joke). These references and the many others are seen as creating a hierarchy of viewers in which those with more "cultural capital" (Reeves, et al 177) are positioned at the top. Although these allusions and many others are part of what makes *Twin Peaks* so enjoyable for its audience, the participants in the discussion agree that the text is not progressively postmodernism in this way because the intertextuality functions primarily to create hierarchies among viewers rather than to dismantle them. Those who have more popular culture capital are privileged in relation to the text over those who recognize fewer allusions, and these allusions are merely playful.

Another subject debated in the transcribed conversation is that of whose voices are heard in relation to such issues as incest and violence. If postmodernism is partially characterized by its inclusion of usually silenced voices and perspectives, then how the character of Laura Palmer is shown to the audience is an important component of whether *Twin Peaks* is progressively postmodern. Because the expression of the isolation and despair of the many abused women in the series is
foregrounded through photography and narrative structures, it may be argued that the series does include voices that are normally silenced in dominant discourse about male violence to women. However, "...the overall narrative places blame not on the abuser (Leland) but on the abstract notion of evil (BOB)" (Reeves 192), and thus the male abuse of women is never openly acknowledged or articulated.

Similarly, Robin Nelson, in "Coda--Critical Postmoderism: Critical Realism," suggests that postmodern texts may be considered ideologically critical or resistant in that they destabilize and decenter the subjectivity of the viewer through the use of a variety of narrative discourses to which a varied audience may align itself in a variety of ways (239). In other words, if the hallmark of postmodernism is the representation of a multiplicity of discourses as opposed to a single dominant one, then Twin Peaks may be considered critically postmodern. Collins also discusses this multiplicity of voices in terms of the development of the series in that its producers understood that to construct mass appeal for a fragmented contemporary audience, the text must be positioned in ways that call upon a number of cultural discourses, not just a dominant view (342). In this way, the series is not resistant to dominant ideology in a political sense, but is a text responding to its commercial context. Nelson also argues that "in the context of postmodernity where fun is encouraged, perhaps at the expense of social critique, Twin Peaks offers a range of pleasure for its audience" (237). The series, in narratively juxtaposing a variety of television formulas to humorous effect (soap opera, sitcom, and the detective series, for example), as well as in its use of multiple in-jokes based on allusions to other television and film texts, might also be
seen as "...mere pastiche of past styles thrown together with no other thought other than to maximize audience" (Nelson 239). However, this juxtaposition also moves viewers back and forth between emotional involvement with the narrative verisimilitude and "ironic detachment," resulting in the viewer taking on a variety of viewing positions (Collins 348). Collins' argument describes the series as postmodern in a sense deeper than 'mere' style—the style itself creates a more diverse text that calls upon the viewers to inhabit more than the dominant viewing position. Botting agrees with this assessment, claiming that "the series' postmodernity might be characterized as a playful and parodic practice that embraces fragmentation and multiplicity" (494). Here again, style itself creates more space from which a variety of meanings arise rather than a single dominant one. Baderoon agrees partially with this assessment in that "Twin Peaks foregrounds and subverts the security provided by old forms" (2) by combining and re-imagining genre elements of the detective-serial form and the soap opera, particularly in placing women not so much as silent figures meant to be looked at, but as an integral part of the action in that they "impart knowledge to the detective" (7). However, Baderoon concludes that the supernatural explanation for violence against women prevents the series from providing a socio-cultural critique of patriarchy, thus undermining its progressiveness (9).

The criticism reviewed above largely concludes that Twin Peaks is not, in fact, an example of an overtly progressive postmodern text. Though its stylistic elements may foreground its status as a work of fiction rather than a window on reality, as well
as open up a variety of ways to view and understand the story, it does not in the end recount its theme of violence against women in such a way as could be described progressive. In terms of Lafky’s two definitions of postmodernism—one which reinforces dominant ideology and one which resists it—the analyses above describe *Twin Peaks* as a normative series that does not challenge patriarchal views of violence against women.

**Twin Peaks and Genre Study**

Genre study is concerned with defining and refining categories of literature, film, or television and placing particular texts within these categories in order better to understand the cultural values they represent and how they manipulate their audiences in relation to these values (Feuer 138-139, 141). *Twin Peaks* is seen as a unique television series because it is an imaginative combination of several genres and because it breaks the formulas of the genres with which it is most closely aligned. The series defies being situated clearly within any given genre, making it a rich text for analysis.

The narrative structure of the series, an important element in understanding television genre, is discussed by Marc Dolan in "The Peaks and Valleys of Serial Creativity: What happened to/on *Twin Peaks*." He examines forms of television narrative: the episodic series, the continuous serial, the episodic serial, and the sequential series, the latter being the most closely related form to *Twin Peaks*. The episodic series is typified by shows such as *I Love Lucy* in which each storyline is
resolved by the end of each episode (33). The continuous serial is defined by soap opera, in which each storyline is left hanging at the end of every episode, and the characters' situations evolve over time, never circling back to the point of initiation. These two forms characterized much of television in the 1950s and 1960s (32-33).

The third form, the episodic serial, characterized television in the 1970s, and is typified by the miniseries, a form in which elements from both the episodic series and the continuous serial are combined. The fourth form, that of the sequential series, constructs the narrative in a more linear fashion over many episodes, but still keeps to the episodic series format in which a storyline is introduced and more or less resolved by the end of a single episode (35).

Twin Peaks, according to Dolan, is an example of the "continuous-serial-within-an-episodic-serial-pattern" (36.) The primary running narrative is the mystery of who killed Laura Palmer, but as each episode unfolds, the audience is introduced to more of the "background" characters, who are almost all seen as linked to Laura in a particular way, but who also have their own storylines and relationships with other characters, some of which are resolved almost immediately, some of which are not resolved until the final episode of the series. This form, according to Dolan, allows the series to exist as both a serialized detective story (who killed Laura Palmer?) and a soap opera (for example, what is going to happen with the Ed/Nadine/Norma love triangle?).

The most obvious categorization of the series in terms of genre is that of the detective story or murder mystery. Maria M. Carrion in "Twin Peaks and the Circular
Ruins of Fiction: Figuring (Out) the Acts of Reading," places the series in the realm of "pure analytic detective stories, a fictional genre that lends itself to endless acts of rereadings and grows out of an interest in deductions and solutions..." (241). Carrion suggests that the audience is interested in the process of deduction more so than the ultimate solution, and that Cooper's weird techniques and the bizarre citizens of the town offer a limitless set of possibilities for the audience to explore alongside the official investigation to which we are privy through the narrative surrounding Cooper (242). Thus, the "wandering viewpoint...is a key element in the 'act of reading,' since it 'permits the reader to travel through the text,' thus unfolding the multiplicity of interconnecting perspectives which are offset whenever there is a switch from one to another" (Wolfgang Iser, qtd. in Nochimson 241-242). The convoluted narrative structure of the series, then, might be seen as both allowing the reader to take great pleasure in the possibility that anything and everything may be a clue, and at the same time, potentially frustrating the reader by seeming "incoherent [or] incomplete" (242). This quality is also seen as a possible reason why the series lost much of its audience as the murder mystery drew closer to a conclusion, and why the series was eventually cancelled by ABC (Nochimson 240).

Several other views of Twin Peaks as a detective serial highlight the ways in which the series disrupts the traditional detective genre. Angela Hague in "Infinite Games: The Derationalization of Detection in Twin Peaks," bases her analysis on Ronald Knox's 1929 "A Detective Story Decalogue," which sets out the rules of the detection genre. She focuses on two rules in particular, that "all
supernatural...agencies must be ruled out...[and that] no accident must help the
detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition that proves to be right"
(Knox, qtd. in Hague 130). *Twin Peaks* parts with both of these restrictions in that
Agent Cooper utilizes dreams, waking visions of his own and of others, "Tibetan
Method" (a method of Cooper's invention that utilizes 'mind-body coordination' as he
throws rocks at a glass bottle as each potential killer's name is said aloud), and
finally, the use of what Cooper calls "magic." The solution to the mystery is also
undercut, breaking the first of Knox's rules regarding supernatural agency, in that
Leland is discovered to have been possessed by the demon Bob, and so is not held
responsible for the rape/murder in the minds of the other characters or the audience.
The significance of these elements in terms of detective fiction is that they place *Twin
Peaks* within a postmodern formulation of genre, one in which the narrative is not
neatly wrapped up for the audience, creating a sense of unease, and one which
"denies the ability of the human to solve problems through the syllogistic order"
(Hague 132). A rational, linear worldview is thus undercut, "...open[ing] up new
realms of consciousness unhampered by the constraints of telos and positivism"
(Hague 133).

Martha Nochimson suggests that *Twin Peaks* represents a postmodern
detective genre based on her analysis of the characterization of Cooper as detective
hero. In "Desire Under the Douglas Firs: Entering the Body of Reality of *Twin
Peaks,*" she shows the ways in which Agent Cooper differs from the traditional
detective hero who is invulnerable in body and exists purely as a cerebral entity.
Cooper is distinctly vulnerable and connected to his body and thus breaks the binary opposition of male/female—mind/body upon which the traditional screen detective persona depends (Hague 150). Some particular examples forwarded by Nochimson include the previously mentioned mind/body coordination of Cooper's Tibetan Method as well as information Cooper learns from other characters via supernatural means. The Log Lady, a recluse who communicates psychically through the log she is never seen without, gives Cooper clues that she has learned about through her log regarding the night Laura was murdered. Laura's mother Sarah shares with Cooper a vision in which she saw Bob in Laura's bedroom. Laura whispers the name of her killer to Cooper in a dream shared between the two of them. In this way, Nochimson argues, difference, which is generally "supersaturated with feminine associations" (150) is "demystified...in Cooper's heuristic dreams..." (151) and other deductive techniques. Baderoon makes a similar argument, claiming Agent Cooper represents the convergence of feminized soap opera and masculinized detective fiction in that he does not remain separate from the town and its citizens, but becomes emotionally invested in their lives (5).

Catherine Nickerson in "Serial Detection and Serial Killers in Twin Peaks," argues in a similar manner to Hague that although Cooper's allegiance to a traditional detective guidelines ("break the code, solve the crime," he says), places the detection in a classic sense of the genre, Cooper nevertheless surpasses the logical detachment of other fictional detectives by engaging in an emotional way with the world of Twin Peaks and its citizens (272). He also breaks character with the classical detective by
becoming the object of detection himself, both when his extralegal activities cause him to be investigated by other F.B.I. agents, and in the final episode, when he is shown to be Bob's next human host. Nickerson sees this as an ironic twist of the detective genre, in that, finally, it is the detective himself who must be detected.

Melynda Huskey in her comparison of Twin Peaks to the nineteenth century sensation novel, also comments upon the murder mystery narrative. The sensation novel is a story form based on discovering forbidden knowledge, and it is the process of discovering that knowledge, not necessarily the knowledge itself, which drives the narrative and provides pleasure for the reader (Huskey 250). Huskey views Twin Peaks as providing pleasure in the same way as the sensation novel, and in this, her analysis is similar to Carrion's in that they both see the convoluted narrative structure as the primary factor in determining how the audience might read the text. Huskey claims that "in Twin Peaks...finding out is more exciting than knowing; the search for Laura Palmer's killer, not the goal of bringing him to justice, drives the plot" (250).

In terms of genres other than the murder mystery and detective story, Twin Peaks has been analyzed as a postmodern form and parody of soap opera. The primary example of this is the use of a text within the text: the fictitious soap opera that different characters of Twin Peaks are sometimes seen watching at work or in their homes, Invitation to Love. Elizabeth C. Hirschman in "Using Consumption Imagery to decode Twin Peaks," uses [John?] Fiske's formulation of soap opera, pointing out that soap opera characters are not meant to be read as "real people" (191). Rather, they are symbolic of certain "types" and are thus a representation of
ideology, as well as existing only in a continuum of "textual relations" (Fiske, qtd. in Hirschman 191) with the other characters of the series. The plot of Invitation to Love often coincides with the plot of Twin Peaks, and we can also see clear linkages between its characters and the characters of Twin Peaks. For example, in Twin Peaks, when the villain character Leo Johnson is shot in his living room in episode eight, he falls back onto the couch and stares at the muted television, which is tuned in to an episode of Invitation to Love. The scene Leo watches is of the villain, Montana, being shot by the character Chet. These simultaneous scenes draw attention to audience in such a way that the audience of Twin Peaks is distanced from the text by a recognition of the "unrealness" of Leo's viewing position in contrast to our own "real" viewing position (Hirschman 193). This text within a text is used multiple times throughout the series, often as an ironic commentary on the soap opera nature of Twin Peaks and the viewing position of its audience.

Lastly in terms of genre analysis, Twin Peaks is also understood as a representation of the fantastic as embodied by the Gothic tradition. In "Twin Peaks and the Television Gothic," Lenora Ledwon positions the series with other television Gothic series such as The Outer Limits and The Twilight Zone but claims that Twin Peaks "is the first series to tap the full potential of the 'television gothic" (260) primarily because of the "exuberance" (263) with which the series is loaded with traditional Gothic elements, and also because of the visual style of the series, which utilizes television's potential to heighten gothic effects. Ledwon views television as a natural outlet for the Gothic, "the most disturbed of domestic fictions" (263) because
the television itself is a domestic phenomenon. Ledwon and Dziersk, in fact, both view the television itself as a gothic device, one that brings the uncanny literally into the realm of the familiar, the home (263 and Dzierk 148).

Elements of the gothic tradition that occur in Twin Peaks include "incest, the grotesque, repetition, interpolated narration, haunted settings, mirrors, doubles, and supernatural occurrences" (Ledwon 260). In particular, Ledwon and others focus on the doublings in and the familial aspects of Twin Peaks. Doublings are often used to represent binary oppositions such as good/evil and appearance/reality, themes that are central to the series and to the gothic tradition. Even the name of the series, Twin Peaks, highlights these themes. Ledwon notes some of the many doublings that make manifest these themes, including Laura and Maddy (identical cousins, both played by Sheryl Lee), the friendship between Mike and Bobby and the relationship between the evil demon Bob, and his former "partner" Mike (which constitutes a doubled doubling), Laura's two diaries (one a cover story, one chronicling her abuse by Leland/Bob), Leland's possession by Bob in which he acts as two people, and the White Lodge and Black Lodge, supernatural locations aligned with good and evil, respectively (262). These doubles and groups of doubles symbolically represent the tension between everyday life and nightmares, and Ledwon suggests that "Lynch taps into the stuff of nightmare so that we can call it unreal. Better the Gothic, than the horror of everyday domestic life" (264). Ledwon does not analyze gender within this essay, or comment on from whose (Laura's) point of view everyday domestic life
might be horrifying, but focuses primarily on how the series represents a televisual postmodern Gothic.

These genre studies place *Twin Peaks* between a number of genres and view it as a unique and imaginative text. This situates the series as more complex than the typical TV show and clearly demonstrates its distinctive character. *Twin Peaks* is thus of interest to scholars due to its uniqueness and what its structure tells us about contemporary cultural values in relation to gender.

*Twin Peaks, Violence and Female Sexuality*

The discussions of postmodernism and genre study touch on the themes of incest, violence, and women's sexuality. These themes are also examined in explicitly feminist terms from a variety of other approaches in order to determine whether or not the series tells a story about the abuse of women in a way that implicates patriarchy. Of primary interest is how violence, incest, and female sexuality are connected in the series. Violence (not only against women) is a very prevalent theme in the series, and families in *Twin Peaks* are represented as the loci of secrets and the wellsprings of the most significant tragedies within the overall narrative, most significantly of course, the narrative surrounding Laura. Huskey, in her comparison of the series to the nineteenth century sensation novel writes, “the sensation novel counters the rhapsodic vision of Victorian domesticity so common in the nineteenth century novel by baring the criminal undercurrents in family life” (248). Huskey views the town of Twin Peaks as a family in and of itself, committed
to keeping its secrets from outsiders and, as in the sensation novel, to solving the crime from within the family (252). Agent Cooper quickly becomes an insider, even joining the secret society of the "Bookhouse Boys," a vigilante group of male citizens, including the sheriff, who "fight evil" from outside of the official law. Because of Cooper's oft-expressed admiration for the town of Twin Peaks as well as his un-F.B.I. like methods, he becomes fully initiated and thus not one from whom secrets are kept. His initiation positions him within the family, not as an outside authority and thus he is allowed to detect the many secrets of the town with often willing assistance from its citizens (252-253).

In terms of discovering the identity of Laura's killer, Twin Peaks follows the same pattern as the sensation novel: despite the sensation novel's form of countering Victorian notions of the family, in the end, "aberration must have an explanation which does not arise in the family itself, in society itself" (Huskey 253), and the supernatural definition of Leland's behavior provides this explanation. Huskey continues:

Readers must be returned to a world in which our relationships can be ratified as safe and essential to society. Leland and Sarah Palmer are not guilty of child abuse, incest, and murder; BOB has made all this happen. Moreover, Laura's death is not the inevitable result of an escalating cycle of abuse, a meaningless tragedy. Laura is a sacrificial victim who dies resisting the forces of Evil, and in her death brings home the liberator, Agent Cooper, who will destroy BOB, and with him, the threat to marriage, to the family, to the community. (253-254)

In this way, the series reinscribes dominant ideology: the structure of the heterosexual nuclear family and its place in society is not a site of patriarchal violence in itself, but only in that it has been contaminated by an un- or supernatural force.
Diane Stevenson in "Family Romance, Family Violence, and the Fantastic" analyzes the doublings within Twin Peaks in terms of Laura and Leland. Laura's double personality (high school homecoming queen/Meals on Wheels organizer versus cocaine-using prostitute) is viewed here as a manifestation of multiple personalities arising from her abuse. Stevenson writes, "Victims of abuse may not only split themselves into different personalities as a defense mechanism but they may split the abuser in like manner--commonly into a good and bad figure" (76). In this way, Leland, too, is seen as a doubled figure, not literally possessed by Bob, but seen as two people from Laura's perspective. In her secret diary, she refers to Leland/Bob as a friend of the family, a (bad) figure separate from her (good) father. Through this, Stevenson views Twin Peaks as being informed by current scientific understandings of sexual abuse victims and sees a sympathetic message about women who are sexually abused. Rather than being blamed for her own victimization through her deviant behavior, Laura is characterized purely as a victim.

Stevenson examines how we might understand the supernatural explanation for violence against women. She writes

The ambiguity of the fantastic is not an obfuscation here but an expression of genuine uncertainty about our understanding of family violence. Through its play with the genre of the fantastic and with the kindred genre of the mystery, Twin Peaks gives play to different ways of assessing family violence: in terms of the normal and the abnormal...in terms of innocence and guilt...in terms of good and evil...of outrage and redemption, and in terms of the inner and the outer, the psychological and the social, the intrinsic and the constructed. (75)

Stevenson views the possession of Leland by Bob and his subsequent crimes as an example of cultural uncertainty over how to understand child abuse. "That Bob the
demon possesses Leland tells us that anyone could be so possessed..." (75). The crimes are not seen here as culturally derived, but as psychologically-derived, and anyone could be Bob's next "victim." Stevenson does view the text as offering a straight-forward explanation for family violence.

Randi Davenport in "The Knowing Spectator of Twin Peaks: Culture, Feminism, and Family Violence," claims the series produces a sympathetic audience to men's abuse of women because the abuse arises from within a middle-class household and must therefore be viewed as common, rather than aberrant and associated only with a "lower class" criminal element (255-256). Davenport also suggests that Twin Peaks disrupts the Seductive Daughter trope in which incest is excused because the daughter is seen as having purposefully seduced the father. This view of incest not only arises from pornography, but from early psychological reports regarding incest (257). Davenport suggests that changing cultural knowledge, specifically feminist knowledge of incest and child abuse is represented in the text through the foregrounding of Laura's self-destructive behavior as described by her friends and psychiatrist, Dr. Jacoby. Children who have been abused often behave in self-destructive ways (257) and Laura's secret "wild side" is understood here as an expression of this knowledge.

Diana Hume George also discusses the ways in which Twin Peaks manages female sexuality through violence but disagrees with Davenport. She sees male violence against women as a more or less natural outcome of normative masculinity under the conditions of patriarchy. From a psychoanalytic perspective, "normal male
gender acquisition takes place in opposition to females" and "misogyny is fundamental to the acquisition of gender identity for males" (112). She defines Twin Peaks as powerful material that "fed America’s collective hunger for wounded, maimed, tortured, dead women" (114). She dismisses Davenport’s argument that there is feminist intent in the series’ display of Laura’s wild side as a display of self-destructive behavior common to those who have been abused, calling it “mammothly subtle” (117). It is not nearly a clear enough message to override the series’ treatment of female characters about whom she asks the question, “Is anyone out there vaguely in charge of herself, not a victim, not crazy, and not corrupt?” (115), the answer to which is “no.” Hume George contends that the series does not ask us to reformulate dominant understandings of violence against women, but instead uses images of violence against women to titillate and entertain.

Laura Plummer, in her essay "I'm not Laura Palmer: David Lynch's Fractured Fairy Tale," views the secret wild side of Laura not as an example of the behavioral consequences of abuse, but as an example of the way in which middle-class patriarchal values are protected. Based on the work of Ann-Louise Shapiro, Plummer argues:

In all the processes of protecting patriarchal, middle-class values, ‘the actual and symbolic presence of the criminal woman [is] centrally important,’ and the criminal woman becomes a ‘site where some of the contradictions about women’s position in society [can] be located and temporarily managed. (308)

Plummer does not see the series as a text that is sympathetic to sexual abuse. Rather, the text serves patriarchy by managing female sexuality through violence by deeming it “to be the fulfillment of violent male fantasy” (308).
Christy Desmet examines the characterization of Laura Palmer as good girl/bad girl in her essay "The Canonization of Laura Palmer." She sees Laura's life as mirroring legends of martyred saints. Laura does good works almost as a vocation (tutoring Josie Packard in English, taking care of Johnnie Horne, Audrey's autistic brother, and organizing the Meals on Wheels program). She is tortured to death rather than quickly killed. She leaves "testaments for the devout" in the form of her two diaries, the tapes she made for her psychiatrist, and her half-heart necklace. Through her diary, it becomes known that she had decided to let Bob kill her, to sacrifice herself, so that Bob could not inhabit her and force her to kill others (95-97). After Laura's death, her wild side is exposed to some of the middle-class pillars of the community, but primarily, her life is re-written. She is finally understood only as a victim. As a saint figure, Laura represents another way of dealing with female sexuality—through punishment for her sexuality she becomes a martyr.

Davenport suggests that the figure of Bob inhabiting Leland shows that family violence is a legacy, and that Bob is a symbol for abuse Leland suffered as a child (257). More textual evidence for this view of Leland/Bob is discussed by Kimball in "'Into the light, Leland, into the light': Emerson, Oedipus, and the Blindness of Male Desire in David Lynch's Twin Peaks," although Kimball does not describe the text as sympathetic to violence against women as Davenport does. Kimball discusses the scene in episode sixteen in which Leland lies dying in a jail cell after Bob "made" him repeatedly hit his head against the wall, presumably so Bob could escape. In Bob's absence, Leland suddenly becomes aware that it was he who raped and killed
Laura and sobs to Agent Cooper, "I, I was just a boy. I saw [Bob] in my dreams. He said, 'You wan... you want to play?' He opened me and I invited him....And he came inside me" (Kimball 25). The specificity of the phrase "he came inside me," is here seen as a memory of rape that happened to Leland as a child, though Kimball notes that Cooper's response, "He went inside?" shows that Cooper (willfully) misses the implication of sexual assault (25). The identity of Laura's killer is now known, but the emphasis of the series is immediately changed from whom and why these crimes occurred to a search for an understanding of Bob and where he is now that he no longer inhabits Leland. This abstraction is, in Kimball's estimation, an avoidance of naming human crimes as such, and does not offer a reason for Laura's murder in as much as Bob represents only "a violent tautology" (25).

The following scene in this episode has the sheriff and Cooper, along with several other male characters, sitting in the woods discussing the revelation. The sheriff expresses an inability to believe in Bob, to which Cooper replies, "Harry, is it any easier to believe a man would rape and murder his own daughter? Any more comforting?" to which Harry responds "no" (Kimball 27). Kimball argues that this question and answer characterize the series as being unable to deal with male desire and actions, and that the text at this point fails to explore the crime in any other way than avoidance through dependence on the supernatural (27).

Laura's story is not the only incestuous one in the series, according to Warren Goldstein in "Incest for the Millions." He observes that other female characters are sexually involved with men in ways that mirror a pattern of incest. Audrey Horne, a
schoolmate of Laura's, attempts to seduce Agent Cooper, and is almost raped by her father when she goes undercover at a brothel her father owns. Nadine Hurley tries to kill herself with an overdose of pills, and when she comes out of her coma, believes herself to be sixteen, but does not question the fact that her husband, Ed, is in his 40s (741). Goldstein asks, "What's Lynch saying? That all sex is incest? That we all carry the marks of Oedipal struggle in our psyches?" (741), but concludes that instead it is simply a case of "forbidden sex sells" (741).

These analyses explore the messages the series offers regarding violence against women and sexuality mainly by examining what happens to Laura and how she and her father are characterized. These analyses largely conclude that it does not present a challenge to the status quo, but instead uses violence against women to entertain.

Conclusion

Few of these analyses see much hope for the redemption of this series in terms of feminism. Rather, it is largely understood to be a text which reproduces dominant ideology about women's sexuality and violence toward women, and its postmodernism is not seen as particular liberating or as presenting a challenge to the status quo. Although the series is highly original in terms of style and genre, in the end, most of the criticism pronounces it bound by dominant discourse.

I will explore Twin Peaks from a feminist perspective, focusing on how the character Audrey Horne both represents and subverts the male gaze, as well as how
she represents and subverts governing ideologies regarding women’s sexuality. I would like to leave behind discussion of Laura Palmer both because she has already been thoroughly analyzed, and because she is dead as of the first episode, offering no agency or subjectivity; we know Laura only through the memories of other characters and artifacts such as video recordings and photographs. Audrey is a central character who is emblematic of the living mystery of the series, and she creates tension in relation to the expression of normative ideology. At times, she presents challenges to the status quo, though in the final analysis, these moments are contained, and the text reinscribes dominant ideology regarding women and sexuality. Nevertheless, Audrey is a fascinating character who at times represents something more than patriarchal victimization, and an exploration of her character points to how the series can be a source of pleasure for a feminist audience.
Chapter Three: Feminist Inquiries into Popular Culture, Method and Theory

In this chapter I will outline the ways that feminist scholarship has sought to understand popular culture and mass media in relation to women, as well as discuss reader-oriented criticism and the concept of the ideological problematic in order to situate my analysis of *Twin Peaks* within the body of feminist criticism.

Early feminist textual analyses of popular culture are said to be rooted in Betty Friedan's 1963 work *The Feminine Mystique*, which looked at the ways that women's magazines and other forms of mass media defined for women an ideal femininity situated in the housewife role (Hollows 11). Friedan argued that this ideal affected the way women regarded their womanhood, producing in them an insecurity and frustration due to an inability to be completely satisfied in their lived experiences as this housewife ideal. Similarly, Germaine Greer's 1971 work *The Female Eunuch*, argued that mass-produced romance novels reinforced a false ideal of complete satisfaction for women attained only through heterosexual romance (van Zoonen 11). In 1978, the work *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media* featured research in this vein in analyzing television, magazines, and newspapers and their symbolic representations of American cultural values. Tuchman uses the phrase "symbolic annihilation" to describe the ways that the representation of women in mass media had been either condemning, trivializing, or lacking (8). Tuchman posited a time or culture lag in which media do not reflect women's actual roles and participation in contemporary society, but rather portray a patriarchal ideal that does not take into account progressive social movements and societal change (7).
Research of the type described above is theoretically situated within liberal feminism, which advocates equal rights for women within the existing sociopolitical system. In this tradition, images of women in popular culture are explored primarily through content analysis in order to examine the representation of women, assuming that media should be or is a direct reflection of society. At stake is the idea that the consumption of popular media is part of a gender socialization process, and that negative and stereotypical representations of women in mass media influence this process in a way that perpetuates patriarchal ideology and sexism.

Other forms of textual analysis, such as semiotics and psychoanalytic theories, are used to analyze the associative meanings of the representation of women rather than manifest images, and from this perspective, media texts are not viewed as flawed or accurate reflections of reality. Rather, texts are seen as more dynamic sites in which meanings of gender and reality are constructed in an ongoing process, and do not relate to a pre-existing reality (Hollows 44). This tradition of research explores woman as image as opposed to images of women. Semiotics is especially useful in analyzing the meanings in advertising media because the time span in which the message is sent is very short, and the designers of ads necessarily rely on obvious signifiers to get a message across (van Zoonen 75). Semiotic analysis is not necessarily linked to any one theory because it can be used to understand signs within any framework, as long as the researcher can tap into cultural codes (van Zoonen 85).

In psychoanalytic theory, the signifier of woman is understood as signifying difference from a male norm within the symbolic order. Woman in this sense is
therefore an "empty sign" (Hollows 45), signifying difference only. Film studies have been the primary site for psychoanalytic analysis. Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" is a landmark in psychoanalytic film theory. Mulvey argued that the pleasure in viewing narrative film is geared toward a male psychic need to de-mystify women through scopophilia and fetishization. Scopophilia refers to the pleasure of looking in a voyeuristic, objectifying manner. Woman is constructed as object in film, and parts of her, such as breasts or hair, are fetishized to counter woman's lack of phallus, which lack produces in men a fear of castration. When woman is rendered a fetishized object, she becomes familiar and knowable instead of a threatening lack. Mulvey argues that narrative film is inherently patriarchal in this manner; any pleasure that women receive as audience is either masochistic (identifying with woman as object) or transvestitic (identifying with the male protagonist). Mulvey argues that traditional narrative cinema can never be reclaimed for feminist purposes because woman as sign and image can never be anything but empty. Some limitations of psychoanalytic theory are that it universalizes and essentializes male and female categories, and that it does not allow for the intersection of other categories such as sexual orientation, race, or class.

In the mid-1970s, researchers began to focus on popular culture from the perspective that audiences are not necessarily passive receivers of the messages in mass media. Audience reception frameworks attempt to analyze spectatorship as an active component rather than a passive one in terms of the ways audiences may make use of mass media and/or resist dominant ideologies through critical readings.
Women's genres such as soap operas and romance novels have been analyzed in this regard because they are genres aimed specifically at women. Shiac discusses Modleski's 1982 study of romance novels, gothic novels, and soap operas which argues that these genres' popularity with women suggests that there is something in them that speaks to women's circumstances under patriarchy, as opposed to the idea that these genres simply manipulate women ideologically. She argues that the narrative rhythm of soap operas matches women's rhythms in their work at home, providing pleasure and satisfaction for the viewer (Shiac 43). She also found that resistive female characters in soap operas, though usually punished for their resistance, provided women with an opportunity to imagine resistance in their own lives (Shiac 43). Van Zoonen notes that Radway's 1984 ethnographic study of women readers of romance novels found that women she interviewed preferred romance novels that provide particular narrative and characterization elements, such as a hero who becomes warm and loving because of his love of the heroine (seen as a victory of female values), and a heroine who "does not live up to the traditional ideals of femininity...has an unusual job...and is special and independent" (van Zoonen 109). Radway asserts that the women who read romance novels are not necessarily passive women who are ideologically manipulated by the texts, but women who look for particular elements that might even be described as feminist in as much as they depict the contradictions of women's lives in patriarchal culture (van Zoonen 110).

Qualitative methods used for audience reception include ethnographic interviews and surveys. Although audience reception studies such as these privilege
the notion that women are not simply manipulated by media, they do run the risk of assuming that no matter what a text "says," it is not necessary to intervene in the production of texts because audiences may make their own resistive meanings (Joyrich 13). To intervene in this context could include actions such as boycotting a particular publisher or mounting a public campaign to counter the naturalness of the messages of the text. In order to fully understand media texts then, it is necessary to balance textual analyses, which seek to denaturalize hegemonic ideologies, and audience reception studies, which assume a less pessimistic view of the effects of media messages.

**The Ideological Problematic, Subjectivity, and Reader-Oriented Criticism**

Within the methodology of ideological analysis, the ideological problematic can be understood as the variety of competing meanings and representations within a particular text, how those meanings are created, and what systems of meanings, or ideologies, are thus given or denied voice (White 182). Dominant and critical systems of representation of particular themes, such as violence against women, or women's sexuality, can exist simultaneously depending upon how the theme is constructed within the text and how viewers interpret the textual moments from their various viewing positions. This bundle of meanings for a particular theme within a given text is the ideological problematic. Mimi White in “Ideological Analysis and Television,” gives an example from the TV series *Cagney and Lacey*. White analyzes
a camera shot from a scene in which the character Cagney decides to pursue a sexual discrimination case against the police department in which she works.

Cagney is seen in a close-up framed against the barred windows of the precinct interrogation room....[T]he scene could be taken as just another familiar image of a weak woman, or as a self-conscious comment by the program itself on the way in which women, however competent, are framed by social constraints.” (182, italics mine)

Thus the shot can be seen as a sexist statement symbolic of an essential weakness of femininity, or it can be read as a sympathetic acknowledgement of the patriarchal oppression of women. That both of these meanings can exist simultaneously is an example of one piece of the series’ overall ideological problematic in relation to depictions of femininity.

As a methodology, ideological analysis originates from Marxist theory, and takes as its main assumption that artifacts of culture located in a specific historical context reproduce values, practices, and beliefs in relation to that historical context. The production, dissemination, and reception of these values, practices, and beliefs (or ideologies) are elements which are analyzed with this method (White 163), and “ideological analysis...aims to understand the ways in which meanings are produced by and for individuals within a social formation” (White 168). In the case of an ideological analysis of Twin Peaks, television is the artifact, and Twin Peaks is a televisual text that will be analyzed via textual analysis in an effort to decipher how the series reproduces dominant ideologies that protect the interests of those who benefit from patriarchy, how it expresses challenges to patriarchy, or how it does both simultaneously.
Classical Marxist theory, in particular the concept of false consciousness, has been critiqued and revised in part because it doesn’t adequately explain why people would accept ideas which do not represent their own interests (White 166). In attempts to completely explain how ideology functions, theorists have reevaluated Marxist criticism in terms of both reception and the organization of society. Television, as a popular culture artifact, is geared to reach a mass audience, and thus must appeal to a wide variety of identity groups who do not necessarily share the same viewing position. (Fiske 37). Because of this, television’s meanings are complex and there can be found a number of competing messages.

In striving to represent itself as a totality that speaks for and to us all, the medium inevitably raises issue and points to values and ideas that are problematic or disruptive and that cannot be neatly or easily subsumed in general social consensus. (White 192)

Antonio Gamsci explained the nuances of ideology with the concept of hegemony (White 168). With this concept, ruling class ideology can be described as hegemonic, or that which makes up the dominant worldview. This does not mean that other belief systems are not in existence, but that they must compete against the hegemonic ideology which has been naturalized and seems to be merely common sense (White 168). Thus competing ideologies are seen as contrived products of minority special interests, while “hegemony appears to be spontaneous, even natural” (White 167), the truth, or just the way it is. This positions dominant ideology as an authoritative system against which all other systems of belief must compete, leaving them in relatively disadvantaged positions. In this way, ideology can be seen as a multitude of differing ideas representing any number of class or identity groups’
interests. Such a view also explains how the status quo is yet maintained by the hegemonic power of ruling class ideology. Television incorporates a variety of belief systems in order to appeal to a mass audience, but hegemony maintains the status quo.

This representational heterogeneity mainly functions as a limited and regulated pluralism, striving to hold things in balance and to develop all subjects and points of view in relation to normative frames of reference. Dominant ideological interests may constitute this normative frame and prevail in the last instance. But along the way we are confronted with a variety of issues, ideas, and values that cannot easily be subsumed under the heading “ruling ideology.” (White 196)

Here the ideological problematic comes into play as a concept that allows an exploration of the variety of meanings on a particular theme within a text, some of which may be in opposition to dominant ideology. However, because the ruling class controls television production, “dominant interests will prevail most of the time and may even restrict the range of competing voices that get heard” (White 168).

In terms of analysis of a televisual text and its potential expression of competing interests, subjectivities and viewing positions come into play as important factors in how people create meanings from a given text. Classical Marxist thought results in all viewers taking only one of two positions (ruling class or working class), which does not account for the complexities of interpreting television’s messages from the variety of potential viewing positions. Individual social subjectivities are more convoluted than merely ruling class or working class (White 168-69). One’s subjectivity may consist of many different elements such as gender, race, sexual orientation, and nationality, or any other categories of social identity. Ideology then
would be seen as much more complicated than a reflection of only ruling class interests. Instead, "ideology functions as a system of address, and individuals are positioned as social subjects through their responses in this system" (White 169).

Social subjectivity and viewing position are important elements in understanding how ideology functions through television. Individuals come to understand who we are and how society functions in part through ideology or cultural expression. We do not simply absorb an identity from the medium of television, but rather negotiate with the texts through our sense of familiarity and disconnect with what we are viewing in terms of all the categories of identity through which we understand ourselves.

As individuals with specific identities, audiences watch/read and make meanings of television from specific subject positions. The meaning of a given text does not reside in the text, but within the interplay of text and audience. There is no single objective meaning; every viewer creates her own meanings in response to her own subject position. This is called reader-response criticism, reception theory, or reader-oriented criticism (Allen 102) and stems from theories of literary criticism. In regard to identity politics and ideological analysis, individuals situated within a particular group (women, gay men, African-Americans) may look for moments in a given text in which the dominant meaning is challenged. This is called reading against the grain, or reading subversively.

A subversive reading emphasizes a marginal voice or position and brackets off the dominant context that presumably holds it in place, or it demonstrates how the marginal voice exposes the contradictions of the dominant context within which it emerges." (White 192)
A dominant reading, on the other hand, uncritically accepts the prevailing ideological messages within a text. In a feminist analysis, a subversive reading may result, for example, in a celebration of moments in the text in which patriarchy or sexism is overtly challenged by conventions such as shot angle, narrative event, character development, or dialogue. A subversive reading may also entail a critical reading in which the structures which contribute to a text’s sexist message are exposed and analyzed.

The concept of the ideological problematic is useful in exploring Twin Peaks from a feminist perspective because it is a framework which supports a subversive reading which both exposes dominant ideology at work and locates the feminist possibilities within the series. Patricia Pender in “I’m Buffy and You’re…History: the postmodern politics of Buffy” writes,

> Feminist critiques of popular culture frequently mobilize a strategy similar to Buffy’s slaying technique when they question if any given text is part of the solution, or part of the problem: is Buffy the Vampire Slayer a groundbreaking, empowering, and transgressive text, or is its political potential compromised, commodity driven, and contained? Put simply, is Buffy good or bad? (35)

It is possible to avoid a simplistic good/bad critique of Twin Peaks through an analysis which emphasizes the complexity of its characterization of femininity and explores the fissures in dominant ideology. Though Twin Peaks is by no means a progressive text, neither is it completely lacking in pleasure for a feminist audience.
Chapter Four: Watching Audrey

Although Twin Peaks is a unique television show in terms of its postmodern style and artistic presentation, its uniqueness does not necessarily extend to its portrayal of women, and in general, the series conforms to patriarchal conventions, such as portraying women primarily as victims and sexual spectacles. However, the character Audrey Horne sometimes makes a break from this typical presentation, opening up the text, however briefly, for viewing pleasure as a feminist spectator. This is accomplished via a notable subversion of the male gaze and through Audrey’s positioning as a symbol of the ethos of the series.

The ideological message contained within the gaze is one of objectification and control. According to Mulvey,

Woman...stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on a silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning. (58)

When Audrey is positioned as viewer of the action, the male gaze is disrupted, and there exists potential for an audience to seek identification with Audrey as subject, breaking the feminine connection with “bearer of meaning” and moving her into a position of “maker of meaning.” From this position, Audrey offers a reading of scenes that strongly shapes the ultimate interpretation. Though some scenes break away from the controlling male gaze in this way, other scenes reinforce it, limiting the text from breaking free of patriarchal conventions and minimizing its liberating
possibilities. The ideological problematic in terms of the female figure as sexual spectacle is defined by the movement back and forth between these two positions.

Laura Mulvey in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” defined the concept of the male gaze and its function in cinema in order to “advance our understanding of the status quo, of the patriarchal order in which we are caught” (58) and to destroy the pleasure we find in looking by analyzing it (59). Mulvey conceptualized cinema through the lens of psychoanalysis, focusing on how cinema “reflects, reveals, and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference” (57) and the patriarchal symbolic order in which woman is man’s Other. It does this by providing a way to contain the male fear of castration as embodied by sexual difference and female ‘lack.’ Scopophilia, or voyeurism, which is defined as gaining sexual pleasure in looking at an objectified other from a secret or hidden point of view, is the mode by which narrative cinema contains the threat of the female lack and provides visual pleasure. The female figure is fetishized to make up for her lack, to be made comprehensible within the symbolic order which revolves around the phallus which she lacks.

Mulvey argues that “the determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly” (62). The female figure as spectacle interrupts the narrative flow, providing a moment of “erotic contemplation” (62) for viewers while the male figure forwards the action. The spectator is able to tap into a narcissistic mode of looking, that of identifying with the characters on the screen through a recognition of the human form, as well as a voyeuristic mode of looking,
that of objectifying the human form. The male figure carries the action and provides spectators with a sense of identification, while the female figure on the screen is made into a spectacle to appease castration anxiety. In this way, cinema offers the male viewer the opportunity to identify with the active male protagonist, as well as offering erotic pleasure through watching the female sexual spectacle. A female viewer, on the other hand, is offered a different set of options. In order to identify with the protagonist, she must identify with someone not of her own sex. At the same time, in viewing the female figure, she may either watch from a male perspective in which she participates in objectification of the female figure, or she may identify with the object, thus objectifying herself. Mulvey argues that the gaze contains power because it limits woman as image to representing male desire and pleasure under the conditions of patriarchy in which woman is Other to man.

Although Mulvey developed her theory of the gaze in relation to classic Hollywood cinema, it applies to television in terms of the way that the narrative is presented, as well as through the way the audience relates to the story on the screen, and her theory has been applied in studies of television texts (Morse, Fiske). Mulvey argues that cinema portrays

   a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy. (60)

Television operates in a similar way. Spectators are disconnected from the characters by a screen and observe them voyeuristically as though through a window into their world. But unlike film, television has frequent commercials that interrupt the story at
regular intervals, breaking the realism and potentially detaching the audience from absorption in the story. Despite this difference, television still offers a relatively “hermetically sealed worlds” which seem to grant spectators a window into another universe.

_Twin Peaks_ exists somewhere in between film and television. Though it is a television show, its principle creator is a noted film director, and the pilot episode was aired without commercials. It was also short-lived on television and became a cult classic in part through its availability in VHS format (no commercials), and its style has been hailed as unique for television standards. In these ways, the series has a filmic presence. However, as _postmodern_ television, _Twin Peaks_ disavows the hermetically sealed world model because the audience is purposefully reminded throughout the series via a variety of stylistic techniques that what we are watching is a creation. In this lies the potential for disruption of dominant ideology: spectators are offered the choice of accepting the story on the screen as an accurate reflection of real life or of understanding the text as someone’s invention. In the first instance, whatever is portrayed within the text seems natural and obvious and thus resists being read critically. In the latter, a critical reading is more easily made because dominant ideology is denaturalized, is shown to be merely a fiction from someone’s point of view. The gaze as described by Mulvey in relation to classical Hollywood cinema is thus relatively weakened in _Twin Peaks_ because the series often draws attention to itself as an imagined fiction. However, the gaze still functions strongly in terms of the pleasure offered in watching the character Audrey Horne.
Audrey Horne is representative of Mulvey's theory of the female figure as sexual spectacle, though she also functions in some ways in opposition to this theory. Audrey, played by Sherilyn Fenn, is a high school student, the daughter of Ben Horne, the wealthiest man in town, who owns the Great Northern Hotel, Horne's Department Store, and secretly, One-Eyed Jack's, a casino and brothel over the Canadian/U.S. border, not far from the town of Twin Peaks. Audrey is characterized as manipulative, mischievous, and rather spoiled. In episode ten she says, "I'm Audrey Horne, and I get what I want." She is also extremely beautiful and overtly erotic. She is meant to be watched. Audrey is visually coded as a "bad girl," a brunette who often wears red, smokes in the high school bathroom, and exchanges her demure saddle shoes for red pumps when she arrives at school. She has no intimate relationships until near the end of the series, and she is repeatedly rejected by her father. Her primary desires are for love and adventure, and she seeks these things out primarily (though not entirely) via men, in particular from father figures, such as Agent Cooper.

Audrey is often seen observing the action in a voyeuristic manner, and it is in this role that her character works in opposition to the male gaze. Rather than occupying the position of object-to-be-looked-at, she herself is in control of the gaze, directing what the audience sees and what meanings we make. It is also in this role that Audrey is emblematic of the ethos of the series, a position that sets her apart from other characters. Audrey often eavesdrops on conversations through a secret passageway in the hotel where her family lives, and in several scenes she observes the
action from a corner of the room or from a closet rather than being involved in it. Her emotional reactions to the various events she observes sometimes seem slightly inappropriate because they are often in conflict with the mood that has been created through other cues, such as the background music or the reactions of other characters in the scene. This places Audrey on a different plane than the other characters, which makes us take notice and relate to the events occurring through Audrey’s eyes. *Twin Peaks* is a world built on secrets, and Audrey is the only main character who has very few of her own. Rather, she is an observer who serves as an intratextual audience, watching and detecting the secrets of others. In this way, Audrey is emblematic of one of the primary themes that structures the series: human curiosity. In this she does not represent sexual spectacle and sexual difference from a male norm, but humanity in general and the ethos of the series. This positioning offers up a way of viewing that makes a break from the status quo because she is not merely on display for male pleasure. Her personal motives matter in and of themselves, and she can carry the action from her own desires rather than interrupting the action as spectacle and representing only the desires of others. However, Audrey is also extremely beautiful and very much meant to be watched. Her outstandingly good looks are central to her place in the narrative, and she is frequently the object of the gaze throughout the series. She both disrupts and reinforces the male gaze.

There are several scenes in which Audrey is not objectified by the controlling gaze, but functions as a subject in her own right and as a thematic representation for the entire series. For example, in the pilot episode, students and staff at the high
school learn that Laura has been murdered, and students in the classroom are shown crying and comforting one another. Audrey sits alone, elbows on her desk with her chin in her hands and legs crossed, staring into space with a dreamy smile on her face, as though excited and aroused by the mysterious occurrence which has shaken up those who surround her, and eager to see what will happen next. The expression on Audrey's face in this moment establishes the primary emotional tone of the entire series of *Twin Peaks*, that of human fascination with the hidden dark side of the mundane. Although there are many comic elements, the series is in many ways an example of a Gothic-style detective fiction, and the tone reflects this genre. The overall atmosphere of the series is dark and forbidding. In order to solve the murder of Laura Palmer and to understand the supernatural forces present in the woods around the town of Twin Peaks, a fascination with dark secrets must exist. Audrey represents this fascination in her role as observer and investigator, and her emotional reactions to events demonstrate the curiosity and the attraction to hidden secrets that drive the series, as well as symbolizing the mystery. Although she is meant to be looked at in this scene for visual pleasure, we are also asked to look beyond her beautiful surface and into her fascination with the events about to unfold because her reaction is in stark contrast to the other characters in the scene. This has the effect of positioning Audrey not merely as a beautiful figure but as a significant embodiment of the story that is being played out.

In episode five, Audrey is an observer at a reception hosted by her father, Ben, for a group of European investors. When music begins to play, Leland, Laura's
distraught father, begins to dance alone, then breaks down weeping and gesturing, repeatedly putting his hands to his head then reaching up in despair. The confused guests stare, and Ben quickly enlists Catherine, his secret business partner and lover, to dance with Leland, making it seem as though Leland is dancing rather than having an emotional breakdown. Catherine imitates his gestures, and soon many others do as well, as though it were a new dance, and the scene has a comically absurd feel with lively big band music. The camera then cuts to Audrey, peaking out from behind a pillar, crying at the spectacle and the unintentional mockery of Leland’s pain by the guests at the reception. In this moment, our laughter at the absurdity of the scene turns to sympathy for Leland and disgust toward Ben and Catherine for their mercenary behavior. Audrey’s reading of the scene competes with comic cues, asking audiences to elect their own emotional reading of the scene from the two placed before them. We can laugh at the absurdity of the situation or tap into Audrey’s point of view by looking at more than just the surface.

In a previous scene in this episode, Audrey has snuck into the hidden room off of the hallway to secretly observe Catherine and Ben talking in his office. Catherine and Ben, who are having an affair, are trying to bankrupt the Packard Sawmill, which is managed by Catherine but owned by her sister-in-law, Josie. Ben wants the land where the sawmill is located for his housing development project (Ghostwood Estates), but Josie will not sell it to him. Catherine and Ben meet regularly to carry on with their affair and to plan their scheme. During a previous meeting, Catherine finds a poker chip from One-Eyed Jack’s when it falls out of Ben’s pants pocket, and
is now confronting Ben about it, angry and jealous that he has been at the brothel. As Audrey creeps through the room to the hole in the wall from where she will watch, we hear Ben’s voice in voice-over saying to Catherine, “Let’s keep the melodrama to a minimum.” Audrey removes the plank covering the hole and watches as Catherine slaps Ben in the face. Audrey is amused by this and stifles laughter. Catherine slaps Ben twice more, and Ben stoically asks her if she is “quite finished.” Catherine says that she is, there is a pause, and suddenly they embrace and kiss. Catherine is bent backwards over the desk passionately saying “Let’s burn the mill! Let’s do it tonight!” as Ben kisses her throat. Audrey continues trying to hold back her laughter as she replaces the board over the hole.

Audrey’s amusement seems out of place in terms of the content of the scene—she is watching her father being physically attacked and accused of visiting a brothel by a woman with whom he is having an affair and plotting felonious criminal activity. It seems this might disturb Audrey rather than amuse her. But as an example of a postmodern moment in the series, her reaction can be understood in a different light. The scene between Ben and Catherine is reminiscent of soap opera with overly dramatic dialogue and delivery with stylized gestures. The embrace in particular is almost comic in its intensity, and Audrey’s amusement can be understood not in relation to what is taking place between Catherine and Ben, but rather in relation to the style of the scene itself which echoes melodrama and soap operas conventions. Audrey is watching the scene from a hidden position, as a voyeur, reflecting back to the audience our own voyeuristic spectatorship. Because of Audrey’s laughter, the
scene between Catherine and Ben cannot quite be taken seriously; it is instead seen as silly, as the parody of soap opera conventions that it is. In addition, the intratextual soap opera, *Invitation to Love*, watched by the residents of Twin Peaks, has been prominently featured in the previous episode, specifically the story line regarding the characters Jade and Montana who are scheming to steal real estate. Through the use of the soap-opera-within-a-soap-opera, we are asked to compare the two plots. The obvious fiction of *Invitation to Love* highlights the fiction of *Twin Peaks*, placing them within the same frame of reference in regard to Catherine and Ben. This, combined with Audrey’s laughter, establishes the dominant reading of the scene on Audrey’s terms.

When Audrey functions as an observer, a distance is created between the text and the audience because spectators are made aware of our audienceship as we observe Audrey functioning as an intratextual audience. One becomes aware of one’s position as a spectator and is forced to break away from complete absorption in the text as a “true” story. A spectator with self-awareness of spectatorship cannot at the same time continue to suspend disbelief in the fiction before her, nor can she continue watching in a voyeuristic fashion. The viewer’s role in the configuration of storytelling is no longer naturalized; it has been exposed and we, as spectators, are briefly self-conscious of our spectatorship. Audrey observes the spectacle from a point of subjectivity thereby controlling the audience’s interpretation of the emotional meaning of the scene. In these scenes, Audrey is not positioned from the perspective of a male spectator as a feminine object of desire. Rather, she is positioned as a
spectator herself, and an audience may watch the scene with her as feminine subject. Through this positioning, viewers are brought back into proximity with the story because the text has offered the possibility of identifying with Audrey by watching the action from her point of view. Audrey directs the emotional impact of the narrative, influencing how the scene might be interpreted by embodying the point of view from which the final meaning of the scene can arguably be taken. Threatening sexual difference is erased through this positioning because the spectator is directed to watch the scene through her eyes and seek an understanding of the action from her point of view. Through this, Audrey is in control of the gaze, and as viewers watch her watching, we identify with her as a subject, viewing the scene as a lonely, unloved troubled teenaged girl in a dysfunctional family. These scenes serve as a disruption of the male gaze because of the identification that we experience with Audrey and because the emotional impact of the scene is controlled by her unique emotional response to it. This serves as one aspect of the problematic of spectatorship and power in the series. The controlling male gaze has been disrupted.

However, other scenes strongly reestablish the male gaze. Audrey immediately develops a crush on Agent Cooper, who is staying at the Great Northern Hotel, and she hatches a plan (unbeknownst to Cooper) to help him solve Laura’s murder in an effort to make him fall in love with her. The main component of her scheme involves following a lead by going undercover as a prostitute at One-Eyed Jack’s where Laura is suspected of having worked, and it is there that Audrey is positioned as a sexual spectacle. It is worth noting, however, that Audrey’s motives
are not purely based on gaining the admiration of Agent Cooper; she is also investigating the brothel for her own satisfaction, and through this, the feminist spectator is offered something more. Audrey is clearly fascinated with and titillated by One-Eyed Jack’s. In episode three, Audrey describes One-Eyed Jack’s to Agent Cooper, saying, “It’s a place up north. Men go there.” When Agent Cooper asks “what about women?” she lowers her voice and says in a conspiratorial tone with a mischievous smile and a roll of her eyes, “women...you know, work there.” In episode four, Audrey tells Donna,, another high school student, that thinking about Laura working at One-Eyed Jack’s makes her shiver, and goes on to describe exactly how it makes her feel: “…it’s like a hot-cold like when you hold an ice cube on your bare skin for a long time…” and trails off with a dreamy look on her face. Audrey, in following her own motives to investigate the brothel, is operating from her own desires, not necessarily trying only to please others, and she is unmistakably mesmerized with the brothel.

Despite this, the gaze is strongly in operation at One-Eyed Jack’s. In episode five, Audrey presents herself to Blackie, the madam of One-Eyed Jack’s, for an interview in Blackie’s office at the brothel. Audrey’s youth and inexperience are highlighted at the expense of the image she is attempting to portray of a sexually-experienced woman. She begins by handing Blackie a falsified résumé of her work in the sex industry that gives her name as Hester Prynne. It is noteworthy that Audrey has chosen as her pseudonym Hester Prynne of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter. This choice places Audrey within a context of a woman who breaks her
society's taboos. Audrey's circumstances are quite different from Hester Prynne's, but she perhaps would identify with Hester in that she feels like an outsider in her community. There is also a sense of playfulness in Audrey's choice, a titillation with naming herself after a figure who transgresses sexual boundaries as Audrey is about to do. Blackie immediately sees through the false credentials and says, "give me one reason why I shouldn't airmail your bottom back to civilization." Audrey responds by taking the cherry from Blackie's cocktail and performing a burlesque in which she eats the cherry and ties the stem into a knot with her tongue. Blackie watches appreciatively then offers Audrey the job.

As Audrey performs this sexual pantomime, the male gaze is in operation via the camera/audience's look, as well as that of Blackie's. Audrey is auditioning for Blackie, literally performing, and we are supposed to watch. We are thus given permission to disassociate with Audrey as a subject, overlooking her motivation for being there, and instead scrutinize her for visual pleasure as her performance asks us to. This is a moment Mulvey explains as "the device of the show-girl [that] allows the two looks [of the audience and of the characters in the scene] to be unified technically without breaking the narrative verisimilitude" (Muley 62). Even though the female figure has interrupted the narrative flow, it doesn't disturb the realism, because we are allowed to watch Audrey through Blackie's eyes. Mulvey explains how the looks of cinema function to produce this effect:

There are three different looks associated with the cinema: that of the camera as it films the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion. The conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to
the third, the conscious aim being always to eliminate intrusive camera
presence and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience. (68)

The gaze is strong because the camera and the audience’s looks are
subordinated to Blackie’s gaze. The scene thus appears to be realistic, to exist as part
of that hermetically-sealed world in relation to which the audience and the camera are
non-existent. The gaze functions to make the text real by giving spectators a way to
watch without being aware of the text as a fiction or aware of ourselves as an
audience to that fiction. The male gaze is back in operation, and Audrey’s subjectivity
as established in scenes in which she is the observer or has acted from her own
desires has been contained.

A scene in the Double-R Diner, one of the primary settings in the series, also
strongly reaffirms the male gaze. In this scene of episode four, Audrey arrives at the
diner, chooses a song to play on the juke box, and takes a seat at the counter. Donna
Hayward, a fellow high school student, is also in the diner sitting at a booth with her
parents having breakfast after church. Donna’s mother Eileen points out “little
Audrey Horne,” and continues with the conversation. Donna and Audrey make eye
contact, but it is tense, and neither one smiles. After a few more moments pass,
Donna tells her parents that she is going to go say hello, and crosses the room to the
counter where Audrey is seated. Donna approaches her cautiously, somewhat
awkwardly, and their greeting is stilted. Audrey, who has ordered coffee, asks Donna
if she likes coffee. Donna says, “Yeah, with cream and sugar.” Audrey leans close to
Donna, smiled wickedly, and says “Agent Cooper loves coffee.” The two then laugh
at the absurdity of Audrey’s crush on Agent Cooper, and the tension between them is
broken. It is a shared moment of light-hearted ‘girl-talk’ in which Donna appears fond and slightly protective of Audrey. The two then begin a conversation about Laura, when Audrey, who suspects and fears that her father may have been involved in Laura’s murder, suddenly blurts out, “Did Laura ever talk about my father?” Donna is confused by the question, and Audrey quickly changes the subject to the music playing on the juke box. Tension is once again established. Soon Audrey stands up, moves away from the counter, and begins to dance slowly to the music, as though in a trance. Without taking her eyes off of Audrey, Eileen gestures to her husband to look, and he turns to do so. Donna also watches and looks embarrassed and ill-at-ease. Audrey makes eye contact with Donna, and her expression is heavy-lidded, her movements sensual; she looks at Donna with passion. This scene reinforces the controlling male gaze in that Audrey is once again a sexual spectacle, a ‘show-girl’ uniting the looks of the camera and audience with that of the characters. In fact, there are three characters watching in this scene (Donna and her parents) and the spectators’ look is strongly subordinated to the gaze of the characters in the text.

Although the two scenes detailed above demonstrate the way the male gaze functions via Audrey, they cannot be simply dismissed as conforming to patriarchal conventions. Because Audrey is performing in a sexual manner for women, a discussion of lesbian subtext is in order. The presence of lesbian subtext would offer a different way of reading these scenes, one which would provide a feminist and/or queer audience a more diverse text. A queer reading would place the series outside of patriarchal heterosexual norms and allow female characters to operate without the
need for male validation and without the presence of male heterosexual desire. But despite Audrey’s sexual performances for women, the potential for lesbian subtext is mostly undermined, especially in the Audrey/Donna scene in the Double R.

In “Surpassing the Love of Vampires,” Farah Mendlesohn discusses the requirements necessary for lesbian subtext to exist. She writes, “if a queer reading is something genuine that responds to specific structures, then there must be circumstances in which it does not work and reasons why this is the case” (46). Mendlesohn claims that the relationship between Buffy and Willow lacks lesbian subtext largely because their relationship lacks tension, as it is “the tension between the two characters that is most productive of queer readings” (45). In the diner scene, there is most definitely tension between Audrey and Donna, as well as an overtly sexual look. However, despite these ingredients, there is little sense of real attraction. Although Audrey gives Donna a smoldering look, it does not give the impression of being directed at Donna personally, but rather seems to be a perfunctory part of the performance she is giving. Indeed, the performance is overdone and seems rote, as though Audrey is merely retreating behind an image she wishes to convey of someone unafraid, independent, and uninhibited after having almost made herself vulnerable by confessing her fears about her father. Neither does Donna’s uncomfortable expression appear to come from a shy attraction to Audrey. Rather, Donna seems uncomfortable because Audrey’s dance is out-of-place and unexpected. In opposition to Audrey, Donna is coded as a good girl from a “normal” family, in which her father is a doctor, her mother is a housewife, and they all go to
church together each Sunday and then to the Double R Diner for breakfast. They are characterized as a very traditional family, and through their eyes, Audrey’s provocative dancing is inappropriate and unseemly. The tension between Audrey and Donna points to lesbian desire but is not sustained.

In the brothel audition scene, there is more of a context for lesbian subtext because tension does exist, and lesbian desire is more overtly present. This is a place of real danger in which women are at the mercy of Blackie and the owners (Audrey’s father Ben and his brother Jerry), as well as the male customers. Blackie is an intimidating figure, controlling the lives of the women who work for her through the use of security guards. These women wait on her as though they were her harem, acting as secretaries, rubbing her feet as she reclines on a red velvet sofa, and serving customers at her bidding. Moreover, she is the gatekeeper to knowledge that Audrey desires, someone whom Audrey must get past in order to carry out her plan of helping Agent Cooper solve Laura’s murder. In this configuration, Blackie is someone Audrey must seduce. Blackie’s gaze is that of an entrepreneur: she must evaluate whether the product will sell to her customers, and in this Audrey is truly objectified. Blackie’s gaze as Audrey performs is also one of appraisal which could be read as desire for a new “hostess” who will please customers, or as a sexual desire of her own. Perhaps the final analysis in terms of lesbian subtext in this scene specifically resides in the dialogue at the end of the scene. Audrey lays the knotted cherry stem on the corner of the napkin underneath Blackie’s cocktail, and Blackie pushes a paper across her desk to Audrey, saying, “Sign here. Welcome to One-Eyed Jack’s,
Hester.” Her use of Audrey’s chosen pseudonym indicates that she is willing to allow Audrey to continue her charade as an experienced sex worker because she sees Audrey as a commodity that will benefit her own needs. This is a business transaction, and both women appear satisfied with the outcome; each has gained what she desires. Further, Blackie’s femaleness does not signify as such here. As a madam of a brothel, she embodies the male gaze by evaluating Audrey as a prospect for male sexual pleasure. In order to determine whether to allow her to work at One-Eyed Jack’s, she watches Audrey from the perspective of male heterosexual desire.

Nevertheless, there are two other scenes between Audrey and Blackie that do offer an overtly flirtatious encounter and the naming of lesbian sexual desire. These must also be explored in order to delineate more clearly whether a queer reading can exist. In the following episode, Audrey, dressed in a frilly red and white corset, is ushered into Blackie’s office. Blackie commands Audrey to turn around in order to inspect her and says, “Yes, very nice. Come over here.” Blackie lays out a deck of cards face-up and asks Audrey to pick one. Audrey points to the Queen of Diamonds, Blackie places her hand on top of Audrey’s, and they smile at each other seductively. The background music is slow and sultry, emphasizing the sexiness of the moment, and the scene ends with Blackie’s gaze on Audrey.

The second scene that specifically articulates the question of lesbian desire immediately destroys the possibility. This scene takes place between Audrey and Blackie the day after Audrey’s first night at the brothel. Audrey’s customer that night is her father. She manages to conceal her identify by wearing a mask, and he is called
away by his brother before he can initiate sex. Blackie is unhappy with Audrey's performance and has Audrey brought in before her by a security guard. Blackie is reclining on a chaise lounge having her shoulders and feet rubbed by two prostitutes as Audrey enters. Blackie tells Audrey that the owner was disappointed with Audrey and demands an explanation. Audrey says, "Well, the owner isn't exactly my type." Blackie stands up and Audrey stands in front of her. Blackie strokes Audrey's hair and says, "What exactly is your type?" Audrey leans in closely as though being discrete and says with a smile, "Not you, no offense." Blackie angrily gestures for the security guard who stands behind Audrey holding her arms, and Blackie takes Audrey by the chin, saying threateningly, "Let's get something straight, princess. When you work for me, everybody's your type." Audrey tries to look away in defiance, but Blackie forces her to continue facing her.

The scenes between Audrey and Blackie thus undermine sustained lesbian subtext. In fact, because the sexual moments between the two are so overt, it cannot necessarily be described as subtext. Mendelsohn writes, "...should attraction become overt, should the homosexual interest become blatant, a queer reading as such is no longer possible, as it depends for its structure on hidden and coded messages" (45). Within this definition, the Donna/Audrey dyad offers a brief moment of subtext which is almost immediately undercut, while the Blackie/Audrey dyad offers a more blatant version of lesbian desire which, though present over two consecutive episodes, is also undercut. Therefore, although the series does offer some notion of
homosexual content, both subtextually and overtly, it is not strong enough to disrupt heterosexist norms or to offer up a more diverse text for a feminist or queer audience.

How we watch Audrey is important in defining the ideological problematic of the text in relation to patriarchal norms because her looks are a fundamental element of her character. Although the gaze as described by Mulvey is sometimes reinforced, it is occasionally undermined via Audrey’s positioning as a symbol of the ethos of the series and as an observer. Though Twin Peaks is certainly not a feminist text, it does manage to offer a feminist audience something more than the standard positioning of the image of woman as representative of patriarchal desire through the character Audrey Horne.
Chapter Five: Good Girl/Bad Girl

Exploring how spectators look at Audrey Horne shows how the gaze functions in visual media to reinforce patriarchal modes of power and how patriarchal representations can be disrupted. Exploring what happens to Audrey within the narrative is important in determining the ways in which she reinforces and/or subverts dominant accounts of femininity. Audrey’s behavior and the choices she makes, how she is used by others, and how these events are framed shed light on governing ideologies. Because Audrey is depicted as overwhelmingly sexual yet at the same time virginal, she represents the pornographic tropes of the sexy school girl and manipulative sexual tease, which has implications for how Twin Peaks handles the discourse of rape and sexual assault. However, Audrey uses her sexuality and beauty in combination with intelligence, imagination, and self-confidence as a means of fulfilling her own desire for adventure and worldly exploration. This mischievous and sexualized portrayal can be read as resistance to a “good girl” role. This problematizes the sexy school girl stereotype, although the themes of self-fulfillment and resistance do not, in the end, override the reinforcement of negative stereotypes.

In the second half of the series, Audrey transforms from a pornographic figure to a traditional romantic heroine in the style of the fairy tale princess. This transformation illustrates another feminine stereotype, that of the dependent, self-sacrificing, and virtuous woman waiting to be rescued through romantic love. These two roles are related in that Audrey’s pornographic role is held in abeyance; it does not progress to sexual activity. This makes it possible for Audrey later to occupy the position of
romantic heroine. Both of these roles serve to limit and define Audrey’s sexuality within strict patriarchal terms.

A frequent theme in heterosexual pornography is that of the “barely legal” girl/woman who represents both the virgin and the whore. Her place in the pornographic narrative is that of transformation—she is in the process of becoming/being sexually experienced, with the emphasis on being. Her sexual appeal resides in the offer of her “purity” for “degradation,” which privileges a view of femininity as self-sacrificing to heterosexual male desire, and also commodifies the virginal state in that her virginity has value primarily in relation to the pleasure someone else will gain from it.

MacKinnon in “Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory” writes, “What defines women as such is what turns men on. Good girls are ‘attractive,’ bad girls are ‘provocative’” (531). In this sense, the virgin/whore configuration results in a version of womanhood in which one is either virginal (good) and thus attractive to men as a potential wife, or one is sexually available (bad), and thus appealing to heterosexual male sexual desire. Gloria Steinem in “Erotica and Pornography: A Clear and Present Difference” writes

“It’s a familiar division: wife or whore, ‘good’ woman who is constantly vulnerable to pregnancy or ‘bad’ woman who is unprotected from violence. Both roles would be upset if we were to control our own sexuality.” (75)

Steinem is discussing a revision of women’s sexuality in which women are not defined by patriarchal roles and male heterosexual desire, in which a woman is neither the ‘good’ wife/mother whose sexuality is controlled and limited by her
husband, nor the 'bad' woman who is sexually active outside of heterosexual marriage, and thus at risk for violence and punishment. Both MacKinnon and Steinem define the virgin/whore dichotomy as one which places women in a double-bind: both roles result in a feminine sexuality bound by a patriarchal socio-political arrangement and heterosexual male sexual desire. The "barely legal" figure represents virgin and whore simultaneously—she is both an unattainable, pure, sexually unavailable young woman and a feminine figure who is available for male pleasure. This figure also represents the pornographic theme of status inequality, in which the woman in the sexual encounter has a lower socio-economic status than the man, such as being younger than him, having less education, or working in a lower-paid profession (Cowan and Dunn 13).

In Twin Peaks, Audrey fills this pornographic role, functioning as a virgin and whore simultaneously, and this has implications for the way the text treats rape. Audrey is depicted as a naughty school girl in her tight sweater, plaid skirt, and red pumps, smoking in the bathroom at school. George Hume describes her character as "...sexually-advanced, eighteen going on forty" (50), and Audrey frequently performs in an overtly sexual way. It is in relation to Agent Cooper that Audrey is most strongly positioned as the "barely legal" figure. In episode one, Audrey meets Agent Cooper in the dining room of the Great Northern Hotel. He is ordering breakfast as she crosses the room toward him, looking directly at him and smiling licentiously. Cooper is seated at a table in the process of ordering breakfast. He asks for grapefruit juice stipulating "just as long as those grapefruits are freshly squeezed."
The words “freshly squeezed” are timed to coincide with his first view of her, and his tone of voice changes from business-like to dazed. The background music is this scene is a light and jazzy drum beat which is utilized in multiple scenes to create a comic and playful mood. The dialogue in this scene serves the same purpose as the music: that of adding levity to what could be read as a dangerous moment in which Audrey’s virginity is threatened and Cooper’s ethics are compromised.

Audrey asks if she can sit at his table and then directs the conversation toward her body with the lines, “Do you like my ring?” “Sometimes I get so flushed. It’s interesting,” and “Do your palms ever itch?” Her body language strongly reinforces the flirtation. She holds her hand out to him so that he can examine her ring, and looks at him from beneath her eyelashes with her head held to the side, smiling invitingly. Cooper says very little in response to her rather absurd statements and looks at her with both amusement and desire. In this scene, Audrey is the object of the gaze and once again a sexual spectacle, and though Cooper is clearly sexually attracted to her, we are asked by the background music and dialog to view this as humorous and harmless. This has the effect of delaying the consummation of the pornographic narrative just set into play so that it can be sustained over future episodes and so that Audrey remains sexy, but not yet sexual.

In the first scene of the third episode, Audrey and Cooper meet for the second time, and the theme of status inequality is further developed. Audrey sees him walking down the hall toward the dining room and quickly positions herself in front of the fireplace to greet him. When he comes around the corner and into view, she
smiles, gives a mock Boy Scout salute, and says pertly, "Good morning, Colonel Cooper." Cooper replies, "Just 'Agent,' Audrey. 'Special Agent.'" By referring to him as "Colonel" and saluting him, Audrey has highlighted his higher status and placed herself in a subordinate position. In episode five, the differences in their status and ages are literally named, and the sexual tension and pornographic narrative come to a head. Audrey sits down at Cooper's table in the dining room and offers to help with his investigation. Cooper declines her invitation, stands up to leave, and says, "Wednesdays were traditionally a school day when I was your age."

Audrey stands up and goes around the table to stand next to him, saying teasingly, "I can't believe you were ever my age." Cooper then asks Audrey how old she is. Continuing to stand very close and looking up at him, she tells him that she is eighteen in an earnest tone of voice and with a smile, obviously well-aware of the importance of this particular age to an older man, and one who represents the law. Cooper maintains eye contact a moment longer and then smoothly replies, "See you later, Audrey," and walks away, leaving her looking wistfully after him.

In the final scene of this episode, Cooper comes into his room at the hotel late at night to find Audrey naked in his bed. The scene ends with dramatic music and Audrey's plea, "Please don't make me leave." Episode six begins with a continuation of this scene. Cooper sits down on the edge of the bed, facing away from her and says, "Audrey, you're a high school girl. I'm an agent of the F.B. I... When a man joins the bureau, he takes an oath to uphold certain values, values that he's sworn to live by. This is wrong, Audrey, we both know it." Audrey replies, "But don't you
like me?” and Cooper reassures her, saying, “I like you very much. You’re beautiful, intelligent, desirable. You’re everything a man wants in his life. But you’re an eighteen year-old girl.” The scene ends with Cooper offering her his friendship instead and Audrey looks visibly relieved.

Cooper has been drawn as painstakingly ethical, and though he has flirted with Audrey, his character development lessens the possibility that he would allow a sexual relationship to develop. He is not a real threat to Audrey’s status as virgin. When faced with a decision regarding a sexual relationship with her, he cites the difference in their age and status, as well as unspecified values, as a reason not to become sexually involved. Narratively, this serves to further the view of Agent Cooper as the hero of the series in that he faces and overcomes temptation. It also positions and defines Audrey as that temptation, and in this her sexuality is utilitarian rather than in and of itself. Audrey must remain a virgin for the text to continue to use her as the “barely legal” pornographic figure and, later, as a fairy tale princess. Because sexual activity is continually delayed, Audrey is always on the verge of what can be seen from a pornographic perspective as sexy degradation: being (not becoming) sexually experienced. The text sustains Audrey’s one “good girl” quality (her virginal status) while forwarding a titillating view of her as a manipulative and dangerous flirt who may at some point in the future “get what she is asking for.”

At One-Eyed Jack’s Audrey is literally a virgin and whore, and she is at risk there of being punished for using her sexuality to manipulate and of “getting what she’s asking for.” Because of Cooper’s ethics, Audrey’s ‘purity’ has been protected.
At the brothel, it is not likely that she will encounter anyone with similar ethics, and so her virginity must be maintained in a different way. Because her only customer is her father, who is called out of her room before he can discover her identity or continue his sexual advances, her virginity is again maintained. The text avoids allowing Audrey to “ruin” herself by first giving her a partner who must resist her, and then giving her a partner whom she must resist. Later she is tied up on a bed and drugged by Blackie and Jean Renault in a kidnapping scheme, and rather miraculously, not raped.

The text in no way advances the absurdity of this fact. On the contrary, although all the narrative elements are in place for a rape that in a pornographic text would be the natural outcome, Audrey is not in fact sexually assaulted, though in some scenes her captivity and victimization are sexualized. For example, when she is being confronted by Blackie about her “poor performance” with the owner (her father), Audrey is wearing a short black chemise and red high heels as a security guard roughly holds her arms behind her back while Blackie strokes her hair. While tied up in bed, Jean wakes Audrey up by holding a caramel to her mouth, saying “sugar is what you need” in reference to the effects of the heroin with which she has been repeatedly injected. Audrey sensually and eagerly sucks on the candy as he holds it in his fingers.

Besides this sexualization of violence, there is no rape or any subtextual implication of sexual abuse during her captivity at the brothel, and the word “rape” is never spoken by any character. After she is rescued, she vehemently assures Agent
Cooper that when she was at One-Eyed Jack's, she “never, never let anyone...” but is interrupted by Agent Cooper saying very firmly and seriously, “Audrey, you don’t have to say anything.” She replies, “But I want you to know,” and Cooper says, “I know.” Though she doesn’t finish her sentence, it is clear that Audrey is referring to sex, and her use of the word “let” places this sex in a context of consent, though she has been drugged and held against her will. It is extremely important to Audrey for Agent Cooper to know that she didn’t willingly have sex, and Cooper reinforces the horror and shame of such a notion by being unwilling to let her speak the possibility, even to deny it. That Audrey was not raped is, at least to her, secondary in importance to the fact that she did not willingly have sex, and she needs Agent Cooper to know that she is virginal in order to be virtuous and eligible for his love.

The glaring textual absence of rape combined with an over-emphasis on Audrey’s “choice” not to have sex in a context in which she has no control places the text squarely within the dominant discourse on rape and illustrates two rape myths. The first is that women provoke rape through “incautious behavior” (Brownmiller 312) such as behaving provocatively. The kidnapping scenes offer the sense that Audrey is finally going to get what she has been asking for, that she will be put in her place for using her sexuality to get what she wants. An unsympathetic audience is titillated by the threat of sexual violence against the sexual tease. Though the threat is not carried out, its contextual presence illustrates the myth that “women ask for it.” The second myth is that rape can be successfully resisted if a woman fights hard enough. Audrey’s insistence that she did not “let” anyone have sex with her
reinforces the view that a "bad" woman is raped while a virtuous woman will fight off her attacker at any cost. The textual narrative of Twin Peaks does not address sexual assault as such in this context, and simultaneously assigns the only dialogic exchange about the notion of sex to Audrey, who frames it as a choice of her own and is not even allowed to articulate literally what it is that she didn't "let" happen.

Because the text does not address sexual assault, it romanticizes sex work and undermines the seriousness of the dangers of prostitution and pornography. The possibility of rape has been denaturalized in three ways. First, it is avoided via the absence of the articulation of sexual assault and the framing of rape as Audrey's responsibility. Secondly, it is avoided by the fact that her father is her only customer at the brothel, and while he is portrayed as emotionally neglectful, he has not been characterized as physically abusive and is also quickly called away. Lastly, it is circumvented through Audrey's costuming. Finally admitting that she is in danger at One-Eyed Jack's, Audrey calls Agent Cooper at the Great Northern to tell him she is in trouble and is coming home. This is the first time she has sought help, and she appears helpless and innocent, wearing a pink sweater and saddle shoes, crying and overwrought. She is then confronted by Blackie and the kidnapping plot begins. The pink sweater and saddle shoes are demure in comparison to the cocktail dress, teddy, and chemise, and direct attention away from a sexualized view of her captivity. Her clothes are also symbolic of the shift from the pornographic role to the fairy tale princess.
Audrey remains a virgin: she is not punished with rape for flirting in order to get what she wants and behaving provocatively, and consensual sexual activity has been avoided due to Agent Cooper’s ethics. Though the text repeatedly draws Audrey as a pornographic image, it does not carry out the pornographic narrative to its obvious conclusion. Narratively, this disavowal of sexual activity maintains Audrey’s virginal status, so that there is hope that as a “good girl” she may still find a suitable love interest. In this she represents the flip-side of the “barely legal” figure: the fairy tale princess who must be a virgin in order for an appropriate man to fall in love with her. Rather than a prostitute, Audrey is now a princess held against her will by an evil witch (Blackie). The king (Ben Horne) in his castle (The Great Northern Hotel) must ransom her back, and Agent Cooper is the prince who will rescue Audrey from her captivity.

Though she is still flirtatious, Audrey’s new role transforms her from a pornographic figure to one eligible to participate in heterosexual romance ideology. Rather than boldly seeking to fulfill her own desires, she now expresses a willingness to sublimate herself to the goals of the patriarch, as though in preparation for self-sacrificing wifely duties. While she is motivated by a desire for love and acceptance from her father, this change can also be read as a chastened reaction to her rather disastrous and sobering adventure at One-Eyed Jack’s. When Ben asks her to be his “right-hand man” in the family business, Audrey enthusiastically agrees, and subsequently aligns herself with his goals while expressing a strong sense of family loyalty which she had previously only feigned in order to investigate One-Eyed
Jack’s. Audrey’s new role of dutiful daughter extends to entering the Miss Twin Peaks contest. In a previous episode, Catherine Martel has blackmailed Ben into signing over the Ghostwood development project to her. In revenge, Ben comes out against the project on an environmental platform (“Save the Pine Weasel”) and asks Audrey to participate in the beauty pageant in order to use her as a spokesperson for this campaign. Audrey’s reply to his request is, “Daddy, with all my heart, I do not want to be the town bathing beauty,” but nevertheless does what he asks. She no longer shows resistance to the good girl role and has become deferential to the desires of her father, establishing her new role as a fairy tale princess.

In *Fantasies of Femininity*, Ussher discusses fairy tale romance conventions in relation to the “Beauty and the Beast” tale.

Fairy tales offer self-sacrifice and romance as solutions to life’s difficulties....Beauty’s three decisions—to stay, to serve, finally to sacrifice her life—establish her willing subservience to paternal needs. She obeys the ‘law of the father’, as all good girls should. (9)

Audrey’s new role fits neatly with this description in that she is suppressing her own sense of who she wants to be to please her father and serve his needs. A fairy tale princess is also beautiful and virtuous. Audrey’s beauty is unquestionable, and her virtue in terms of virginity has been maintained throughout the series. Her sudden devotion to her father, as well as the fact that in her new capacity as her father’s assistant she behaves professionally rather than intentionally spilling coffee on the concierge’s paperwork and running off business junkets for entertainment as she did early in the series, also helps to establish a sense of virtue. Audrey lives in a castle
and waits for her prince to arrive, as she wishes of Agent Cooper, "to whisk [her] off to a life of romance and international intrigue."

Concurrent with the development of this new persona, Audrey is reunited with John Justice Wheeler, a family friend whom she hasn’t seen since she was a child. Now a wealthy businessman and environmentalist, he has come to Twin Peaks to help her father block the Ghostwood Estates project. John and Audrey quickly fall in love and Audrey believes she has found the love of her life. When he must suddenly leave and does not know when he will be able to return, Audrey commands Pete Martel to drive her to the airstrip to stop him. Standing on the runway next to his private plane she tells him, “I’m a virgin,” and with a facial expression that tells us he would be a fool to resist her offer, he ushers her onto the plane. Later, Audrey and Pete stand by the side of the runway and watch as the plane takes off into the sunset, while Pete comforts Audrey. Audrey’s desperate offer of her virginity reinforces romance ideology in that she is in effect asking John to claim her by giving herself bodily to him. This is a narrow definition of self, but within the fairy tale context, her beauty and sexuality are her most important attributes and all she feels that she has to offer. John accepts her offer and promises that he will return someday to claim her, and Audrey is rewarded for maintaining her virginity and waiting for her prince, as well as recognizing him and offering her carefully-maintained virginity to the right man.

Audrey’s characterizations first as a pornographic figure and then as a fairy tale princess serve to maximize her usefulness in keeping an audience’s interest. She offers sexual titillation in terms of her flirtatiousness and the threat of violence her
flirtatiousness foreshadows, as well as offering a romantic melodramatic storyline as a traditional romantic heroine. However, these roles can also be problematized in that Audrey’s provocative, pornographic behavior can be read as resistance to the “good girl” role while the fairy tale princess role is undermined when Audrey’s personal stakes are made visible.

The double-standard of sexuality to which women have been held is that “good girls don’t.” With its 1950s-era atmosphere, *Twin Peaks* clearly conveys this sentiment, especially in regard to Audrey. There is no sense in the text that a feminist movement ever existed to move the heterosexual political economy beyond the notion that the primary goal of women is to find men who will fulfill all of our needs, and that in order to be appealing to these men, we must be both beautiful and virtuous. The men in Audrey’s life try to keep her in this place, but she shows resistance to their warnings, which complicates a simple reading of Audrey as a manipulative sexual tease. Her overtly flirtatious and mischievous behavior might also be read as resistance to the good girl role and as her way of seeking to fulfill her desire for worldly knowledge.

In episode one, after Audrey has mischievously run off a group of potential investors in her father Ben’s Ghostwood Estates development project, Ben threatens to put her to work “scrubbing bidets in a Bulgarian convent.” Her response is defiant; she turns her back to him and folds her arms across her chest, saying sarcastically, “Oh, Daddy, I’m so scared.” In episode four, referring to a note Audrey has written to him, Agent Cooper warns, “Audrey, that rightward slant in your handwriting
indicates a romantic nature, a heart that yearns. Be careful.” This warning speaks to the importance of avoiding the dangers of the wider world Audrey longs to experience. Within the context of the flirtation between Cooper and Audrey and the content of her note—Audrey’s hint to Cooper to investigate One-Eyed Jack’s—the warning seems specifically to allude to sexual danger, to a loss of innocence that, according to the sexual double standard, could “ruin” Audrey. Nevertheless, Audrey continues with her plan to go undercover at One-Eyed Jack’s. These scenes demonstrate the desire for masculine control of women as if for our own good. Twin Peaks posits an ideology that predates second wave feminism. In it, a feminine sexuality is seen as unruly and a danger to women’s innocence. A good woman is meant to satisfy her desires only within the confines of the institution of marriage, and she must be carefully managed so as not to damage her chances of finding the right man. Audrey resists being placed in this narrow role of the good girl because it does not offer her the worldly experiences she longs for. She is particularly defiant toward her father and pursues her own desires with little regard for the opinions of others.

Though she seeks to fulfill her desires largely through manipulation based on her “feminine wiles,” in doing so she is confident, demanding, creative, self-assured, and gets the better of men who would try to control her. Audrey shows daring and creativity in infiltrating One-Eyed Jack’s. In order to do so, she must first investigate the connection between Horne’s Department Store and the brothel. After Audrey learns that Laura and Ronnette, who were attacked the same night, both worked at the
perfume counter of Horne’s Department Store, she feigns interest in the family business. She tells her father that she wants to learn the business from the bottom up and would like to start working at the department store, though her real goal is to covertly investigate what may be going on at the perfume counter. Next, she forces the department store manager, Emory Battis, a condescending and unpleasant man who recruits women from the perfume counter to work at One-Eyed Jack’s, to put her to work at the perfume counter rather than the wrapping department by saying to him, “If you don’t, I’ll rip my dress in half, scream at the top of my lungs, and tell my daddy you made a pass at me.” Though this feeds the stereotype that women invent stories of sexual harassment and assault (as well as frighteningly defining a pass as having one’s dress ripped in half) she delivers the line with such attitude and style, sitting on his desk, adjusting his tie for him, and forcing him to call her “Ms. Horne” as he looks up at her from his desk chair, that the scene is both humorous and celebratory. Though he has been positioned as the authority figure in terms of age, sex, and position as manager, Audrey gets the better of him. Later, she sneaks into his office, reads his “little black book,” smokes his cigarettes, and hides in the closet of his office to eavesdrop as he explains to a new recruit how to get in touch with Blackie.

Once inside One-Eyed Jack’s, she comes into the room in which Emory is participating in a weird sexual ritual in which he is blindfolded, tied-up, and having his toe nails painted while a prostitute runs the vacuum cleaner. Audrey gestures for her to leave, then removes his blindfold, laughs in his face, and forces him to tell her
who the owner of the brothel is by threatening to strangle him with the very ropes with which he is tied up. Again, it is satisfying to see Audrey turn the tables on a man who routinely takes advantage of women for his own gain, and her bold style and self-confidence as she does so are a pleasure to watch. She is supremely self-assured and manages to control very precarious situations in which she is at a disadvantage.

Though Audrey resists being controlled by men, which can be seen within a larger context as resistance to patriarchy, she is not successful in the long run, and her tactics are limited. But Audrey’s use of her sexuality and beauty is explained in part by the fact that she does not seem to understand that she has any other tools to help her achieve her goals. For example, when she meets Denise Bryson, a transvestite F.B. I. agent, she mistakes him for a woman and asks with astonishment, “They have women agents?” That Audrey views her womanhood as so limited creates sympathy and understanding for her chosen tactic of sexual manipulation. This lack of knowledge can even be read as feminist in that it highlights the reality that women are taught that our most important attributes and primary means of success are beauty and sexual appeal to men. But neither the mode of Audrey’s resistance, nor the resistance itself, is ultimately productive. Her defiance often seems more childish than assertive, and her self-confidence is revealed as bravado at One-Eyed Jack’s when she realizes she’s in over her head and prays that Cooper will rescue her. Audrey does not, in the end, escape the good girl role, but chastened, comes to embrace it. Rather than continue to strike out on her own, she aligns herself with her father’s
goals and moves into the role of dutiful daughter. Through this, Audrey’s transformation from adventurous thrill-seeker to dependent romantic heroine is made complete.

However, Audrey does not fully conform to the fairy tale princess role because she does not completely leave behind her mischievous ways. She still spies on her father, flirts when she feels it will serve her needs, and retains a sense of her own self-assurance and confidence. Her role of fairy tale princess in which her allegiance has shifted from satisfying her own desires to helping her father achieve his agenda is sometimes undermined in ways that speak to Audrey’s surviving autonomy and personal motivations. Bobby Briggs, a fellow high school student, has become her father’s new lackey and thug. Audrey spies on them as they meet in Ben’s office discussing the photographs of people Ben asked Bobby to spy on. Though she doesn’t know the subject of the photos, she follows her instincts and curiosity and steals them to show to Agent Cooper. The photos are evidence that Cooper has been framed in a drug operation and the DEA investigation against him comes to an end. Audrey is satisfied that she and Cooper are “even,” having now saved each other’s lives, and sees herself on more equal footing with him.

When Ben falls into the delusion that he is a southern general and begins to re-enact the Civil War in his office at the hotel, Audrey’s motivation for her interest in the family business is revealed as interest in her own financial future more so than strict family loyalty. She leads the way in getting help for Ben, telling Bobby that he must do what she says to help Ben or risk being left with “a handful of nothing.”
Similarly, when Jerry, her uncle, suggests that they leave Ben in his delusional state so that Jerry can pursue his own business interests, Audrey informs him that she has looked at Ben’s will and that she, not Jerry, will inherit the business. Knowing that she is not ready to run the business by herself, she convinces Jerry to follow her plan to help Ben recover so as not to jeopardize her financial future. Her father is framed as a means to an end.

Despite these fissures in the dutiful daughter role, in the end, her subservience to her father’s desires results in her death. Audrey has discovered that the Twin Peaks Savings and Loan is financing the Ghostwood Estates development plan. In the final episode, to publicize the bank’s role in what her father has constructed as an environmental issue, she chains herself to the bank vault gates. When a bomb in one of the deposit boxes goes off, she is killed, and Audrey dies in the service of her father’s agenda. This can be read in competing ways in regard to dominant ideology. On the surface, this narrative underpins the notion that a woman’s role within the patriarchal family is one of virtuous self-sacrifice. Audrey dies as a martyr in the service of a good cause; she has finally become a responsible and selfless young woman who has earned her father’s love and respect. However, because we know the cause for which she died is not truly noble, but rather a contrived and absurd issue based on revenge and greed, her death can be read as a sympathetic comment on the dutiful daughter trope. The shot immediately following the explosion is an exterior of the bank with dollar bills fluttering down to the street. In this way, the text highlights
her father’s love of money and Audrey’s death can be read as a symbol of the corruption inherent in patriarchy.

Throughout the series, Audrey both conforms to norms of femininity and challenges them. The series’ use of her as both a pornographic figure and a traditional romantic heroine speaks to the ways in which multiple femininities are constructed to serve patriarchal ideology. The barely legal figure serves as an excuse for sexual violence against women, while the fairy tale princess role reinforces the idea that a good woman serves the needs of her family before her own. Nevertheless, cracks exist in these roles which demonstrate their restrictive nature. The pornographic role, in addition to masking the nature of sexual violence, can also be read as Audrey’s method of resistance to being boxed in as a good girl, while the fairy tale princess role seems at times to be a rather thin persona she voluntarily puts on in order to advance her own agenda. Arguably, the text positions Audrey in these normative roles to provide sexual titillation and to capitalize on traditional narratives of femininity, but it also contains gaps in its presentation which lead to a sympathetic view of these roles and simultaneously draws attention to their constructedness.
Conclusion

Though *Twin Peaks* reflects patriarchal ideology in that its female characters are by and large helpless victims, Audrey Horne problematizes a characterization of the series as irredeemably sexist. A feminist viewer may find in Audrey a challenge to constructed femininities in that Audrey does not fit neatly into them. Though she is positioned by the text as a sexual spectacle and in such stereotypical feminine roles as the sexual tease and the fairy tale princess, there are cracks in both configurations which expose the constructedness of these roles and demonstrate resistance.

Audrey is often situated as the object of the male gaze, yet as a spectator within the text herself and as a symbol of human curiosity, she breaks free from objectification and operates as a subject, a maker of meaning. As a pornographic figure, her sexuality is utilitarian, yet this role can also be read as her resistance to the confinements of the good girl. When she is fairy tale princess, we see through the façade flashes of her true motives to control her own future. The text uses Audrey in as many ways as possible to capture interest from an audience, positioning her via typically feminine narrative conventions, yet she does not conform completely to these conventions. This offers pleasure for a feminist viewer in that constructed femininities are exposed and resisted.
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