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TWIN PEAKS: FIRE WALK WITH ME (2018) BY LINDSAY HALLAM

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Hallam, Lindsay. *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me (Devil's Advocates)*. Auteur Publishing, 2018. 120pp.

Lindsay Hallam's *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (2018) appears at a moment of increasing literary and academic interest in the *Twin Peaks* world. Franck Boulègue's *Twin Peaks: Unwrapping the Plastic* (2017); David Bushman and Arthur Smith's *Twin Peaks FAQ* (2016); and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock and Catherine Spooner's edited collection *Return to Twin Peaks: New Approaches to Materiality, Theory, and Genre on Television* (2016) have provided fresh insight and approaches to the world of damn fine coffee and ontologically uncertain owls. Accompanying this has been a resurgence of theoretical interest in the Horror genre, including Xavier Aldana Reyes's *Horror Film and Affect: Towards a Corporeal Model of Viewership* (2016), suggesting renewed approaches to works of genre cinema. Applying such approaches is the aim of the *Devil's Advocates* series, published by Auteur Publishing. Previous efforts include *The Blair Witch Project* (2017) by Peter Turner, *Don't Look Now* (2017) by Jessica Gildersleeve, and *Macbeth* (2017) by Rebekah Owens. Critically-minded without descending inescapably into the mountains of theory, the "fresh perspectives" of the series have been praised by Christian Fowler who also suggests the series "will perfectly complement the BFI archive volumes" (Hallam, 1). Hallam combines, analyses, and extends academic and journalistic commentary in their examination of David Lynch's *Fire Walk With Me* (1992), utilising modern theoretical tools which have developed or come-into-being since the film's release, particularly affect theory, employing these on "the ways in which human bodies are affected by those on the screen on three levels: representationally, emotionally and somatically" (Abstract).

Hallam begins by noting the initial negative reaction to the release of David Lynch's *Fire Walk With Me* (henceforth abbreviated to *FWWM*) and recent reassessments, driven in part by the attention given to the 2017 television series *Twin Peaks: The Return* which continues the story of Laura Palmer and the town of Twin Peaks. This can be seen as part of a wider reassessment of Lynch's oeuvre, including *Lost Highways* (1997) and *Blue Velvet* (1986). Twenty-fifth anniversary screenings of *FWWM* occurred in 2017 and "highly respected distribution label Criterion" released a "Director approved special edition" version of the film positioning *FWWM* "amongst other cinema classics" (112). Yet, upon release, critics accused Lynch of cashing-in on his creation, reusing his old tropes and techniques uncritically, or, more seriously, creating a spectacle of violence or sexual voyeurism, wrapped in a puritanical concept of victimhood. Lynch stated that "I was in love with the character of Laura Palmer and her contradictions" whilst creating a film centred on her suffering (11). Other criticisms focused on how *Twin Peaks* was portrayed as "a nightmare space controlled by oppressive

and abusive patriarchal structures" (23). The non-involvement of the television series' co-writer David Frost, the choice to focus on prequel material, and various production and actor-related occurrences also contributed to hostile reviews (14). Moreover, the way *FVWM* provoked "strong reactions" and shifted towards pure horror undoubtedly affected viewership. Hallam claims that assessments of the film have changed over time and that *FVWM* has become "an integral part of the *Twin Peaks* universe," although the film could still productively be viewed as an unsuccessful experiment (15). Keith Phipps, writing for AV Club in 2008, for example, still found it "pointless at best and sadistic at worst" (n.p.). Hallam, though, argues that "to follow Laura Palmer you must confront the true horror of her existence" (7). To this end, foregrounding emotion, feeling, and lived experience, Hallam's book is structured around different ways to view the film, including, as 1) a Horror film; 2) a film about trauma; 3) a David Lynch film; and 4) a film in a wider cinematic context. In this review I consider the first two perspectives since they constitute the most thought-provoking and consistently original sections of Hallam's work.

At the heart of the book is a rigorous consideration of *FVWM* as a Horror movie. Whilst the film's mythological elements such as the White Lodge and Owl Cave rings suggest a film where "there is a lot going on," Hallam starts with a straightforward move by viewing the film as a Horror movie (20). As Hallam states, *FVWM* was not intended to extend the television series "but to delve deeper into the mysteries surrounding Laura's death and the connection to a supernatural realm that lies just below the surface reality of the quaint American small town" (11). The central thesis of the book emerges here as the idea that "Laura is in fact the strongest of them all" (21). This optimistic interpretation is reinforced - perhaps it is only possible at all - by reference to *Twin Peaks: The Return* which has recontextualised all preceding narrative. In the new series, several scenes from *FVWM* play out differently, including Laura Palmer's last moments. Agent Cooper prevents Laura's murder, only for "negative forces" to take her back and the timeline to be restored (117). Cooper then finds Laura's tulpa or doppelgänger, returning her to Twin Peaks. Laura's piercing scream ends the series. Hallam suggests that, rather than a traumatic wound being reopened by her coming home, Laura's "scream is her realisation of her true identity, but also the realisation of her role as 'the one' to defeat [Evil]" (119). This interpretation is contested but is logically and engagingly argued.

Hallam's book works best where it considers the mechanics of the film, particularly in sections discussing how *FVWM* incorporates "elements associated with the horror genre in order to emphasise how Laura's experience of life in Twin Peaks has become a living hell" (27). These elements include use of the supernatural and the use of sound, as Laura's trauma manifests in the everyday experience (27). These can be thought of in terms of affect theory, defined here, according to Xavier Aldana Reyes, as "not just somatic responses, or 'body responses', but also emotions and moods" (29). The use of objects by Lynch to convey meaning is viewed in this same light. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock writes how things in Twin Peaks become "saturated with affect," and, as Hallam continues, "animate by being out of place, seemingly possessed or of threatening portent" (49). Items such as a roof fan, for example, are associated with Laura and her abuser Bob. It is one of Lynch's principal successes that he can convey such moods, often inaccessible to those not experiencing them, in this manner. The affective energy of the objects is frequently amplified by

sound and other cinematic techniques, as well as originating from sound itself. In one of the most interesting passages in the book, the importance of sound in Lynch's work is emphasised, either created by objects such as vehicles or through the musical score, which "is essential in creating mood, elevating tension and creating fear" (55). Think of Laura listening and crying to Julee Cruise's song at the Roadhouse, for example, conveying her emotions without words. Other scenes highlighted in this regard include the overwhelming noise of the cross-border party in Canada where Laura and Donna briefly escape and the grimly comedic use of subtitles onscreen to comprehend their speech. In another case, noisy vehicles, people, and animals represent "Laura's sadness, while also highlighting her attempts to drown out her feelings and deny her abuser's true identity" (55). In each instance, noise acts as what Michael Goddard, following Michel Serres, calls "an uninvited parasitic third party, the uneliminable noise operative in any communication channel" (n.p.). For Serres, a parasite, in the French language, contains three meanings, "a biological parasite, a social parasite, and static" (Translator's Preface, *The Parasite* i). The parasitic stranger is the stranger entering, it is the hum of a fan suggesting disturbance, it is musical background noise or a car's loud engine suddenly becoming overwhelming, representing an underlying tension and suppressed knowledge. Hallam is right to state that "For Lynch, the sound is of equal importance to the image" (58). The two are intertwined in their conveying of his message.

After considering *FVWM* as a Horror film, Hallam turns to the concept of a "trauma film," following Janet Walker, identifying the home as a central site in the film where this interpretation can most clearly be seen, remarking on a scene in particular where dinner is being eaten in the Palmer household. Leland appears as a controlling, abusive father, demanding Laura clean her hands before eating and driving her to tears. Such "a clear view of the dysfunctional situation in the Palmer home ... was never provided in the [television] series. To other residents of Twin Peaks, the Palmers are a model family, pillars of the community" (75). The use of the home "as a site of horror is a common genre trope" (75). *Insidious* (2010); *Rosemary's Baby* (1968); and *Poltergeist* (1982), for example, show the home invaded. Another genre trope employed by Lynch is the possession of a father figure "by malevolent forces, taking the figure of patriarchal authority to a violent extreme" (75). Yet, Hallam argues compellingly that *FVWM* resists a straightforward Oedipal narrative, not revealing unseen desire but exposing violence in a normally peaceful space. Instead, "the ultimate horror" is "not in some fantastical or outwardly Gothic ominous setting, but in a middle-class home" (76). This is at the heart of what makes *FVWM* an example of trauma cinema. Turning again to the mechanics of film-making, one particular feature of such cinema is the use of audio-visual techniques to distort reality, as an expression of trauma, rather than necessarily conveying realistic events. This, as mentioned above, can be seen in the scene where Leland picks up Laura and drives home. A van drives erratically behind the, sound grows from horns, engines, and a dog. Referring to her abuser, Mike, an other-worldly entity, shouts to Laura "It's your father!" Leland speeds away as Laura covers her ears in denial (77-78). This, as Hallam, astutely notes, is the "traumatic paradox," or "the tendency for trauma to be expressed, or remembered, not as it exactly occurred, but in symbolic or fantastical terms, or for significant elements of the trauma to be forgotten completely" (79). Lynch's "abstract, oblique, fragmented and bewildering" approach compliments his narrative intent (80).

Hallam concludes by restating the aim of the book is to “not only celebrate a film that was once unfairly maligned ... but in particular to celebrate Laura Palmer, who evolved from an image personifying the ‘beautiful dead girl’ ... to a character who is complex and flawed, yet powerful and strong, who never submits to the evil surrounding her” (121). Cherry pie, surrealist cinematics, and twisting narrative threads can often obscure this. As Hallam states, Lynch’s tale is one of despair, trauma, and the fragmentation of identity (121). It is a Horror story. With this in mind, Hallam’s *Fire Walk With Me* summarises a number of approaches to the film and to Horror cinema more generally. It employs modern theoretical approaches, notably affect theory, but remains resolutely attached to the story. Its weaving of contextual references to cinema help ground *FWM* within wider conventions of genre and film, as well as highlighting its divergence from these traditions. The consideration of different elements of the film, particularly sound and colour, is carried out thoughtfully. Re-watching the film with these small details being noted, one feels a greater sense of immersion and understanding regarding the way the film is constructed. This book is a worthy addition to Twin Peaks literature and a useful guide to a challenging work of cinema.

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BIONOTE

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