

# “Something Very, Very Strange in These Old Woods”

## Wilderness and Otherness in *Twin Peaks*

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The work of American filmmaker and artist David Lynch has always invited a broad spectrum of interpretations and readings, yet leaving his viewers often alone in their striving for conclusion. Lynch’s statement “I never interpret my art. I let the audience do it” (qtd. in Sheen and Davison 3) seems like an invitation to do just that – finding one’s own interpretative key in a pool of seemingly infinite possible explanations. The series *Twin Peaks*, which was first broadcast over two seasons in 1990 and 1991 before its revival in 2017, is often subject to scrutiny by its audience and scholars as well. Due to its abstractness and unconventionality – both in plot and cinematography – many of its viewers continue to elaborate on different aspects. Two of these aspects are the tropes of Otherness and wilderness that the creators evidently made use of; however, they have received very little scholarly attention so far. Therefore, this essay explores the world of *Twin Peaks* by focusing on the two tropes, which I argue play a central role in the TV show.

Despite its homicide plot, *Twin Peaks* does not necessarily revolve around the mysterious killing of high school girl and prom queen Laura Palmer and the question of who murdered her. The TV show rather explores how the natural environment and the Native American past come into play to explain the supernatural occurrences in the eponymous town of Twin Peaks. The protagonist, FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper, in search of Laura’s murderer inevitably learns that there is more to the remote Twin Peaks than meets the eye. As the fictional town is located on former Nez Perce territory, the series makes use of Native American iconography and mythology. Evidence for this can be found, for instance, in the Native American iconography of one of the series’ frequently used

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is a shortened version of Viktoria Graf’s BA thesis which was supervised by Dr Elena Furlanetto. The author would like to thank Dr Elena Furlanetto and Prof Dr Josef Raab for their constructive criticism in revising this paper.

locations, the Great Northern Hotel, or the frequent references to a supernatural presence in the woods by Nez Perce Twin Peaks deputy chief Hawk. Furthermore, the significance of the mystery in the woods – the wilderness – and the influence of indigeneity and otherworldly elements – the Otherness – is expanded in co-creator Mark Frost's epistolary novel *The Secret History of Twin Peaks* (2016), published 25 years after the show's cancellation in 1991.

I argue that the unintelligibility of *Twin Peaks* derives from the show's fascination with fears of wilderness and Otherness. The fictional characters seek an explanation for the uncanny occurrences in the town, as fear and inquisitiveness often go hand in hand. In order to explore my thesis, this essay examines elements of the mythologized frontier in the TV show and Twin Peak's past as a logging town. Furthermore, I analyze the importance of Native American symbolism to the plot, albeit often used problematically, and elements reminiscent of Lovecraftian fiction to portray a supernatural form of Otherness in *Twin Peaks*.

## WILDERNESS AND OTHERNESS IN AMERICAN MYTHOLOGY

Giles Gunn argues that “American writers and thinkers have been obsessed [...] with what might be termed the problem of otherness, the problem of coping with forms of existence assumed to be alien to one’s own” (193). Gunn submits the potential ethical and religious problems of imagining an “Other” based on one’s own subjective perception, which is often reproduced in writing. He refers to “Nature,” an essay written by American poet and leader of the transcendentalist movement Ralph Waldo Emerson, which distinguishes between the “Me” and the “not-Me” (see 196). Most prominently, the Puritan settlers established a connection between the concepts of Otherness and wilderness when they felt confronted with an unknown territory, the “not-Me”. Eventually, however, the wilderness transformed their perception of themselves “as transplanted Europeans” (201) – their sense of “Me” (see 198).

The concept of wilderness cannot be found exclusively in an American context. Explorers and settlers from Europe were familiar with wilderness long before they set foot on the American continent. Vast parts of Europe were still unexplored during the Middle Ages, which already deeply implemented

wilderness as a concept in the Western imagination. Especially the dark and mysterious forest became a popular trope in European folklore, recurrently used as an imaginable setting inhabited by demons and spirits (see Nash 8). It was perceived as something alien; an “insecure and uncomfortable environment against which civilization had waged an unceasing struggle” (8).

It may safely be said that the first American settlers’ negative attitude toward the wilderness was profoundly influenced by the aforementioned mindset. The American pioneer had to fend for food, shelter, and a presumed “danger of succumbing to the wildness of his surroundings and reverting to savagery himself” (Nash 24). The settler’s fear of the wild and the unknown becomes apparent when looking at Puritan writings from the early New England Settlements of the seventeenth century. The Puritans’ imagination was filled with “wonders of the invisible world” (Bergland 27), as described by New England Puritan minister Cotton Mather in his eponymous 1693 book. Claiming to have had uncanny apparitions of shadowy figures and beasts, but also “manifestations of the great,” the Puritans believed that they battled a physical and metaphysical war “between Satan and God” (27).

## FRONTIER MYTH AND THE VANISHING INDIAN

It comes as no surprise that the frontier myth, too, ties in with the concepts of wilderness and Otherness. The frontier is a self-perpetuating narrative in American history and has attained mythical status that dramatizes the society’s ideology and morality (see Slotkin 5). Its ideological task was to justify the founding of the American colonies for the sake of progress and modernization and is based on the premise of the impossibility of the coexistence of Natives and settlers (see 10-12).

More important than the origin of the frontier myth, however, is its end which greatly influenced its mythologizing. Mostly used to describe the advancement of European settlement and the formation of a U.S. American identity in the early period of American history, Frederick Jackson Turner declared the closure of the frontier in 1890 as the West had been settled by then in his view. At the same time, the East experienced monumental unanticipated and complex changes – “organized crime and abuse of political power, recreation

and sports, overtime and child welfare laws, women's rights and minimum wages, violent racism, severe poverty, and vast wealth" (Stoeltje 241). The frontier became a nostalgic trope, as white American authors began to portray a nostalgic yearning for that period. People started to feel a "longing for a beauty, integrity, and purity that was lost in the misty past" (Stoeltje 242). Seemingly forgotten were the atrocities of the extermination of the Native Americans, as the increasingly romanticized and idealized frontier period found its way into literature and art.

The vanishing Indian trope became the predominant representation of Native Americans. Once portrayed as the "noble savage," an ideal often associated with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, American authors began to make use of Rousseau's picture of the natural person free from the guilt of civilization's failings, as early as the 1800s, even before the presumed closing of the frontier (see Dippie 18-19). Extinction was considered to be the Natives' inevitable fate and manifested itself the idea of the vanishing Indian, doomed to succumb to the advancement of "civilization" over "wilderness" (see 20-21). Whether "savage" or "noble red man," Anglo-American fictional and non-fictional literature locates Native Americans somewhere on the spectrum of these two stereotypical categories. Later, these stereotypes found their way into other media, most prominently the Hollywood Western which popularized stereotypical and often racist filmic depictions of Native Americans (see Benshoff and Griffin 110). Yet, other genres such as the horror film also make use of Native American elements by employing, for example, the motif of indigenous haunting. The trope of the cursed, spectral woods or Native American burial grounds are indebted to the Puritans' belief that Indigenous people are "demonic presences inhabiting the howling wilderness" (Boyd and Thrush viii). Colleen Boyd and Coll Thrush argue that the Native ghost trope "perform[s] a wide range of cultural and political work" (ix), playing with the moral anxiety of Anglo-Americans regarding the displacement of the Native Americans in the past by drawing from indigenous beliefs in supernatural powers (see ix).

The myths of the frontier and the vanishing Indian seem to epitomize the constant conflict, literally and emotionally, between a (specific) American Self and its (presumed) Other. Native Americans continue to be a vehicle for a variety of such sentiments in the Anglo-American mindset. *Twin Peaks*, too, makes use of a frontier nostalgia in its depiction of space, its use of cinematography, and the adaption of indigenous elements in its narrative.

## LOVECRAFT COUNTRY: THE ISOLATED SMALL TOWN WITH A DARK SECRET

In American fiction, the tropes of wilderness and Otherness are not only embodied by the Native American and the frontier but also by more surreal beings, another kind of ‘Other.’ These beings oftentimes hail from unknown and dangerous realms comparable to an other-worldly kind of wilderness. Albeit a fairly recent phenomenon, celestial beings or creatures from other dimensions have continuously been finding their way into print and visual media (see Sturma 318-320).

The fiction of American author Howard Phillips Lovecraft is considered to be of great importance in regard to the representation of “entities, things and places that [lie] ‘beyond’” (Kneale 106). His inclination to set his narratives in fictional small towns exhibiting uncanny elements which evoke some sort of strangeness (see 112) – something from beyond – appears familiar when looking at more modern day narratives (see Lagan 538-539). Novels such as *Needful Things* (1991) by Stephen King (see 538), but also popular television series like *Stranger Things* (2016) and *Twin Peaks* feature an American small town with a dark, otherworldly secret which lends itself to induce a fear of the “lost corners of relatively familiar places” (Kneale 112).

Lovecraft’s stories are most of the time set in real and fictional locations in New England, which are referred to as “Lovecraft Country” (see Alban). Imaginary towns like ‘Arkham’ and ‘Dunwich’ are initially “realistically described” but “become uncanny as Lovecraft introduces elements ‘from beyond’” (Kneale 112). A metaphorical threshold between the realistic world and another dimension is a prevalent theme in Lovecraft’s fiction (see 113). James Kneale gives the example of Lovecraft’s short story “From Beyond” (1934), in which the narrator comes to the “shocking realization that ‘strange, inaccessible worlds exist at our very elbows’, not just alongside but *within* our own” (emphasis in original, Kneale 113). This quote also aptly captures the other-dimensional atmosphere of *Twin Peaks*.

Lovecraft is also known for his racist beliefs and fear of miscegenation. His racism is also mirrored in his fiction, as he often uses themes like hybridity and cross-species inbreeding. The unearthly creatures in Lovecraft’s works are usually humanoids showing different degrees of human and inhuman features, such as the

'Deep Ones' in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (1931) (see Kneale 114-115). John Lagan argues that narratives of small-town horror, as often exhibited Lovecraft's works, "harbor the past, preserve tradition, resist change" (Lagan 546) and are often lined with xenophobia and paranoia (see 546).

Otherness in Lovecraft's fiction, then, is represented by extradimensional worlds threatening the otherwise familiar small town and thereby draw allegory from older Puritan tropes of wilderness. Otherness is embodied by uncanny, oftentimes otherworldly creatures that are, again, based on xenophobic ideas.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WILDERNESS AND OTHERNESS IN *TWIN PEAKS*

"There's a sort of evil out there. Something very, very strange in these old woods. Call it what you want. A darkness, a presence. It takes many forms but ... it's been out there for as long as anyone can remember and we've always been here to fight it," (Frost and Lynch 1.3) says Twin Peaks Sheriff Harry S. Truman relatively early in the series. In the scene, Truman, Deputy Chief Hawk, and the owner of the town's local gas station, Big Ed Hurley, are briefing FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper on the mystery that revolves around the town of Twin Peaks. The show juxtaposes this threatening and uncanny side of Twin Peaks with the homely pleasantries of small town life as the men talk about murder over a cup of coffee and a slice of Huckleberry Pie in the coziness of the Double R Diner. I argue that the Sheriff's sentiment epitomizes the significance of the concepts of wilderness and Otherness in *Twin Peaks* and is crucial to the unintelligibility of the TV show. Even though Truman's explanation remains intangible, the viewer learns that "Twin Peaks is different" (1.3).

Lynch and Frost made use of a variety of American cultural myths: "civilization and savagery, [...] village and wilderness," and, more blatantly, "good and evil" (see Carroll 293). The following pages will analyze a selection of elements – characters, locations, and aesthetic choices – that reveal the series' concern with this duality and the fear of wilderness and Otherness.

## “SO MANY TREES”

When David Lynch was asked about space in *Twin Peaks*, he envisioned it as “a place surrounded by woods. That’s important. For as long as anybody can remember, woods have been mysterious places. So they were a character in my mind [...] There are things about the Northwest that are unique” (Lynch, *Lynch on Lynch* 162). Looking at the choice of locations and sets in the series, it is evident that he kept his word. The fictional American small town of Twin Peaks is located at the edge of the woods, far away from big cities in the rural areas of Washington State – or, as explained by Agent Cooper: “Five miles south of the Canadian border, twelve miles west of the state line. Never seen so many trees in my life” (Frost and Lynch 1.1).

Unlike most other TV shows at that time that radiated a “soundstage anonymity” (Lim 86),<sup>2</sup> *Twin Peaks* creates a strong sense of space in establishing recognizable iconic locations, such as the Great Northern Hotel, the Double R Diner, or the Twin Peaks Sheriff Station as well as landscapes like the rustling foliage of Ghostwood Forest in a transition scene or cascading waterfalls in the title sequence (see 86). However, “civilization” and nature seem to coexist unsettlingly in the imaginary space of *Twin Peaks* (see Joseph 76). Based on its design and function, each location appears to contribute differently to the narrative and mood of the series and contains its own secret.

## A FRONTIER TOWN

At first glance, *Twin Peaks* appears to be an average American small town in the Northwest; a spot of human life surrounded by nature, embodying the archetype of a sylvan village. In his essay “Picturing America” (2006), Greil Marcus stresses the importance of *Twin Peaks* being set in the West because as “a place at the far end of the American march, it remains less fixed, less settled than the places left behind” (30). This description alludes to the westward expansion of European settlers and places *Twin Peaks* within the frontier myth.

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2 Lim indicates a loss of authenticity regarding space when shooting on the soundstage of a studio as opposed to filming at actual locations.

Twin Peaks can be described as an emblematic Western logging town, as the lumber industry is indispensable to its economy. Two autochthonous families, the Packards and the Hornes, seem to be profiting most from the commercialization of the Ghostwood Forest. In his novel *The Secret History of Twin Peaks*, Mark Frost provides additional information about the origin of the town. The character of Robert Jacoby, editor of the fictional newspaper *Twin Peaks Gazette*, elaborates on the founding of Twin Peaks. He states that

James Packard arrived first [...] Inspired by a vision, [he] traveled west and, moved by its natural beauty and untouched trees, laid claim to ten thousand acres around White Tail Falls in 1890. Once the railroad built a spur line from Spokane to connect Packard's mill to the Northern Pacific, the Packard Timber Company became the economic engine for the town that sprang up around his burgeoning business: the Town of Twin Peaks. (Frost 157)

This section refers repeatedly to the frontier myth and westward expansion, as James Packard “traveled west” to find his fortune in an “untouched, natural beauty.” The allusion to the building of the railroad adds to the understanding that Twin Peaks was settled on the principles of Manifest Destiny by cutting down the forest for financial profit (see Lowry 102).

Orville Horne, member of the second important founding family, “arrived in 1905 and opened a well-financed general store and dry goods business [...] [which] grew into a three-story anchor of the business district known as Horne’s Department Store” (Frost 159). The success of Orville’s business and legacy lives on in his grandson Benjamin Horne, owner of the Great Northern Hotel and arch-capitalist of the town (see Zontos 117). In the series, Ben Horne tries to expand his wealth mainly at the expense of the natural environment as he negotiates with a group of Icelandic investors to build a country club on the location of the Ghostwood Forest. His hotel “with its pinewood panels and its taxidermied animal heads, emblematises the belief that nature exists for man’s use alone” (Lowry 102). The show portrays him as a despicable character whose behavior results in ecological dilapidation (see 102).

Another aspect linking *Twin Peaks* to the frontier myth is its nostalgic quality. Even though the series’ narrative takes place in 1989, plenty of its cultural iconography borrow from a 1950s America, such as the jukebox in the Double R Diner or characters’ outfits, most explicitly Audrey Horne in her plaid skirts and

saddle shoes (see Lowry 101). Other iconography dates back even further, even to the nineteenth century, exhibiting a more explicit reference to the town’s frontier past. The interior of the Great Northern Hotel, for example, is plastered with murals reminiscent of the Suquamish Tribe’s painting style (see Spooner 108). Oftentimes, the town’s portrayal seems to suggest a simple and carefree life close to the beauty of nature.

With its aesthetics and musical score, *Twin Peaks* creates a nostalgic atmosphere, which already becomes apparent in the title sequence. Angelo Badalamenti’s iconic melancholic “Twin Peaks Theme” of deep and slow bass tones and a montage including some key locations and images introduce the viewer to the town of Twin Peaks. The title sequence includes a little bird sitting on a branch, the Packard Sawmill’s smoking chimneys in the sunset light, close ups of the lumber mill’s blades being repetitiously sharpened by sparking grinding machines, the “Welcome to Twin Peaks, Population 51,201” sign next to the main road leading into town, and a shot of the scenic White Tails falls, which fades into a tracking shot capturing the maroon colored surface of a river slowly bickering along. Each shot is connected by soft dissolves and tinted in natural green and brown earth colors. The opening credits convey a distinct mood for the locality of Twin Peaks (see Fischer 164-165): they evoke a feeling of familiarity but, in accordance to the prevalent dualism in the series, also create an eerie, almost delusive atmosphere, suggesting it is more illusion than reality. Oftentimes, the diegesis and design of the series seem theatrical and fake, which alludes to Sheriff Truman’s statement that Twin Peaks is “different,”<sup>3</sup> housing something that is ‘Other’.

The portrayal of space in *Twin Peaks* draws from popular images of small frontier towns. Its aesthetics amplify a sense of nostalgia often connected to the myth which is, for instance, realized in the series’ opening titles’ music and cinematography. However, the surrounding forest is far from being just an object of (frontier-style) exploitation but actively contributes to the narrative by harboring a mystery and yet holding answers to the unintelligible happenings in *Twin Peaks*.

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3 The performance of the actors further exemplifies the point: in one scene, actors were required to act “convincingly” (Lacey 127) while in the next their behavior becomes exaggeratedly melodramatic creating a comic effect (see 127-128).

## THE MYSTERY UNDER THE DOUGLAS FIRS

The woods surrounding the town can be seen as “the stage, the place of the weird” (Joseph 79). Several aspects refer to the wilderness’ core value to the series’ narrative and development of events, as the forest holds a ubiquitous presence in almost every narrative strand. Even when a shot captures the Great Northern Hotel or the sheriff’s station, the forest and the mountains appear in the background of the picture, dwarfing these small islands of inhabited areas with their majesty.

However, the forest also functions as a place of action rather than just a prop. The Ghostwood as a setting is connected to the creation, presentation, and revelation of the mysteries haunting Twin Peaks. Eventually, the forest serves as another character (see Shimabukuro 122-124). In the first season, the mystery sheltered in the woods revolves around Laura Palmer’s murder and the secrets of her double life (see 124), such as her ‘side job’ as a prostitute at the Canadian brothel One Eyed Jacks. The second season focuses on the fear and horror Windom Earle, a former FBI agent, brings to Twin Peaks who hides in the woods trying to win control over the Black Lodge (see 124).

The viewer is constantly reminded that the woodlands play a key role in the narrative. In contrast to characters such as Ben Horne, most people recognize the mystical peculiarities and qualities of the woods. Agent Cooper, who is thoroughly fascinated by the vastness of forest enclosing Twin Peaks, oftentimes comments on the majesty of the trees stating, for example: “Sheriff, what kind of fantastic trees have you got growing around here? Big, majestic”; or “Man... smell those trees. Smell those Douglas firs” (Frost and Lynch 1.1).

Other characters in the TV show inscribe the “big, majestic trees” with spiritual properties (see Lowry 102). Margaret Lanterman, for example, known as the Log Lady, opens every episode sitting in her cabin, holding her log, and ambiguously refers to the theme of the respective episode in a series of monologues. Considered to be mentally ill by most of the town’s residents, the Log Lady believes that she is able to communicate with the spiritual world through her log (see Woods 99). She is never seen without it, carrying the log like a baby and trying to assure others that it is conveying messages: “My log hears things I cannot hear. But my log tells me about the sounds, about the new words.

Even though it has stopped growing larger, my log is aware” (Frost and Lynch Log Lady introduction to 2.21).

Even though the woods are portrayed as dark and threatening in many situations, they also function as messengers providing answers because “as potential spirit entities, trees absorb, record, and reflect” (Lowry 103). Although reluctant to believe in the powers of the log at first, Agent Cooper eventually consults Margaret Lanterman and her log later on in the show to solve the murder of Laura Palmer. Cooper and his investigation team visit the Log Lady in her cabin and ask her about what her log saw the night Laura Palmer was murdered to which she replies:

Shhh, I'll do the talking. Dark. Laughing. The owls were flying. Many things were blocked. Laughing. Two Men, two girls. Flashlights pass by in the woods over the bridge. The owls were near. The dark was pressing in on her. Quiet then. Later, footsteps. One man passed by. Screams far away. Terrible, terrible. One voice. (Frost and Lynch 1.6)

In this passage, Agent Cooper learns that seemingly unexplainable transformations can occur in the Ghostwood Forest. Cooper concludes that the two girls must have been Laura and another girl, Ronette Pulaski, who was abducted together with Laura but was found alive, catatonically walking along a rail bridge before lapsing into a coma. He considers “the log an unnerving yet benevolent force” (Lowry 104) contributing to the solving of the murder. Eventually, Cooper presumes that he has to venture deeper into the wilderness to find the answers to the mystery (see 104). The idea of the forest as a dark source of evil still possessing powerful knowledge appears reminiscent of the popular trope in European folklore. Suggestively called Ghostwood, the forest surrounding Twin Peaks evidently harbors a metaphysical presence.<sup>4</sup>

The intentions of the spirits are, again, dualistic. As it is later revealed, Killer BOB, an entity from the Black Lodge, a realm of pure evil in another dimension, possessed Leland Palmer, Laura's father, who molested and murdered his daughter under BOB's control (see Frost and Lynch 2.7). The entrance to the Black Lodge is

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4 Even though there is no explicit mention of the nature of this presence in the series, the mystery of the spirits in the woods seems to precede the actual founding of the town and has been there long before the Packards and Hornes.

located at Glastonbury Grove, a part of the Ghostwood Forest which opens as a portal in the center of a circle of twelve sycamore trees during the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn (see Frost and Lynch 2.20). The danger lurking in the woods as well as the trope of abduction and captivity recall elements of the Puritan fear of the wilderness.<sup>5</sup> Yet, there are other important locations and entities in the forest of a more benevolent nature, such as Margaret Lanterman's log. As revealed in *The Secret History of Twin Peaks*, the log is inhabited by the spirit of her deceased husband who fell into a burning ravine in the forest while on duty as the volunteer fire chief (see Frost 318).

The forest around Twin Peaks also works as a frame for the diegesis. All clues leading to the solving of the mysteries inevitably also lead to the forest itself or to places in the woods. To give another example, Ronette Pulaski, after escaping her torment and after witnessing the murder of Laura in an abandoned train car in the forest, is shown "walking along railroad tracks, the literal road to civilization, and then ultimately emerging from the forest" (Shimabukuro 124). The constant threat emanating from the wilderness, starting with the abduction of Ronette and Laura in the pilot episode, draws from the Puritan fear of the 'Other,' the evil spirits lurking in the woods. Nonetheless, the relation between nature and the town in the narrative appears to be both symbiotic (the log helping to solve the mystery) and dangerous (the woods as a hiding place for evil entities such as BOB) which underlines the pervasive dualism in *Twin Peaks*.

## SMALL TOWN IDYLL VS. STRANGE OCCURRENCES

While Ghostwood Forest provides a stage for numerous unintelligible happenings in the series and even though it seems to embody the quiet and peaceful small town on the outside, *Twin Peaks* arguably resembles the typical Lovecraftian corrupted and foreboding rural American village on the inside. Similar to Dunwich or Innsmouth in Lovecraft's fiction, *Twin Peaks* initially presents itself

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5 This notion becomes apparent when looking at Puritan writings from the early New England settlements. Narratives of captivity were pivotal for colonial America and became a popular literary genre in Anglo-American writing of the seventeenth century (see Sayre 3). Johnson defines the genre in a racist and ideologically charged manner, speaking of an "ordeal of a colonial Euro-American woman, who is taken captive by mercilessly predatory Indian 'savages' assailing the virtuous frontier family" (see Johnson).

as a fairly mediocre, perhaps even boring ‘jerkwater town.’ Yet, the presentation of objects and locations in the TV show often move back and forth between evoking a feeling of exaggerated familiarity and abstruseness. The filming of trivial objects, such as the taxidermied deer head sitting on the table next to Laura’s safety deposit box being examined by Truman and Cooper, suggests that they are of significance to the plot; yet they have no narrative function other than creating an eerie atmosphere. Slow panning shots accompanied by threatening music furthermore capture locations such as the Palmers’ middle class American living room. This technique evokes a feeling of terror; as the series progresses, these images increasingly correlate with this feeling (see Glaubitz and Schröter 22-23). After all, the living room is not only an everyday place for family gatherings but also the scene of a murder, Laura’s cousin Maddy Ferguson. Scenes like that underline the notion that seemingly trifling and familiar objects and places create an uneasy feeling and can be read through Kneale’s description of the remote American town generating a fear of “the lost corners of relatively familiar places” (112).

The threshold between the real world and another dimension is a common theme in Lovecraft’s narratives. The protagonist’s realization in “From Beyond” (1934) that “strange, inaccessible worlds exist at our very elbows” brings to mind the multidimensionality of *Twin Peaks*. The idea of multiple dimensions embedded in the same town finds its correspondent in the Black and White Lodge.<sup>6</sup> They can be seen as a “place that [lies] beyond” (Kneale 106) and is inhabited by strange entities, such as BOB, or a character literally called The Man from Another Place. Both entities appear human, yet they exhibit distinct extraordinary features. The show uses Michael J. Anderson to portray The Man from Another Place because the actor lives with a genetic disorder causing brittle bones and leaving him with a smaller stature (Internet Movie Database). The show further alters the cadence of his speech by employing phonetic reversals to portray the character as Other. The Black Lodge itself appears extraordinary in comparison to the rest of *Twin Peaks* because it seems to consist of an infinite, red-curtained sequence of hallways and rooms with chevron-patterned floors, the so called Red Room. When applied to the “civilization” versus wilderness dualism,

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6 Even though the series references the White Lodge, it is neither used as a place of action, nor described in terms of its appearance.

the Black Lodge seems to represent a domestic place decorated in utterly unfamiliar and uncanny fashion.

Neither David Lynch nor Mark Frost commented on whether their ideas were influenced by H.P. Lovecraft or not. However, some of the uncanny occurrences in *Twin Peaks* regarding Otherness and wilderness arguably resemble common themes in Lovecraftian fiction. The idyllic community bit by bit reveals itself to be corrupted by a grave menace prowling in the Ghostwood Forest hailing from an entirely different reality.

## INTERTWINING FACT & FICTION: NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES IN THE NORTHWEST

It is safe to say that *Twin Peaks* hardly relies on traditional representation of Native Americans found in film genres such as the Western. However, the series does not only employ Native American iconography and aesthetics but also uses indigenous myths as plot elements. Lynch and Frost amplify the story of their fictional town with plenty of Native American references, both historic and imaginary. While the inclusion of stereotypical indigenous elements enriches the narrative and sense of locality of the series, its colonialist and non-native purposes shall also be critically evaluated.

In *The Secret History of Twin Peaks*, Mark Frost combines historical figures and events with fabricated elements to embellish the story of Twin Peaks. For example, he includes passages from the expedition journals of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, two pioneers known for their *Voyage of Discovery*, which is considered the largest US government expedition of the nineteenth century (see Bergon 128). While it is true that Lewis and Clark did get into contact with various Native Americans, among them the Nez Perce people who actually guided the two pioneers (see Lewis and Clark, Entry: 20th September 1805), Frost adds fictitious sections to the original journals to write *Twin Peaks* into U.S. history and thereby establishes the frontier narrative of *Twin Peaks* (see 9).<sup>7</sup>

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7 The following excerpt is taken from an original entry by William Clark, dated 21st September 1805

The Cheif [sic] drew me a kind of chart of the river [...] the river passed thro'gh [sic] the mountains at which place was a great fall of the water passing through the rocks. (Lewis and Clark)

Another adaption of Native American history is Frost's allusion to the historical character of Chief Joseph, a leader and spokesperson of the Wallowa band of the Nez Perce who lived in the Pacific Northwest. Two of his most renowned speeches are his surrender speech (1877) and his “Plea for Justice” (1879) held in front of an assembly of congressmen in Lincoln Hall in Washington D.C. (see Nerburn 151). Frost includes extracts of both speeches in his novel. Again, he adds fictional passages supposedly stated by Joseph such as “I will go now to the place known to our ancestors, seldom visited, the place of smoke by the great falls and twin mountains, to seek the aid of the Great Spirit Chief in this time of need” (Frost 43). The novel thereby alludes to the fictional location of Twin Peaks with the White Tail Falls and the ghost of Ghostwood. Yet, Frost also uses actual passages from the speeches to stress the importance of the spirit world to the Nez Perce: “We were taught to believe the Great Spirit sees and hears everything, and that he never forgets” (52).

With *The Secret History of Twin Peaks*, Mark Frost expanded on the importance of Native American history in *Twin Peaks*. The allusions to historical events and Native American people contributes to a sense of spirituality and the supernatural atmosphere in the forest surrounding the fictional town. Frost in particular plays with the belief that ghosts and spirits haunt former indigenous territories after the violent displacement of their Native American inhabitants in the past (see Boyd and Thrush ix). The Great Spirit, an entity which the Nez Perce believed in, may also have been the archetype for the presence in the Ghostwood Forest.

But elements in the series also convey the importance of indigenous culture. Native American petroglyphs carved in the walls of Owl Cave inevitably become a

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This excerpt is taken from *The Secret History of Twin Peaks* and refers to the original quoted above:

With great cheerfulness Twisted Hair drew me a kind of chart of the river on a white elk skin. He said that the river forked a long distance above and passed through two mountains at which place was a great fall of the water passing through the rocks. [...] our Shoshone guide thinks it regards something like the peculiar fascination with spirits we find among the Indians in this region. (9)

In the original passage, there is no mention of spirits and the natives' fascination for them. However, Frost seems to make use of this passage in order to stress the supernatural component of the mystery in *Twin Peaks* and arguably refers to the Natives' belief in spirituality.

centerpiece to the solving of the mysteries. These prominent remnants of indigenous culture in a frontier town illustrate the anxiety described by Boyd and Thrush and “function as unsettling reminders of past colonial sins” (Bil). These past colonial sins are also prominent in another scene. When Annie Blackburn gives her Miss Twin Peaks Contest speech, her words are inspired by Duwamish Chief Seattle and function to highlight her rejection of the commercial exploitation of the Ghostwood forest by Ben Horne:<sup>8</sup>

Your dead are soon forgotten and never return. Our dead never forget the beautiful world that gave them being. They still love its verdant valleys, its murmuring rivers, its majestic mountains. When the last red man has vanished from this earth, these forests and shores will still hold their spirits. For the Indians love the earth as a newborn loves its mother's heartbeat.  
(Frost and Lynch 2.21)

The prevalence and importance of indigenous symbolism and mysticism to the plot and, as Geoff Bil calls it, “local flavor” of *Twin Peaks* is unequivocal. The usage of native iconography and myths contributes to the series’ ambiguity and mysteriousness; yet feels stereotypical and cliché given their use to condemn environmental destruction. The show as a “white settler drama” (Bil) tends to appropriate native culture for non-native purposes which becomes particularly apparent in the stereotypical representations of BOB and Chief Deputy Hawk.

## **BOB AND CHIEF DEPUTY HAWK**

Whereas the use of Native American culture functioned to embellish the tone and atmosphere of *Twin Peaks*, at times ambiguously, the characters of BOB and Chief Deputy Hawk clearly stand in the colonial tradition of the presumably “violent, aggressive, and demonic” Native American figure (Benshoff and Griffin 103) and the honorable type who “maintain[s] purer instincts about nature and the world around [him]” (104).

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8 The authenticity of Chief Seattle’s speech is questioned by a scholarly consensus, yet it continues to be used as an unsettling reminder of colonial sins in cinematic narratives (see Bil).

BOB, a local spirit who has been living in Twin Peaks since ancient times and “the diabolical centre of violence in *Twin Peaks*” (Bil) is not explicitly identified as a Native American character but is based on American indigenous mythology (see Bil). He is the personified evil being responsible for numerous cases of captivity and murder in the town. Adhering to his archetype, BOB is notorious for his cruelty. The fact that he is rather spirit than human further links him to the Puritan tradition of imagining Native Americans as demons or spirits dwelling in the wilderness around the village. Even his outward appearance invokes the stereotype: “his long oily hair and his grimace and threatening postures also recall [...] obvious signs of the archetype” (Carroll 291). BOB even appears to be mimicking a most feared practice of the ‘evil savage’: while in possession of Leland Palmer, BOB repeatedly hits his forehead against the door of the jail cell (Frost and Lynch 2.9); soon after he has taken possession of Agent Cooper’s body, he smashes his head into a mirror (2.22). Both victims are left with a bloody slash in the forehead, visually reminiscent of a scalping ritual (see Carroll 291). The fact that BOB is capable of possessing Leland and later Cooper could actually be seen as an allegory to the white settlers’ fear of the reversion and assimilation to “savagery,” described by Roderick Nash as the “danger of succumbing to the wildness of his surroundings and reverting to savagery himself” (24).

BOB is juxtaposed with another stereotypical Native American type: the ‘Noble Red Man’ embodied by Chief Deputy Hawk. He assists the white protagonists by giving spiritual insight into the otherworldly mysteries unfolding in *Twin Peaks* (see Bil). Hawk has a close relationship to nature and – similarly to the Log Lady – understands the connection between Twin Peaks’ natural and spiritual world. Hawk thereby resembles popular filmic representation of natives in the 1980s and ‘90s, more specifically the stereotype of the transcendental, spiritual indigenous figure. With his tracking abilities and aptronymous nick name ‘Hawk,’ he also invokes the stereotypical hawkeye-type hunter depiction of indigenous Americans. Mark Frost describes Hawk as “a full-blooded Nez Perce” (198), which again underlines the tribe’s presence in the town then and now. In the episode “Masked Ball,” Hawk informs Agent Cooper about the presence of the Black Lodge and explains that it has been referenced in Nez Perce stories as a mythological location for a long time

My people believe that the White Lodge is a place where the spirits that rule man and nature reside. There is also a legend of a place called the Black Lodge: the shadow self of the White Lodge. Legend says that every spirit must pass through there on the way to perfection [...] But it is said that if you confront the Black Lodge with imperfect courage, it will utterly annihilate your soul. (Frost and Lynch 2.11)

To some extent, Lynch and Frost appear to have tried to partially undermine stereotypical representations of Native American elements and characters. When Gwen Morton meets Hawk, she says: “God, after all we’ve done to you, how you must hate us white people” to which Hawk replies “Some of my best friends are white people” (2.8). Bil argues that this declaration could be seen as a reversal of a common racist idiom. Hawk responds to Gwen’s racist statement ironically by using a formulation usually deployed to dodge accusations of racism thereby deflecting the victimization implied in her utterance. Although the show arguably presents Hawk in a more favorable light, his character still functions as a “generic Native American tasked with ameliorating settler guilt” (Bil). Even though Hawk educates Cooper about the other-dimensional mysteries in *Twin Peaks*, he struggles to solve the mysteries himself; eventually it is Cooper who “traverses the dimensional aperture into the Black Lodge itself” (Bil).

Additionally, the implementation of BOB as the main antagonist in the series grew out of similarly stereotypical thinking. In an interview with *Twin Peaks Online*, Frost explains that “the idea for BOB originated in American Indian mythology and that he was a local evil spirit whose presence in the *Twin Peaks* area dates back to ancient times” (*Twin Peaks Online*). This statement, again, stresses the notion that BOB and his depiction is reminiscent of the stereotypical representation of an ‘evil savage’ archetype, prowling in the woods in his spirit form.<sup>9</sup> In the end, the show upholds its tendencies of including indigenous

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9 The casting choice for BOB slightly complicates his reading as a Native American archetype. Initially, Lynch and Frost had already decided on Leland Palmer being Laura’s murderer. However, during the shooting of the pilot, a new plot idea evolved. Initially, Frank Silva was the set dresser for *Twin Peaks*. During the shooting of one scene in which Sarah Palmer bolts up from her couch and screams, Silva’s reflection could be seen in a mirror behind her. Even though it was unintentional, Lynch decided to use the footage and create a new character for Silva – BOB (see Lynch, *Lynch on Lynch* 164).

elements and characters merely for the purpose of adding mystery rather than serving native ends.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that the unintelligibility at the core of David Lynch's series *Twin Peaks* is based on the white settlers' primeval fear of wilderness and Otherness. *Twin Peaks* also exhibits features of the Lovecraftian small town located in a rural area surrounded by woods and threatened by entities from another dimension. Again, a tension between “civilization” and wilderness is at the linchpin of these narratives and their mysteries. Due to its (fictional) colonial history, *Twin Peaks* also resembles an exemplary frontier town. The Ghostwood Forest suggests an allusion to the Puritan notion of wilderness and the folkloric forest harbouring danger. Nonetheless, the series does not only portray the wilderness surrounding *Twin Peaks* in a threatening manner. While Laura Palmer is held captive and murdered in the woods, the forest is also shown in a positive light. With its beautiful trees and benevolent spirits, the Ghostwood Forest is more than just a fear-inducing wilderness.

In regard to the prevalent image of the indigenous American embodying the ‘Other,’ Native iconography and beliefs, both fictional and historic, fulfil two major functions. First, they add to the horror in the woods, mainly through the character of BOB, the stereotypical ‘evil savage’ who captures and kills young women. Second, they contribute to the solving of the mystery by referencing the vanished Nez Perce tribe and their knowledge of the Black Lodge. Similarly, Chief Deputy Hawk functions as a spiritual guide providing insights into the mysteries surrounding the town. However, in contrast to its otherwise unconventional elements, the show does not challenge stereotypical depictions of Native American symbolism, culture, and characters.

Despite the unconventional, often unintelligible diegesis of Lynch's and Frost's *Twin Peaks*, the series still refers to and reproduces the long-standing Puritan fear of the Other. *Twin Peaks* often plays problematically with stereotypical tropes of Otherness and wilderness to establish an oftentimes uncanny and captivating cinematic experience in its plot and visual style.

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Published in:

Student Journal of the Department of Anglophone Studies / 2 (2020), pp. 23-44

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**DOI:** 10.17185/duepublico/71245

**URN:** urn:nbn:de:hbz:464-20200121-150628-6

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