

“Call for help”: Analysis of Agent Cooper’s Wounded Masculinity in Twin Peaks

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[Dale Cooper](#) [Twin Peaks](#) [crime fiction](#) [detective fiction](#) [masculinity](#) [trauma](#)

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*This essay explores the shifts in representation of the masculinity of FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper, one of the leading characters of the Twin Peaks fictional universe, created by David Lynch and Mark Frost. The research covers three chapters. The first chapter serves as an analysis of Cooper’s character from the original television series (1990–91) and Lynch’s film prequel *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992), in which he is interpreted as an intuitive detective (Angela Hague), who departs from the conventional depiction of detective characters. The second one investigates Cooper’s “returns” in the third season/*Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017) and their significance for his character development through the lens of psychoanalytic interpretations of the detective/crime genre and its connections to past trauma (Sally Rowe Munt). The third chapter further explores the struggles of Cooper’s three major self-images in *The Return*: the Good Dale/Dougie Cooper, Mr. C and Richard, all of which suggest certain issues in perception of his masculinity, by referring to several psychoanalytic, feminist and masculinity scholars (Isaac D. Balbus, Jack Halberstam, Lee Stepien), official Twin Peaks novels *The Autobiography of F.B.I. Special Agent Dale Cooper: My Life, My Tapes* (Scott Frost, 1991) and *Twin Peaks: The Final Dossier* (Mark Frost, 2017) as well as the Ancient myth of Orpheus and Alfred Hitchcock’s film *Vertigo* (1958).*

Introduction

Ever since he appeared in the television pilot of *Twin Peaks*, a supernatural crime and soap-opera hybrid series (1990–91) co-created by David Lynch and Mark Frost, FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan), has become one of the oddest fictional investigators to date. Just as *Twin Peaks* immediately came to be regarded as an antithesis to generic television shows, Cooper served as an antipode to the conventional representation of a detective character. Throughout the two seasons of the original series, he acts charmingly strange: instead of predominantly displaying traditional masculine traits such as logic and aloofness like most popular investigators until then, Cooper’s brilliant crime-solving techniques include listening to his own dreams and intuition as well as empathizing with

people around him, which are characteristics commonly perceived as “soft” or feminine (Gates 2006, 28). Even the ending of the show, in which he gets overpowered by evil forces responsible for the murder and continuous rape of Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee), the Twin Peaks high-schooler whose case he had been sent to investigate, defies the traditional portrayal of a detective-hero destined to restore the initial order.



Image 1. Dale Cooper entering the town of Twin Peaks in series' Pilot (1990).

Several other official *Twin Peaks* works depict Cooper in a very similar fashion: in *The Autobiography of F.B.I. Special Agent Dale Cooper: My Life, My Tapes* (1991), the epistolary novel written by Scott Frost, he seems equally eccentric, just as in Lynch's film prequel *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992), where he – although briefly appearing – demonstrated yet again his attunement with the supernatural world by envisioning what is going to happen in the immediate future.

However, in Season Three of the series, or *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017), Lynch and Frost conceived Cooper's character in a much more intricate manner. The main plot follows the complex trajectory of at least three of his versions, developed after the Season Two finale, which was set in the red room, the transcendental realm of various spirits, where his personality got split in half. There is Good Dale, who after 25 years of hibernation in the lodge reappears in the world of men by mistakenly switching places with the insurance

salesman Douglas “Dougie” Jones, in a process that leaves him operating in a “low-functioning amnesiac state” ([Twin Peaks Wiki](#)), which he needs to overcome in order to return to his previous persona. Then there is Mr. C, Cooper’s malevolent doppelgänger possessed by the demon Bob, Laura’s rapist and murderer,^[1] who is on a pursuit to kill off the Good Dale and find Judy, another evil entity which can presumably “save” him from going back to the Black Lodge, from where he had previously escaped. And there is Cooper’s look-alike, FBI agent Richard, who appears after Cooper’s successful self-unification and continues to exist, presumably, in some parallel universe, where he is on a mission to save the adult version of Laura Palmer.^[2]

What seems to be the most surprising is that Cooper, despite his final self-unification, never fully metamorphoses into that quirky and lovable character the audience once knew from Seasons One and Two. Even the very ending of the show, in which one sees the repeated scene of Black Lodge Laura whispering secrets into the Good Dale’s ear, mirroring the dream-like sequence from Season One, in which Laura tells Cooper who her killer is, suggests that he is more likely to enter another storyline similar to Richard’s than to go back “home”.

Considering this, one can assume that Cooper’s character in *The Return* is subject to major shifts in its representation. If the “old” Cooper generally serves as a portrayal of a detective who embraces his “feminine” side and is ready to understand the world’s darkness, the nature of his multiple versions in Season Three reveals that this is not entirely the case. Even though the “new” Cooper still functions as an unconventional detective-hero, the powerlessness (DougieCooper), forceful violence (Mr. C) and savior complex (Richard) of his newer versions all point out that his shattered Self is encountering a deep crisis connected to the notions of his phallic power, which lies at the core of the patriarchal construction of male subjectivity (Silverman 1992, 3). In psychoanalytic terms, if all these versions of Cooper are to be perceived as elements of his psychic reality, the Third Season Cooper does seem to have a problem with his own masculinity, if one is to define it as a “set of expectations that society deems appropriate for a male subject to exhibit” (Gates 2006, 28) that has more to do with a certain “dynamic between embodiment, identification, social privilege and class formation, and desire, rather than ... having a particular body” (Halberstam 2002, 355).

The aim of this essay is to explore the shifts in the representation of Dale Cooper’s masculinity and find out what they mean – especially within the context of the *Twin Peaks*

fictional universe and the time during which its installments had been released. In order to do so, I will start by analyzing Cooper's "original" character through the lens of his intuitive detection (Angela Hague) and feminist readings of the detective genre. I also intend to evaluate how Cooper's "returns" in the third season correspond with the generic conventions of detective and crime fiction and the changes in his character, as seen through the lens of psychoanalytic theory (Sally Rowe Munt). When it comes to the exploration of his masculinity crisis, I shall refer to several psychoanalytic, feminist and masculinity scholars (Isaac D. Balbus, Judith/Jack Halberstam, Lee Stepien), as well as the official *Twin Peaks* novels *The Autobiography of F.B.I. Special Agent Dale Cooper: My Life, My Tapes* (Scott Frost, 1991) and *Twin Peaks: The Final Dossier* (Mark Frost, 2017), along with the myth of Orpheus and Hitchcock's film *Vertigo* (1958), a frequent reference point in *Twin Peaks*, all of which may provide further insights into this paper's subject.

The Original Series and *Fire Walk With Me*: Cooper as an Intuitive Derationalized Detective

In order to explain the ways in which the original and *Fire Walk With Me* Cooper differ from the conventional detectives, one should refer to the insightful text "Infinite Games: The Derationalization of Detection in *Twin Peaks*," written by Angela Hague, in which she analyses the detective narrative of the first two seasons as well as Cooper's non-rational "intuitive detection" methods. According to her, *Twin Peaks* heavily defies the rules of the detective genre, which are "based on what John Cawelti has classified as the 'classical' detective story created by Edgar Allan Poe and Conan A. Doyle" and "equally applicable to the later 'hardboiled' versions of the genre written by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler." (Hague 1995, 130) Namely, "[b]oth classical and hardboiled detection posits that rational solutions can be found to human crimes, that mysteries are physically-based and accessible to the powers of the logical intellect" (Hague 1995, 130). Due to this focus on mental analysis, their stories need to have "definitive endings in which rationality and order are restored" (Hague 1995, 131).

The original *Twin Peaks* often flouts these guidelines. Firstly, it does this by centering its plot around supernatural agencies that are causing pain and sorrow among the people of the eponymous town. Secondly, by setting up an unorthodox crime investigator – Dale Cooper – who primarily relies on feelings, dreams and intuition while solving cases.^[3] And thirdly, it

achieves this by employing a postmodern, or metaphysical, narrative structure, which is non-linear, often parodic in nature, and lacks a firm plot and a neat ending (Hague 1995, 132).

To Hague, Cooper represents a player of an infinite game, a term coined by philosopher James Carse, who defines it as a game in which “boundaries are constantly being dissolved to prevent the game from ending,” unlike a finite game, which depends on “the existence of unchanging rules, spatial and temporal boundaries, and ‘conclusions’ in which someone must ‘win’” (Hague 1995, 133). A finite player may be well “trained” in playing the game but an infinite player is truly educated and “sees what is unfinished in the past and therefore discovers an increasing richness in it, with the result that ‘education’ leads to continuing self-discovery” (Hague 1995, 135). Following this assessment, Hague sees Cooper’s capitulation to evil in the series’ finale as something temporary, just like his prior accomplishments: “[t]o understand the nature of evil and its ‘shadow’ relationship with the good, he must completely experience it” (Hague 1995, 142). In doing so, he becomes the very embodiment of constant boundary shifts, represented by the nature of the infinite game.

The virtue of rationality, along with strength, heroism, virility, independence, and will, together with the more challenging, albeit socially acceptable traits, such as the inability to be flexible, coldness, and detachment, have all been considered manly throughout the decades (MacInnes 1998, 47). As expected, all of them have been attributed to many male detective characters. No wonder Cooper’s character, with all its social intelligence, receptiveness to unconscious forces, “ego elasticity” (Hague 1995, 137) and the ultimate surrender to the powers of the Black Lodge, seems like a parodic departure from the conventional detective persona, even though he may look like one (with his keenness for trench coats and slick hairstyles common in the 1950s, Lynch’s beloved cinematic and historical period).

All of this can be applied to Cooper’s character in *Fire Walk With Me*. Although not functioning as the central figure, since the first part of the film is about the murder investigation of Laura’s unfortunate predecessor Teresa Banks (Pamela Gidley) conducted by other FBI agents, he still demonstrates exceptional intuitive and non-rational mental abilities. For example, one of the key scenes, in which the special agent Philipp Jeffries (David Bowie) appears in the FBI Philadelphia Office from another dimension, serves as a manifestation of Cooper’s dream. He also intuits the details about the next murder victim in a conversation with the agent Albert Rosenfield (Miguel Ferrer), furthering the audience’s previous knowledge of his extrasensory perceptions.

Considering the time of the original series and film's release, Cooper's subversive persona can be interpreted as co-authors' negative response to the popular American films of the 1980s, like cop action films – such as *Die Hard* (1988) and *Lethal Weapon* (1987) or neo-noir films (*Fatal Attraction* (1987) – which try to reassert the traditional notions of masculinity, supposedly due to the crisis caused by the earlier failure of the Vietnam War and further political and economic empowering of women (Gates 2006, 100). It can also be read as their nod towards the handsome male characters of the then extremely popular soap operas like *Dallas* (1978–1991) and *Dynasty* (1981–1989), which have always been traditionally favored by female audiences.

That said, the originally conceived Cooper redefines masculinity within the context of the detective and mystery genre: he acts “feminized” and is revealed to be imperfect, due to his failed heroism in the series' finale. However, what has not been disclosed is the extent of his “imperfection,” which in itself will become the theme of *The Return*.

Season Three: Cooper's Returns to the Scene of the Crime

Season Three finds Cooper where Season Two left him – in the Black Lodge, still stuck in the surrealist world of “black/white dychotomy” (Hague 1995, 141). From then on he – or all of his versions—sets off on a heroic journey back “home” in order to acquire the object(s) of his desire by playing (if not acting) the detective who follows cryptic clues.

There is a special relationship between detective fiction and psychoanalytic theory, whose scientific aim is to trace and understand unconscious desires. “At the heart of both is the investigation of a conflict, with the intention of effecting resolution and closure,” states Sally Rowe Munt in her *Murder By The Book: Feminism and the Crime Novel* (1994, 143). “The figure of the psychoanalyst doubles with that of the detective, as an agent bent on interpreting clues and symbols, a figure of power who applies ratiocinative skills to a particular text. The psychoanalyst is adept at identifying repetition and return, something which characterizes not just the action of a detective,” but the whole narrative (Munt 1994, 143).

Expanding on this notion, *The Return* can be considered as a parable of psychoanalysis, just like the crime novella *The Purloined Letter* by E. A. Poe, which Munt distinguishes, relying on Jacques Lacan, as the perfect example of a crime text echoing the psychoanalytic process. Both of these works exhibit “continuous return and repetition,” which privileges “the *act* of

interpretation over the original event” (Munt 1994, 144). What comes to the fore is their “endless deferral—one can never return to the same place, only hold a mutable memory of it” (Munt 1994, 144). In other words, what one witnesses is the works’ “obsessive return to the crime scene” and “continual reliving of the event” (Munt 1994, 144). In the case of *The Return*, whose title highlights the importance of this continuous recurrence, the “crime scene” evidently signifies a certain loss, trauma or a setback that Cooper, as a variation of a psychoanalyst and analysand, must figure out in order to move on.



Image 2. Dale Cooper in *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017).

It is interesting to note that all of Cooper’s personas gravitate towards a certain vision of “homecoming,” which is a word defined by the act of a return. The Good Dale looks as if he wants to go back “home”, or to begin where he had left off 25 years ago. Mr. C’s goal is to find Judy, who may be perceived as his mother, especially if one compares the horned symbol found on the card he is carrying (Part 2) with the antlered Experiment which bore Bob (Part 8), the entity he is in symbiosis with. Richard, on the other hand, wants to take the woman named Carrie Page (Sheryl Lee), who he believes is Laura Palmer, to *her* mother in Twin Peaks, even though she is perfectly fine living in Odessa, Texas (Part 18). It seems that all of the Coopers have the urge to go back to, psychoanalytically speaking, the realm of “pre-oedipal unity” (Munt, 1994, 143), where the mother, or primary caretaker, acts as an insurer of the child’s absolute safety. However, as one is reminded by Carrie’s negative reaction to the (former) Palmers’ house, the site of horrible abuse that took place decades ago, a “home” can be associated with many crimes, too.

The Return notably plays with another motif that mirrors “our earliest Oedipal struggles,” and that is the split between the good and the bad self, just like the one Cooper experiences throughout most of this season. This “sadistic fantasy” is typical for crime fiction, as the protagonist often projects his own fears “onto a perceived ‘enemy’” (Munt 1998). To explain this fantasy, one needs to go back to the psychic processes of childhood: in order to conceive itself as a “separate identity,” ordinarily after experiencing the trauma of separation from the primary caretaker, the child needs to define itself through opposition, or an enemy, states Munt citing Tania Modleski and W. W. Meissner (1998). Extrapolating from Melanie Klein, Munt goes on further in suggesting that this “splitting off of projected and introjected images into two types – good, loved phantasms, and dangerous, bad phantasms – leads both to omnipotent fantasies of restoration and fantasies of paranoid destruction ... Gradually, through the process of mourning,” the child “learns to reintegrate the two sides of this internal, psychic, manic-depressive response, through an increasing testing of reality, which s/he performs through the activation of the super-ego” (1998). If mourning is not successful, the anger towards the imaginary enemy persists and turns into the state of melancholia (1998). Similar processes may happen in adults when particular events evoke past traumas, which certain artworks, especially the ones consisting of generic crime elements like *The Return*, convincingly recreate.

The eventual eradication of Mr. C and Cooper’s consequential unification, along with his metamorphosis into a “separate identity” represented by Richard, does reveal that, amidst the processing of certain trauma, Cooper is gaining some sort of insight, which Shoshana Felman, following Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, defines as a “singular event of discovery ... that, because it cannot by its nature become a heritage ... has to be repeated, reenacted, practiced each time for the first time” (1987, 12). But what kind of insight and what kind of trauma?

The Return and the Trouble with Cooper’s Masculinity

Except for their peculiar affinity for returns, DougieCooper, Mr. C and Richard all seem to have certain issues with power and potency. DougieCooper is the embodiment of powerlessness in as much as he is completely dependent on others: he walks where he is led and is at most able to repeat other people’s sentences (like “Call for help”). Sometimes he acts like his old self – for example, the first time he tastes coffee after 25 years of absence

(Part 4) or when he masterfully disarms Ike “The Spike” (Christophe Zajac-Denek) in self-defense (Part 7) – but he is not able to consciously control his actions. He does not seem to have an erotic drive, either, except for the one time he had sexual intercourse with Dougie Jones’ wife, Janey-E (Naomi Watts), who took all the initiative (Part 10). Mr. C, on the other hand acts like his sheer opposite: he is the “embodiment of the all-powerful American and the ultimate capitalist product” (Stepien 2018) who does what he wants^[4] powered by Bob, which includes killing people and raping women (like Audrey Horne /Sherilyn Fenn/ and Diane Evans /Laura Dern/). Richard seems like the combination of these two. In Part 18, he exercises different levels of power and control over his enemies as well as Carrie Page, a version of Laura Palmer, whom he desperately wants to take back to her mother in Twin Peaks. He exhibits sexual interest too, although his desire seems more ritualistic than authentic, as one can see from the depiction of his and Linda’s (Laura Dern) intercourse.

Having all that in mind, it is fair to assume that their complex relationship with control and power is related to the perception of their masculinity: DougieCooper acts pretty emasculated, Mr. C is an example of toxic masculinity, and Richard is somewhere in between, although gravitating towards a certain emasculation, due to his failure to bring Laura home. It seems all of them have a different relationship to phallic power, which can be defined as “the representation of the power that seems to be available to men in social and political terms in a male-dominated culture” (Halberstam 2002, 355). If one considers Cooper’s versions as the representations of himself, it is safe to assume that, throughout the *Return*’s narrative, he suffers from a serious masculinity crisis, due to internally conflicting self-images.

These images also reflect certain narcissistic traits – with Mr. C acting within the fantasy of grandiosity (he is a white male psychopath) and DougieCooper his vulnerable, fragile counterpart (he is constantly under attack by Mr. C’s assassins as well as the mafia), similarly to Richard, who behaves as what Isaac D. Balbus in his article “Masculinity and The (M)other” calls an “idealizing narcissist” (2002, 223), marked by his need to take care of others (that is, take Carrie/Laura back home). However they are read, if one considers them along with the previously mentioned psychoanalytic readings of detective fiction, this season can indeed be interpreted as Cooper’s turn to childlike, or pre-Oedipal responses as a defense mechanism from an evocation of a certain trauma.

In order to explore this presumed emasculating trauma one needs to revisit certain scenes of his returns, especially prior to his split and after his unification. The season begins with Season Two finale footage of him getting trapped in the lodge. However, it is worth remembering that the reason he got there is because he wanted to save his girlfriend Annie Blackburn (Heather Graham) from the psychopathic killer Windom Earle (Kenneth Welsh). In order to set her free, he agreed to give his soul away, after which he got split in half and met his doppelgänger, who immediately escaped out of the Black Lodge, leaving the good Dale stuck in the world of transcendence.

Another memorable return of his happens after the killing of Mr. C, when the presumably unified Cooper travels back in time and saves Laura from her demise (Part 17). In this scene, admittedly referring to the mythic legend of Orpheus and Eurydice' journey from the Underworld,^[5] Cooper does manage to save her from her killer and alter the course of history. However, just as Eurydice, Orpheus' wife whom he wanted to resurrect by leading her out of the kingdom of the dead, she disappears nonetheless, leaving him confused.

In his last "return," however, he tries to save her again, this time as Richard, who finds Laura/Carrie working at the Odessa diner (significantly called Judy's) and living in a home with an unidentified male cadaver. She agrees to come with him to "her mother" but ends up screaming and causing a blackout in the Palmers' house, which in this unknown timeline seems to belong to the Tremonds/Chalfonts – families from the earlier installments of *Twin Peaks* linked to the Black Lodge. As indicated in various resources, this plot twist is strongly reminiscent of the one from *Vertigo* (1958), Alfred Hitchcock's film.^[6] In this film, detective Scottie Ferguson (James Stewart) is enthralled by a woman called Madeleine (Kim Novak), who turns out to be played by (another) Judy (Kim Novak), an actress hired to deceive him, so the real Madeleine can die at the hands of her husband (Tom Helmore), who pushes her off the tower Scottie cannot climb due to his vertigo, a condition that developed after he was unable to save his police partner. In the final sequence, Scottie manages to take Judy to the scene of Madeleine's crime, where she screams in horror and falls to her death, too. Although Carrie doesn't die in *The Return*, both of these works feature female doubles – one functions as an object of desire (Laura/Madeleine) and the other as its less glamorous version (Carrie/Judy) – as well as the damaged, fragile and emasculated protagonist (Cooper/Scottie), suggesting that there is an important link between them.

All of Cooper's returns involve failed attempts to save women: first Annie, then Laura, and finally Carrie. However, those were not the only women he knew who were in danger. Let us not forget the original series' Madeleine "Maddy" Ferguson, Laura's look-alike cousin (whose name also refers to the names of *Vertigo's* protagonists), who got killed by Leland/Bob. There is also Caroline Earle, his first love, who got killed by her husband Windom and whose spirit interchanged with Annie's character after Cooper entered the oneiric world of Black Lodge. Audrey Horne belongs to this group too, since she was held hostage at the local brothel and later raped by Mr. C. Cooper did help some of these women, like Annie and Audrey, to a certain extent, although it turned out to be little bit too late. And some of them, like Caroline, Laura and Maddy, he could not help at all. Yet, the last two versions of Laura – the ones resembling Eurydice – perhaps did not want to be "saved".

"Cooper never questions for a minute whether or not he has the right to alter all of time and space, or the consequences that this might have for the people," Lee Stepien interprets the scene of saving Laura (2018). "First off, by 'rescuing' Laura, Cooper is effectively depriving her of the right to choose. In the first season, Bobby Briggs reveals that Laura told him that she wanted to die. It's an extreme example of the way that real world chivalry can often have the effect of suppressing a woman's autonomy. Secondly, preventing Laura's death doesn't erase a lifetime of trauma. She was not a troubled girl who needed a man to save her, but someone who was trying to take charge of her life in the face of the years of physical and psychological suffering. Laura's original problem ... was Bob. He's a symbol of the negative consequences of institutionalized patriarchy that is invisible or ignored, as in cases of sexual assault when the focus is shifted to the woman's behavior." (2018)

In psychology, the urge to save women, or to be needed by them, has been known as the White Knight Syndrome, which is the exact term FBI agent Tammy Preston somewhat sneeringly uses when referring to Cooper in Mark Frost's canonical book *Twin Peaks: The Final Dossier* (2017, 57). Mary C. Lamia defines it as "a compulsive need to be the rescuer in an intimate relationship originating from early life experiences that left the white knight feeling damaged, guilty, shamed, or afraid," which usually include some kind of "loss, abandonment, trauma, or unrequited love. Many [white knights] were deeply affected by the emotional or physical suffering of a caregiver." (2009)

Although *The Return* does not suggest this, leaving the question of his initial wound open, it is interesting to note that, according to Scott Frost's *The Autobiography of F.B.I. Special*

Agent Cooper, in a way, he could not save his mother either. Namely, she died from brain hemorrhaging in a hospital when he was 15. After she died, Dale and his dad saw her and his dad whispered something in her ear (1991, 37). A variation of this scene can be found as early as Season One of *Twin Peaks*, with Laura's persona whispering Cooper the name of her killer in the Red Room of the Black Lodge. However, this scene gets recreated at the very beginning (Part 3) and the very ending (Part 18) of *The Return*, too, suggesting its importance.

Having all of this in mind, *The Return* may be read as an allegory of Cooper's psychic crisis triggered by Bob's violence towards women, which catapulted him back to the interior realms of his earliest loss(es), or feelings of complete safety: like Ferguson in *Vertigo*, he too perhaps felt he was not "man enough" to save them when they needed him the most. This allegory does not have a neat ending, since it ends with the aforementioned scene of an anxious-looking Cooper listening to Laura's whispers. However, the fact that this scene tends to repeat itself suggests a glimpse of hope that Cooper might eventually hear her and create an alternate timeline where he could get past his troubles and gain critical insight concerning his ideas of masculinity, which are more harmful than not to the women he so desperately wants to save.

Conclusion

Agent Cooper has been one of the most radical detective characters in television history. Since the time of the original series and the film prequel's release, he has represented an atypical investigator – warm-hearted, intuitive and sensitive to supernatural forces – someone who incorporates lots of the so-called feminine aspects into his personality. Even his ultimate demise has been seen as a welcome antithesis to the conventional, overly masculinized, white male detective hero who mostly succeeds in solving cases. However, in spite of Cooper failing his final task, he could overall be seen as a psychically stable character who, in light of Lynch and Frost's postmodern play with characters and narratives, represents an "infinite player," whose seeming demise is just another stage in his mission to achieve a certain balance in the world.

In the third season of the series, Cooper remains an infinite player: he indeed passes many stages in his quest for insight and balance. But *The Return* represents a much darker take on this process, eventually reaching the point of radical deconstruction of Cooper's character. By

the end of the show, he still has not finished his journey, revealing his immense fragility, disorientation and insecurity. Moreover, the series exposes that his “old” character is just another and perhaps non-existing construct, and that the “real” Cooper consists of several personas, who severely struggle to find balance in the expression of their masculinity and power.

In order to metaphorically point towards Cooper’s messy psychic reality, Lynch and Frost cleverly play with several oneiric plotlines and timelines, as well as the conventions of crime and detection narratives, which can be seen as a repeated return to the scenes of the crime, or revisitation of certain traumas, losses, and unconscious childhood wounds. In psychoanalytic terms, they revisit certain traumas and losses in order to soothe the characters’ and readers’ subconscious childhood wounds as well as reflecting and revealing pre-Oedipal, narcissistic impulses that emerge while dealing with severe stress.

Since the fictional portrayals of psychic scenarios always at least implicitly reflect on social conflict, Cooper’s struggles with his manhood, triggered by his failures in saving Laura, Annie and a string of other women, may also be interpreted as a reflection of the current Zeitgeist. In this day and age of fourth-wave feminism, women’s rights movements have indeed been striking new blows at patriarchal social structures, disturbing the gendered notions of what makes a “woman” or a “man,” in a similar fashion as during the late ‘80s and early ‘90s, when the original series had been released, coinciding with the articulation of third-wave feminism. Considering this, *The Return* may well serve as a mirror to the latest social upheaval. However, there is a certain optimism to it, which in itself seems radical: by not providing a finite or happy ending, the series invites us to keep replaying the same narrative – just like Cooper – until we reach further insights, which would move us away from the confinements of rigid patriarchal rationalities to the realms of true empathy towards ourselves and others.

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All links verified 27.5.2021

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Notes

[1] He is the spirit that possessed Laura's father Leland, who welcomed his presence when he was a child.

[2] There are two other versions of him: artificial doubles, or "tulpas," manufactured by the supernatural technology, which include the aforementioned Dougie Jones, a sleazy insurance salesman, petty gambler, thief and adulterer, and another one who takes Dougie's former place, this time as the caring husband and father of the Jones family.

[3] I would like to add he is not the only character in touch with his intuition and feelings: similarly defined are also some of the *Twin Peaks* women and men (Sarah Palmer /Grace Zabriskie/, Maddy Ferguson /Sheryl Lee/, Andy Brennan /Harry Goaz/, etc.), which contributes to the overall unconventionality of the original *Twin Peaks*.

[4] Memorable is his remark that he does what he wants: "Want, not need. I don't need anything." (Part 2)

[5] Mark Frost confirmed that in an interview for *Empire Magazine*, quoted in "Twin Peaks Finale Partly Explained By Mark Frost" (2017).

[6] For further reading, see Loncar (2018).