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**IN DREAMS -  
AN ANALYSIS OF BLUE VELVET  
WITH REFERENCE TO BELLE DE JOUR**

**BY**

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## CONTENTS

Description	Page No.
Acknowledgements	2
Synopsis of <u>Blue Velvet</u>	4
Synopsis of <u>Belle de Jour</u>	5
Introduction	6
Chapter 1 Stylistic Patterns	7
Chapter 2 Fantasies and Social Boundaries	15
Chapter 3 The gaze and gender typing	21
Chapter 4 Women	24
Conclusion	27
Footnotes	28
Bibliography	31

## SYNOPSIS OF BLUE VELVET

Lumberton, U.S.A. Tom Beaumont collapses while watering his garden. Returning from the hospital, his son Jeffrey finds a severed human ear which he dutifully delivers to Detective Williams, who later tries to curb Jeffrey's curiosity about his mysterious discovery. Williams' daughter Sandy, however, tells Jeffrey about a night-club singer, Dorothy Vallens, who is connected in some way with her father's investigations. Intrigued, Jeffrey tricks his way into Dorothy's apartment and steals her keys. That night, after watching Dorothy perform "Blue Velvet" at the Show Club (where she is known as "The Blue Lady"), Jeffrey enters her apartment. Failing to hear Sandy's warning signal, he hides in a closet on Dorothy's return and watches her undress. She finds him and threatens him with a knife, forcing him to undress and making erotic advances. Jeffrey hides again in the closet when the acutely disturbed Frank Booth arrives, and sees Dorothy being sexually humiliated and violently abused; Booth, Jeffrey suspects, is holding hostage Dorothy's husband Don - whose ear he has cut off - and her child. Frank leaves and Jeffrey consoles Dorothy, but refuses when she asks him to hit her. After discussing these events with Sandy, Jeffrey visits Dorothy again. He also follows Frank from the Show Club to a deserted industrial area, and sees two of Frank's associates, including a man in a yellow jacket, near the scene of a drug-related murder. When Sandy rejects his advances, Jeffrey returns to Dorothy and indulges her masochistic desires. Frank arrives and takes Jeffrey and Dorothy on a violent joyride to the place where her son is apparently being held, before beating Jeffrey up. Taking Sandy's advice, Jeffrey reports his discoveries to Williams, although he realises that the man in the yellow jacket is in fact Williams' partner. Jeffrey and Sandy declare their love for each other at a party, and Jeffrey is subsequently threatened by Mike, Sandy's boyfriend. Dorothy then appears naked in the street, having been beaten by Frank. After delivering Dorothy to safety and gaining Sandy's forgiveness, Jeffrey goes to Dorothy's apartment, where he finds the bodies of her husband and the man in the yellow jacket. Frank returns to the apartment to kill Jeffrey, but the latter, once more hidden in the closet, shoots him dead ... Jeffrey awakens in his garden, as Sandy calls him in to lunch; his father, now recovered, chats to Detective Williams; Dorothy embraces her son. (1)



## SYNOPSIS OF SYNOPSIS OF BELLE DE JOUR

Severine (Catherine Deneuve) is married to Pierre, a young doctor who is not merely successful, but handsome, loving, considerate. Her frigidity pains him, but hardly ruffles the surface of his goodness. The film begins in the middle of a frequent daydream of Severine's, in which Pierre punishes her by having her dragged from a carriage, tied, gagged, flogged and raped by his obedient coachman. Later, an eerie family friend, Husson, happens to let drop the address of a clandestine brothel, to which Severine, smoothly encouraged by its young Madame, Anais, subsequently returns each afternoon, under the name of Belle de Jour. Her regulars include an ugly young thug, Marcel, who falls in love with her, and, when she's slow to elope with him, threatens to force her hand by telling Pierre. She persuades him to refrain, but he shoots her husband, crippling him for life, before being himself shot down by a passing gendarme. Severine spoonfeeds her paralysed spouse, like a good wife. But Husson mesmerises her into letting him tell Pierre the truth about her past escapade.

But after Husson's departure, Severine goes in to Pierre. His face is bedewed with tears; his hand opens, and falls back, in the conventional screen gesture for death. But abruptly he rises from his chair, miraculously cured, and ever-loving. The jingling carriage of Severine's fantasies passes under their window, empty, and, it seems, no longer needed. (2)





## INTRODUCTION

"Blue Velvet is basically a search into the unknown. In a search you find something. You begin to understand something whether it's good or bad, about yourself, and the world and that you have choices. It's a process of knowledge and experience." (3)

In this thesis, I will primarily discuss Blue Velvet by David Lynch, and I will use Belle de Jour by Bunuel as a comparison vis-a-vis stylistic points and development of the characters involved.

While both are narratives they are an exploration of social controls. They confront those areas, namely thoughts and desires, that words cannot reach. Through fantasy in both movies, we see a development of women who are trapped, beyond torment and obsession. Though both follow the paths of obsession and erotic desire, they do so in very different manners. Bunuel suggests erotic fantasies by inference and innuendo, and therefore does not shock the audience, he allows the viewers use their own imagination to shock themselves. David Lynch does not allow as much room for the imagination but rather confronts the audience with the actualities of the characters sexually explicit fantasies.

As the narrative of Blue Velvet begins, we are given an indication of the beast that can come alive in even the most subdued person, through the confrontation of one's ideals. We can be but passive observers to this idyllic fairy tale of life that evolves into a firm reality of modern day living. As the radio announcer cries "Get those chain saws out" (4), the atmosphere is set for the confrontations that the characters will face in the duration of the movie.





## CHAPTER ONE

### STYLISTIC PATTERNS

I feel it necessary to place both movies into their specific stylistic categories before commenting on other aspects of their structure. It must be noted that both movies have a mixture of film noir and surrealism. However, while Blue Velvet relies heavily upon film noir and post modernism, Belle de Jour is shot from a surrealist angle.

Part of the complexity of Blue Velvet is that it contains a variety of stylistic elements as regards genres. As well as being overtly film noir, surrealism is suggested, and it also has post modernism at the core.

"The post-modern would be that ..... which searches for new presentations in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable." (5)

In discussing post-modernism, I will refer mainly to the conditions discussed by Denzin (6) in his piece on the subject. Those being, firstly, the facement of the boundaries between past and present. And, secondly, the manner in which the unrepresentable is presented humorously, challenging the boundaries that separate public and private. Before I discuss what effect this has on the movie, I will mention how it is entailed in the film.

Blue Velvet, as a whole, creates a time warp; it plays on the relevance of time in our lives. In Dorothy's apartment, it could be any time of day or night. The incidents in the film could be taking place at any time. It is impossible to know the time span of anything, and everything is like a dream. As we enter the ear, the dream becomes our reality; it is only through us that the narrative being told can make sense. It challenges the boundaries of that ordinarily private and public life. From the safety of our own private safe lives, we enter one full of sexual violence, sado-masochism, homosexuality, insanity and so on, that normally are preferred to be unseen. These 'Leapers' of society now become part of the public life: things that are left both unspoken and unseen are now brought out to be part of the 'norm'. This moreover relies on the idea of freedom of expression.

War is waged on the nostalgic impression of small town America where such actions and ideas have no conventional place. It demands attention to be paid to the idea of things that are simultaneously safe and unsafe. Time is used in a manner that leaves us with a movie that is of universal time. Cars, fashions and music span an era from the 50's to the 80's without difficulty. We do not only have the problem of not knowing the time span of the actions, but there is also a feeling of insecurity about when they happened. As Jeffrey walks down the street, the man with the dog is motionless, as if time were standing still around Jeffrey, and again later when Jeffrey finds the dead bodies in the apartment, they stand like statues. The mood that is created encourages the dreamlike quality of the film.

Women and the way in which they are treated also creates this aura; the treatment of women in this disrespectful manner is also a surrealist quality. They are like virtuous women of the fifties who are treated like sex objects of the eighties. There are no rules governing behaviour, nor limits on what is permitted. The feeling of confusion is overpowering as we slide through time, rendering it impossible to tell what is real and what is not. It becomes a dreamlike fantasy, a fairy tale, strengthening the point that we could be anywhere in time, eg. in anyone's neighbourhood. It is a black fairy tale with a confused prince, a queen that is no more than a vehicle for the sexual experience of others, and an evil lord from the warped land that everyone tried to forget.

Denzin epitomises the essence of Blue Velvet as he draws a comparison to Bosch, as both "deliberately show the unrepresentable to make a point about human values." (7) Although unnerving to view, it is essential that it is seen. The response evinced is the desire to see evil, while at the same time being repulsed by it.

The movie is a schizophrenic parody of a post-modernist tale. Realisms are disconnected and don't fully follow on from the initial story. Reality breaks down almost as soon as it is set. As the movie creates realistic situations, we are continually thrown into unreal, dreamlike sequences, back and forth.

I will now focus my attention on film noir and its connection to Blue Velvet as a mood in the movie, and also the manner in which its stylistic points help to develop the movie. I will take the following features of film noir identified by E. Ann Kaplan (8), as my basis for discussing film noir in relation to Blue Velvet.



- Investigative structure
- Flashback
- Proliferation of points of view
- Unstable characterisation of heroine
- 'Expressionist' visual style and emphasis on sexuality in the photographing of women.

As a 'classic' film noir, it is the male hero who is in search of the truth about an event that either has already happened or is about to be finished. In the case of Blue Velvet, the event has both happened, is happening and would continue to happen if Jeffrey had not stumbled across the situation.

"There are opportunities in life of gaining knowledge and experience, imaging what you could learn if you got into her apartment." (9)

In this sequence Jeffrey explains his motives for becoming involved in the investigation, and we realise that it is like film noir in this manner, as his reasons are purely selfish, ie. he investigates for his own pleasure. We also see that he sees the situation as being just a mystery, and that his infatuation with it is primarily because of his love of mysteries. An aspect of film noir is that the male initiates action, and consequently, the plot. For example, the underhanded actions of males, the yellow man, Frank and Ben are all involved in both the drug scam and Dorothy's predicament. The violence in the film is conducted and perpetrated by males.

Flashbacks and voice-overs are not as apparent in the movie, and where they appear, they are used in a more post-modern manner and as a memory aid, for instance, as the well dressed man walks up the stairs, we see a flashback of where we previously saw him.

We also see flashbacks introduced in order to point to the direct association of Frank turning into a monster in slow motion, and later on we see Jeffrey becoming the same. "We're very alike" (10). Though not a flashback in cinematic terms, it is a flashback to the viewer as an association device.



Through the use of voyeuristic devices, it is unavoidable that sympathies and points of view vary. As the investigation continues, it becomes more obvious that sympathies and the viewers outlook towards the characters are extremely varied. On one hand, it could be said that Dorothy is purely the victim of Frank's violence, but on the other hand, she is also the controller of the situation with Jeffrey and controller of the pleasure. Though Jeffrey is the investigator and partakes in the 'investigations' freely, he also loses his childlike innocence, never to return. It is also possible to feel quite sympathetic towards Frank, as he is what he is through (possibly) a lack of love. It is therefore this proliferation of view points that leads to the unstable characterisations of the hero/heroine.

The visual style of Blue Velvet owes greatly to both post-modernism and film noir. As the film begins, it is more film noir that sets the ambience as the music begins. The music at this point has a thriller-like, mysterious note to it; it could be an opening sound track of any film noir movie. The soundtrack of the film as a whole also has film noir undertones to it. As in Gilda, where "Blame it on the Mame" has connotations to it, "Love Letters" and of course "Blue Velvet" also have ulterior meanings. Through the song "In Dreams", we see that Frank does indeed live in dreams, and adds to the theory that the main portion of the film is indeed a dream.

"In dreams I walk with you  
In dreams I talk with you  
In dreams, you're mine all the time". (11)

When singing these lines along with his 'friend' Ben, it is these words which drive him crazy, as it is only in his dream state that Dorothy can truly be his love, and that love can be his all the time. With reference to Frank's threat towards Jeffrey to send him a 'love letter' (ie. a bullet), the song "Love Letters" appears, and Jeffrey believes that Frank is indeed receiving his letter. "Blue Velvet", of course, not only lends its name to the movie, but also has visual associations in the movie, such as the Blue Lady and pieces of blue velvet in Frank's mouth as a sex toy and so on.

Televisions in film also reflect what is happening in the movie. In one of the first sequences in the film we see the gun shot on the television, just as Jeffrey's father has the heart attack. Further on in the film we see stairs reflected in the actions of characters. Other visual references take place to give an idea of what is to follow, for instance, the curtains in Dorothy's apartment blow in the wind preceding sexual intercourse (a surrealist feature). The use of candlelight is also important. As the church candle flickers, the fire roars as the beast becomes alive in both Jeffrey and Frank.

There are also verbal associations as Frank refers again and again to the fact that it is now dark, signifying that it is now time to play. This type of feature is attached again to the concept of the 'neighbourhood'. As Jeffrey's mother asks him not to go near 'Lincoln', he disobeys her when he visits Dorothy, the evil that is so close to home. Later as an explanation of who Jeffrey is, Dorothy tells Frank that he's just from the neighbourhood.

Another inherent part of film noir concerns the framing of shots where female characters are in question. It is used in a lavish manner in the film. "Sandy" is always shown in soft diffused lighting, cast in shadows at times, personifying the fact that she is 'the beauty'. It is Dorothy Vallens who is shot as the traditional temptress as we see her face cut in many shots, ie. angled shots of her lips close up, and her hands clawing at the carpet. Unlike noir, she is also shown in a very unflattering manner in her nude scenes, both in the apartment and outside Jeffrey's house.

One of the more original uses of framing takes place at 'This is it' - Ben's place, as the shots are set up using a wide angled lens in the form of a wedding photograph. Attention is then focused on the "wedding couple" in the middle - Frank and Dorothy, although she does not wear the virgin white. This use of framing also reaffirms the "family" feeling of the group involved, which could be seen as a fetishist cubist statement.



As with the previous cinematic types which I have discussed, I shall use preset features on which to base my discussion. I shall use these features in relation to Belle de Jour as I feel that, just as the previous styles were relevant to Blue Velvet, surrealism is predominantly the style of Belle de Jour. As said by Gould, "Surrealism is everything for everyone to discover". (12)

In this section, I will refer to features of surrealism as mentioned by Barbara Rose (13) in her piece on Surrealism, these being:

- The attack against the Bourgeois society and transvaluation of values in the classes.
- Eroticism being a liberating force.
- Freudian influences.
- Women being portrayed as sex objects or dolls.
- Juxtapositions, that go past the literal through metaphors.

In Belle de Jour, Bunuel attacks Bourgeois society and accuses it of creating sterile marriages, people devoid of imagination and a group that lacks morals. Pierre explains to Severine that men of that status would not dream of acting so 'improperly' with a girl of their class, but would preferably pay a girl of a lower class for their sexual pleasure. To keep up appearances of being 'proper', they would rather live in 'Victorian' type marriages, than break the bonds of repression.

As a direct result of the Bourgeois society, Severine's need to become more sexually expressive is aroused. As Severine is tied by bonds that dictates the society in which she lives, earlier sexual activities, no doubt caused by a member of that society, enter her mind through her sexually explicit dreams, and she begins her quest for sexual liberation. Through the dreamlike sequences of the movie, it becomes apparent that her dreams are not secondary to the action, but are rather the actual reality of her fantasies. It is through her that the 'fidelity', the spirit of surrealism, becomes evident in the movie. In a Hitchcockian sense, she has strayed into a neighbouring universe, that being so far removed from her own that her inhibitions have disappeared. Her exploits provide contrasts between "the dark world of sexuality that lies outside her social and emotional experience." (14)

Typical Freudian associations are dispersed throughout the movie, and strengthen the typical iconography inherent in surrealism. As Severine expresses her fantasies via her dreams, Freudian associations go further to make these dreams more applicable to her fantasies. In her dream, she is tied to a phallic tree and is whipped repeatedly by one of her clients, and her mouth is gagged.

Later in the sequence with the bulls, she is again tied, and would appear to be the Virgin princess bound against her will. Ironically these are her fantasies. The associations with the duel sequence are a paradox with the ideas that were previously made. The guns and whips that were used as phallic symbols affirming Severine's fantasies, are now associated more with sexual guilt than pleasure. As Bunuel's use of stairs are expressed in a Freudian manner in Belle de Jour, they are used in a similar manner in Blue Velvet. Just as Severine climbs the stairs towards sexual liberation, Jeffrey climbs to receive sexual knowledge.

During the course of the movie, the use of metaphors and other "free associations" are apparent. One of the most prominent association points in Belle de Jour is that of the 'Bells'. During the course of the film, it is used as a precursor to Severine's sexual fantasies, whether it be in action or dreams. They herald her coach dreams, her sexual activities with some of her clients, and also, through the use of the coach, the dissipation of her erotic activities. The film also makes references to cats which lend themselves to many interpretations. They may refer to "cats of nine tails", ie. whips, but it also suggests fetishes that correspond to the sequences in which they take place, eg. during the morbid ritual with the Duke, his 'help', who coincidentally was one of the coach drivers in Severine's dream, inquires if the Duke wishes the cats to be present. "Don't let the cats in" (15)

There is also a visual relationship involving Severine's shoes in the movie. As she climbs the Freudian stairs towards liberation, there is much attention paid to her demure patent shoes and again when she is mid-passion with Marcel. It is only later when she has been ridden of her masochistic fantasies that she acquires a new pair of shoes, that are considerably more risqué than her previous choice, that their significance is seen. Previously her shoes were a metaphor for her repressed emotions and later they symbolise her new persona that involves the joining of the two currents of her double lives, that being love and pleasure.

Another element of this film, which is one that could also be confused as being film noir, is that of framing. Where David Lynch's use of 'framing', ie. shots of specific parts of the body, is in film noir style, Bunuel's use of this cinematic feature is directly associated with cubist theories. As hands, feet, shoes and stockings are framed in a manner that they are disassociated from the body that they belong to, they are more a comment on fetishist desires, eg. as Severine rubs her hand across Marcel's scar on his back. It is an erotic suggestion rather than an insight into the female character, eg. in Blue Velvet the framing of Dorothy's lips is a suggestion of the pleasure which she gains from the masochistic action.





As in keeping with surrealist ideals as regards how women are portrayed, women are idealised as sex objects, mannequins or little girls. In this context both directors have categorised their characters into one of two of these categories. Dorothy being a sex object, Sandy being a 'little girl', Severine being both.

## CHAPTER 2

### FANTASIES AND SOCIAL BOUNDARIES

The world of fantasy is located exclusively within the domain of opposition, between subjective and objective, between inner world, where satisfaction is obtained through illusion, and an external world which gradually, through the medium of perception, asserts the supremacy of the reality principle.

The sequence of the ear tunnel in the movie is the point at which the journey to our subconscious desires commences. The viewer, like Jeffrey, enters this world in apprehension of what will be seen, but more importantly, what will be experienced.

One of Freud's theories on sexuality and fantasy explains how fantasy is transferred into sexual action. "Repetition compulsion" is how the repetition of an action which leads to displeasure would eventually lead to an ultimate pleasure through mastery of the action. (16) It is a more roundabout path to pleasure than the primary more commonly used route, ie. that of instant libidinal gratification but eventually, through much displeasure, a more substantial sexual gratification and pleasure will be achieved. It is this road that the 'Blue Lady' has followed (though not necessarily by choice). Though the acts of violence that she is subjected to are both disturbing and painful, they are now part of her sexual pattern. These acts are now pleasurable to her, and this is the most disturbing aspect of her sexual pattern to both the viewer and Jeffrey.

By reference to these theories, it is easier to comprehend Dorothy's reaction to Frank's action. Though the secondary action is thought to be to the advantage of the persecutor it is the person in the more passive position who receives the more substantial pleasure. Though Frank would appear to be the centre of attention, it is rather Dorothy who controls the situation, as regards the control of ultimate pleasure. It is the passive subject (Dorothy in this case) who achieves a mastery of the act, and therefore the higher level of pleasure.

Through the narrative of Belle de Jour, it is obvious that Pierre is the one who adopts the primary path to pleasure, though unlike Jeffrey he does not deviate. Severine takes the secondary path, and like Dorothy, she takes this path through being acclimatised to it by abuse. She is however, unlike Dorothy, only capable of masochistic action, and shows disgust towards both her male counterpart (the gynaecologist) and her co-worker for being the more active object in the scenario. While Severine cannot connect love and pleasure, Dorothy confuses both.

As Dorothy cries: "I love you, love me" (17), she is confusing her love for Jeffrey with their sexual affair. Severine in her soliloquy to Pierre separates these two aspects of love.

"What I feel for you has nothing to do with pleasure, it's much more than that, I don't expect you to believe me but I've never felt so close to you." (18)

As she experiences more masochistic sexual pleasure everyday, she finds that her love for her husband grows stronger. Dorothy's love of sado-masochism grows stronger, as it is experienced on a regular basis. Severine, is in contrast, ridding herself of her masochistic desires by using her job as an outlet. As the final carriage passes by the window, she has her freedom, though this is more like a fantasy, as she is engulfed in Dream. Her masochistic fantasies have been exorcised through her activities with Marcel.

In discussing fantasy it is imperative that there is admission of its existence. It is also important to realise that fantasy through dreams can be deceptive. It is often preferable to take these dreams at their literal sense, rather than delve for the underlying meanings. The reality of these dreams are actually thoughts. These can be transcended into physical actions through our external influence. But it is the sensations from these thoughts that become the 'quest' in the external world. It is therefore not the dream that is the fantasy but the underlying meaning in the dream, eg. sensation rather than the process.

Though Severine has admitted her fantasies to both herself and her husband (though we don't know to what extent), it is only when she commences work that she has fully admitted her fantasies. The use of the 'Dream' in Belle de Jour gives us an insight into Severine, but is also a large portion of the storyline.

Durgnat suggests that the major part of the movie could be a dream and that Severine's development as a character was just a dream. (19) Usually dreams are an account of a secondary action, in this case they are reality. As the film begins, the first sequence is a dream, and indicates the reality of Severine's fantasy. She experiences both horror and ecstasy as she is humiliated, whipped and raped, upon the orders of her loving husband. This dream is repeated as she is again tied in a phallic manner in the bull sequence. In this sequence, we can observe the religious aspect to her guilt, as she wears virgin white and is mocked. Severine is not a hypocrite in her guilt (she does not accept the Body of Christ in one of her flashbacks and feels the guilt of her purity as she wears white).



Frank's fantasies lie, not only in sadomasochistic pleasures, but also through 'role play'. The sinister manner in which Frank 'plays' his part not only reflects an insecurity on his part, but also a lacking in his life. We see Frank adopt the role of both son and father; "Baby wants to fuck" (20). He makes his role play of son more obvious than that of father. As he takes up the role of Dorothy's husband he also takes the role of Jeffrey's father. We see this through both symbolism and suggestion in the film. Both Frank and Jeffrey's fathers are seen to use breathing apparatus; Jeffrey's father in hospital, and Frank during actions of emotion. Frank is also seen as Jeffrey's mentor throughout the movie.

This role play also gives the viewer an insight into Frank. As some play nurse as a personification of lack of tenderness, (21) we see Frank creating a pseudo family as he kidnapped Dorothy's, because he lacks any form of a family structure of his own. He may have stolen both Don and Donny for the purpose of terrorising Dorothy, but in doing so he gained the subconscious lacking in his life, that being a family. I see this as being Frank's subconscious motive in his actions towards Dorothy; he strives for a family and therefore a feeling of normality. He tries to be in charge whilst fighting with himself to be part of an everyday, though parodic, family. This family as a unit is not sufficient for Frank, and he 'role plays' this desire through sexual fantasies with the Blue Lady. Through these fantasies we can observe his lackings, for instance his need for power is quite unnerving with his scissors fantasy. He has to control himself with the use of the gas mask.

His comment, "Spread your legs ..... wider" (22), is more based on insecurity, and therefore psychological trauma, than anything else. It is this trauma that is the base for the desire which causes the fantasy in this case.

Fantasies can also form as a direct reaction to an activity, which is parallel to the drive from which they emerge. As Dorothy experiences her fantasy as a direct reaction to Frank's actions, Severine's are more deep rooted in the past, shown through flashbacks to her schoolgirl times. Firstly as she is being kissed and cuddled by an older man, and secondly the guilt which she felt towards God as a result of these actions. Both actions led to certain sexual fantasies, but one being repressed for longer than the other demonstrates how repression can be a worse fate.

Auto-eroticism can only evolve from a fantasy that contains both components of a sado-masochistic relationship, ie. both subject and object. It is camouflaged by fantasy; it is the absence of substantial gratification which causes desire and therefore makes the imaginary come alive. When sexuality no longer is a part of the object, it then moves into fantasy. Satisfaction from auto-eroticism is more 'selective' (in the sense of gaining pleasure) than other sexual practices. It brings a need (by its very gratifications) for repetition, as its satisfactions are focused primarily on the mind and specific erogenous zones rather than an all over "feel good" sensation, for example when Dorothy is in bed with Jeffrey, she pays more attention to the arousal of her nipples than to the more familiar act of 'having sex'. It is realisation, development and repetition which quells the unsatisfied craving, thus forming the real fantasy.

Blue Velvet discusses contrasting levels of standards between middle and lower middle class societies, whereas Belle de Jour deals with a bourgeois society which can stray into the standards of the lower. Through the course of the film, we follow a bourgeois well cared for housewife who chooses to follow a life of disrepute in a brothel. During the time in which she follows her double life, she creates double standards which eventually collide violently as one. Her lifestyle has tailored her marriage into one of frigid love and unhappiness, where love is displayed as a peck on the cheek. They live in a lush apartment, with the most up-to-date fashions as admired by her co-workers. The splitting of standards becomes obvious as she assumes the role of prostitute cum temptress, which contrasts enormously with the relationship between the couple. Through her exploits, she reveals that she is becoming "closer and closer" (23) to her husband, but only as confidence in her sexuality grows. This confidence is a direct result of her relationship with Marcel, where love and pleasure finally collide. When asked by Marcel about her wedded relationship, she replies:

"They are two quite separate things, separate in that they are separate classes, separate standards and rules of etiquette". (24)

Severine's social standards are confused, as in one class she is 'part of the group' and in the other she is a 'pearl'. Where Blue Velvet describes the differences in two very unreal distant societies (the sickly idyllic and the horribly extreme), Belle de Jour describes that of more realistic societies and how one woman becomes part of the two. As both movies explore the differences in their respective societies, they also convey their propinquity. In the opening sequence of Blue Velvet, small town Lumberton is shown in all its sweetness; the image is then switched as we are shown how close the other side of society can be.



Throughout the movie, as we follow Jeffrey's movements, we observe how these societies are intertwined. As the mechanical robin appears, it is obvious that the levels of behaviour that are accepted will remain static, as 'good' and 'evil' will always be interwoven. In Belle de Jour, it is Severine, like Jeffrey, who connects both sides of her society, but it is also via other members of this society that it will remain stagnant.

Fantasy is an emotion that is frequently repressed in life. (25) Boundaries which are set in society act like barriers, beyond which fantasy does not exist. It is one of Freud's theories that repressed fantasies are the cause of all anxiety. This is echoed in the development of Severine's character as she evolves from a frigid, innocent angel into a more confident person at the end of the film. She, like Jeffrey, laid herself open to moral dilemmas when she stepped beyond the boundary of what was already common to her. If dreams and fantasies became reality, there would not be such a surplus of repressed energy. Before these emotions can become reality, it is necessary to realise what the essence of these fantasies are.

This is the dilemma which creates half of Jeffrey's investigative problems. He yearns 'to solve the case' but during his enquiries into the case, he ends up asking questions of himself, his sexuality and his fantasies. He lays himself open to moral confusion when he follows the Blue Lady, and becomes intrigued and wants to know more.

"There are opportunities in life gaining knowledge and experience;  
imagine what you could learn if you could get into her apartment"  
(26)

On their first meeting, Jeffrey not only becomes aware of the fate of Dorothy Vallens, but also of the sexual horrors that are inherent in her life. Jeffrey then has the chance to partake in this unusual style of pleasure. He does so - first with resistance as he refuses to hit her, but also with enjoyment, as he tells Dorothy that he did 'like' it. As Dorothy demands physical violence from Jeffrey, he feels that he has crossed his limit. He leaves the apartment and experiences nightmares, but return later on. He is not forced to return, but goes back to experience what is next. Upon the next meeting, Dorothy repeats her demands for physical violence, as she asks Jeffrey "Are you a bad boy" (27), at which point he succumbs. It is at only then that Jeffrey can begin to decide what his destiny will be. His nightmares and conscience have now told him that he must make a decision.

Being confronted with these fantasies was a shock to Jeffrey visually. The idea of wanting to partake in these fantasies was also obviously distressing to him. The energy that was blocked inside of Jeffrey, was then released to create a whirlwind of emotion. When Jeffrey entered a fantasy land, he realised that there was to be no point of return. Though he may try, he cannot go backwards and return to his state of ignorance. His dilemma is not taken lightly, and he feels compelled to help Dorothy, whilst knowing that he must save his soul. He becomes involved with Sandy, who is the good angel of his conscience. As in a film noir, it is a struggle between the two worlds of good and evil; essentially the two ladies.

As Sandy's dream of the love robins filling the world would seem to miraculously come true at the end, its sinister side is made apparent. Just as the robins brought a "blinding light of love (28), Jeffrey was swallowed by it (this is more in a visual sense as we see Jeffrey walk into a blinding light). It was not love but realisation of truth. The humorous mechanical robin, which brought so much joy to Sandy, with the insect in its mouth, is a personification of the fact that there is no true "love without evil". Ambiguous as the end of Blue Velvet maybe, Belle de Jour ends with a dream within a dream. As the movie would appear to end in Severine's idyllic fantasy where both love and pleasure would finally become one, a sinister mood is also created as the carriage goes by empty. It suggests that not only are her masochistic dreams consummated, and therefore her fetish gone. The morbid quality of a funeral coach, void of passengers, manifests the idea that the sequence is indeed as false a fantasy as Sandy's robins.



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE GAZE AND GENDER TYPING

"The voyeur represents in space the fracture which forever separates him from the object; he represents his very dissatisfaction (which is precisely what he needs as a voyeur), and thus also his 'satisfaction' in so far as it is of a specifically voyeuristic type. To fill in, this distance would threaten to overwhelm the subject." (29)

'The Gaze' - is a power of being in control of sexuality. It mobilises and positions the spectator in the angle that it wants both the viewpoints and sympathies to lie at. Through the voyeuristic experience of being in the auditorium, the moving images make the cinematic experience closer to the dream state than is possible through other forms. In Blue Velvet, we experience intricate 'gaze swapping' between the characters, and also the spectators and the characters.

It is the apartment scene that provides us with the best opportunity to witness this situation. Jeffrey controls the gaze for the most part, but primarily when he is peeping through the closet doors. He is in control, as Dorothy doesn't even know of his existence at this point. But as soon as Dorothy realises that he is there, she then steals the gaze. She makes him undress by knife point, and gives him sexual pleasure, whilst not allowing him either to touch her or look at her, she is the controller of the gaze at this point. This denial of 'looking' is a power which is then repeated soon afterwards. The gaze again shifts as Frank enters and forces intercourse on Dorothy. Just as she denied Jeffrey to look, she is denied to look at or even touch Frank. It is during this action that a further shift in power takes place. Dorothy steals the gaze, as we observe the pleasure which she gains from the action. Even though it is Frank who would seem to be in control, Dorothy is in control of both the gaze and the pleasure. In Belle de Jour, Severine is primarily the main holder of the gaze, as it is through her viewpoint alone that the story evolves.

The control of gazes also has associations with the primal scene and other 'oedipal aspects'. We first experience the oedipal aspect of the story when Jeffrey's father become ill and goes to hospital. We see his position taken up by others in the duration of the movie.

During the apartment scene, we see a variety of roles being adopted by the characters involved. As Dorothy tells Frank: "Mummy loves you" (30), she assumes the role of 'mother both in this case, and in other scenarios. Frank is therefore son as he cries: "Baby wants to fuck" (31). We then see Frank being likened to Jeffrey's father by his use of breathing apparatus, and also, as Jeffrey appears to be the child in the closet peeping at his parents, taking in what will be his future sexual fantasies. There is a visual connection between Dorothy's apartment and her role as 'Mommy', as it has womb-like qualities, as regards its colour pattern and layout. This promotes her role of 'Mommy'. Later when she appears naked and battered at Jeffrey's house, Mike inquires of Jeffrey "Is that your mother", (32) the concept of Dorothy's motherhood is again augmented. The manner in which these scenarios appear in the movie, set up false identities for the characters and allow the film to become the epitome of a primal scene.

In Belle de Jour there is no main contradiction in gender roles, but rather in the roles in sexual perversion, which is in contrast to Blue Velvet as the traditional roles taken by the sexes, are switched around. Though these roles in the film are filled by the 'correct' (ie. traditional) gender, eg. police positions are filled by males, doctors are male, men work in the hardware store and so on, these positions are seen to waver. Jeffrey's position is unclear at regular intervals. On numerous occasions we see Sandy driving the car for Jeffrey (not as tradition would dictate). We see Jeffrey trying to be the omniscient being towards Sandy, giving scorn at the fact that she drinks 'the king of beers' (Budweiser) rather than Heineken, but further on in the film, he is jeered by Frank for not drinking "Pabst Blue Ribbon". As far as Sandy is concerned, Jeffrey is the hero, but in relation to the rest of the characters, he is both ridiculed and shamed. As Dorothy controls his sexual explorations, making him the pupil and she the teacher, as she asks: "Are you a bad boy" (33), he then falls in with her pattern and strikes her, making him a monster just like Frank. Frank continues to make him into the weak boy as he beats Jeffrey up at the lumber mills.

It is during this scene and its precursor that gender roles are also mixed. Ben is the host of the party at "This is it". Genetically male, he wears jewellery and make-up, he dresses in feminine manner and lives with women, but he is masculine enough to toast: "Here's to your fuck - Frank" (34), and then to punch Jeffrey in the stomach. He becomes the entertainer as he mimes to "In Dreams" (35), which is sung by a man. ("Candy Coloured Clown (36) could also be a description of Ben). At this point, the film cuts to Frank professing that he will "fuck anything that moves" (37), he magically disappears.



During the next "performance" of "In Dreams" when Jeffrey is beaten up, Frank smears lipstick over both himself and Jeffrey; symbolically they are now both female. It is important to note, that even though Frank says that he will "fuck anything that moves" (38), his first choice was Dorothy (only after everyone disappeared; probably to avoid moving), and secondly Jeffrey, but only after smothering him with lipstick as he obviously prefers a female partner. It is also apparent that Frank may have had a "relationship" with Ben, as Ben may have been toasting himself, "to Frank's fuck" (39).

Belle de Jour focuses its attentions more on the switching of roles concerned with sexual deviance rather than gender roles. During the course of the movie, we see both genders take up the masochistic role during their expression of fetishes, ie. both Severine and the gynaecologist adopt the same sexual role and therefore share the same gender role. There is only one main instance where any of the roles are really questioned in the movie. During the Dream sequence in the restaurant, scorn is focused on Pierre. As his wife is beneath the table with Husson, engaged in an action which resonates previous action at the Dukes house, he acts ignorant and is ridiculed as he tries to "remain a gentleman."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### WOMEN

The importance of women is inherent of both of the film's patterns. As before, I will primarily deal with Blue Velvet, and how women are dealt with in that movie, and follow with a discussion on the relevance of Severine in Belle de Jour in relation to the afore mentioned characters.

Primarily we see Jeffrey as being the main character who ties the whole story together, and it could be said that part of the main story line is Jeffrey's self investigation and how the female characters in the movie aid his development.

The first main female character that we are introduced to is Sandy. She is the figure who primarily aids Jeffrey with his investigation of the severed ear. Though giving him the raw material to start his investigation, she is the passive partner in the detective duo. She prefers to assume the safer role in their adventures. She is the innocent figure who aids Jeffrey with moral support rather than anything else. She laughs at his 'chicken walk', even though it isn't mildly funny. It is she, who, before Jeffrey, realised that the motives behind his exploits were confused. "I don't know if you're a detective or a pervert" (40)

Further on we realise that he is as much one as the other. She acts the mother as she tries to do her best, by understanding Jeffrey and what is going on. She behaves like the all knowing person, when in fact she is probably the least worldly wise of them all, as her vision of the future simply encompasses robins as a panacea for world tranquillity. Throughout the film we never really get to know Sandy, and as the film draws to a close, she remains a mystery. She is so blind that she cannot see what is in front of her. She knows deep down that Jeffrey was seeing Dorothy, but fools herself into believing that he still loves her. The idea of unrequited love would be too much, so instead she prefers to believe he never deviated from her love at all. She then becomes ecstatic at the sight of a mechanical robin, as that is the sign that the world is angelically innocent, pure and above all, fit for the perfect family to inhabit.

Dorothy Vallens, the Blue Lady, is the other female character in the movie. She is the Blue Lady, nightclub singer, mother, victim and mentor. Both investigations in the movie revolve around her. The severed ear, belonging to her husband, leads Jeffrey to her. It is during his investigation and the circumstances that surrounded it that Dorothy becomes a sexual mentor for Jeffrey.



She is a princess trapped in the tower by the evil lord. She is the object of desire in many ways; as she sings alias the Blue Lady, the audience (including Jeffrey) admire her. Frank also 'desires' her, as both his partner and mother. It is unavoidable when speaking about Dorothy, not to mention Frank. As David Lynch said himself, "Blue Velvet is a 'love story'." (41) Unbelievable as it may seem, Frank is indeed enamoured with Dorothy. The manner in which this love is professed is both disturbing and unusual, but his love for Dorothy is simple. He wants her all to himself, but to do this he must alienate her from her already existing family. She is the strong female in the movie, the one who controls the gazes, gains the pleasure, and makes sense of the disorder.

The life of Dorothy Vallens is one that would be a continuous nightmare for most. She, through her very being, shows how it is possible to live beyond the boundaries and how those very boundaries can be her new construction of life. She was forced to take the Freudian secondary path to sexual gratification and thus gained a more substantial pleasure. Through obviously repeated role playing, she mastered the action and subsequently changed roles from subject to object. It is she who gained the ultimate pleasure rather than Frank who would have been originally in control of the action. The normality of this action is obviously distressing to Dorothy, and she uses Jeffrey as a test for her insecurity. She inflicts actions comparable to Frank's onto Jeffrey, and as a result of this he becomes the subject and the pupil. He also uses her as a vehicle for his benefit and sexual education. From his point of view, this is true, but from hers, she is gaining power through violence that is abundant in her life. She is the victim cum victor, Frank is the persecutor cum pathetic psychopath.

"People get into all sorts of strange situations, and you can't believe they're enjoying it, but they are. And they could get out of it, but they don't. And there are lots of reasons for it". (42)

Many may see Dorothy as being in turmoil over her sexuality, as she seems to have quite masculine qualities. Some may see this as being quite an incoherent quality in her character, but I believe quite the contrary. Through her feminine qualities she experiences strange sexual activity with Frank. It is through these experiences that she gains these masculine qualities, controlling the male gaze, and being the persecutor of strange actions on Jeffrey. Thus it is through necessity that she gains these more masculine qualities.

It is through her that the conflict of order and disorder become more apparent. She broke through the boundaries, went beyond the limits, and lingered there for a while. It is important to note that in the end she chose to revert back to an earlier way of life but one must recognise that we do not know what sexual pattern she will follow in the future.

Both movies differ in many ways, but mainly in the fact that it is the female character Severine who is the only main character in Belle de Jour since the whole story revolves around her.

She can be seen as the entanglement of features of both mentioned characters of Blue Velvet. Through her 'double life' she is both angelic Sandy and seductive Dorothy. She is likened to "an innocent child" as she seems to be shocked by the idea as a member of the bourgeois society of being a prostitute; but she then becomes the temptress in the Brothel and, like Dorothy, is held in much admiration as she is described as 'a pearl'. (43) Her early childhood haunts her, and she blames her earlier abuse for her loss of innocence and her guilt towards God. As with many of Bunuel's female characters, she is

"a person inhibited by a constricting sense of conventional morality, yet someone who is simultaneously attracted, in a very human way, by the very things that cause her guilt". (44)

As her dreams haunt her, there is a parity between her reality and her dreams. We see her stand with an expression of fear, and nonchalance on her face as she is treated with force in the Brothel, while at the same time makes it obvious that this is how she wanted to be treated.

She is like a continuation of Dorothy's life (she is only Sandy in her married life, though not so frivolous), as she goes past the experience, ie. rape, and deals with it and eventually freed from her fetish hell. We can only assume that at the end of the nightmare, she reverts to a more commonly followed sexual path. We end in her dream of an idyllic life where love and pleasure are one with her husband, a life which can only exist as a dream. This, like Blue Velvet, creates a paradox as the end of both films could be seen to end happily. Just as Severine's story ends in a dream, she in reality is left with a crippled husband, with whom she can never share her now complete love with. Dorothy's story finishes as she embraces her son, her reality is that of the robin which is an evil lie to its 'perfect' image.



## CONCLUSION

As Dorothy yearns for a love and receives nothing, Severine receives an abundance of love, and ends up in the state that she cannot distinguish between them. "He put his disease in me." (45) Both ladies have been 'diseased' through no fault of their own and are forced to lead 'strange' lives in an effort to rid themselves of its effect. David Lynch and Bunuel tell the story of how these women come to terms with such a fate.

"What is love? but nature's innermost principle in action, what is innocence, but a pair of gloves to warm the hands. What is nature but love's innermost principle in action." (46)

Blue Velvet, Belle de Jour; essentially love stories, but ultimately tragedies. As the female characters in both movies end in dreams, it is obvious that nothing is resolved. Severine remains in emotional turmoil and the society in which she lives remains divided and unchanged. Dorothy's story ends in a manner that resembles Severine's beginning as her motherly role with her son commences she has to begin to come to terms with her sexual pattern. As both movies draw to their close, both relevant societies remain split. The robin epitomises the reality of this situation, that nothing is ever resolved, and evil will always remain. As the movie ends, the radio announcer could repeat his earlier statement: "Get those chain saws out" (47), for life seems trapped in a cyclical rhythm.

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