

1. The Text Devouring the Dead: Edgar Allan Poe and David Lynch's American Gothic

To understand American literature, and indeed America, one must understand the Gothic, which is, simply, the imaginative expression of the fears and forbidden desires of Americans.

Charles L. Crow, American Gothic

In a New World, built on the promise of optimism and fueled by the hope of continuous progress and prosperity, the genre of the gothic “exposes the repressed, what is hidden, unspoken, deliberately forgotten, in the lives of individuals and of cultures” (Crow, 2) and employs the cultural imaginary as a canvas for the revelation of that which remains parenthesized. Based on the precondition of an American optimism that neglects death in favor of life, it is not at all surprising that gothic tradition blossomed in an American cultural context from which authors such as Charles Brockden Brown, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, Emily Dickinson, and Edgar Allan Poe emerged, to name only a few. It appears that we find ourselves in a New World that neglects stagnation and affirms growth, given that “[i]n the United States, a belief in progress is almost an article of faith” (Crow, 2); what seems to resonate here is the looming suspicion that what was initially set out to become progressively grand might have already failed. Challenging the aforementioned American optimism with, what Crow terms, a “deeply skeptical” stance, the gothic tradition “insists that humans are flawed and capable of evil, and that the stories we tell ourselves in our history books may leave out what is most important for us to understand” (Crow, 2). In *The Puritan Way of Death*, David E. Stannard further maintains that:

Americans sought a return to their lost sense of community in the graveyard and the heavenly world of the dead; in the process, paradoxically, they effectively banished the reality of death from their lives by a spiritualistic and sentimentalized embracing of it. (12)

Death's sentimentalization finds its initial voicing in the American gothic and this provides a fruitful breeding ground for the *death paradox*, a concept which builds

upon Foucault's work and outlines the idea that language when faced with actual, abject¹ death, stagnates only to become paradoxically productive in the telling of death's aestheticized rendition.²

The flipside of American optimism, and its reluctance to admit defeat (which involves an acknowledgment of the limitations of an initial optimistic promise), culminate in the denial of an actual, abject death for which there is little room in the Promised Land. We are reminded of the epigraph, in which Charles L. Crow asserts that the gothic manifests as the "imaginative expression of the fears and forbidden desires of Americans" (1). Whereas transcendentalist tendencies highlight self-reliance, independence, and a strive to move forward, the American gothic gazes fondly at a seemingly forgotten past which is revitalized in its cultural imaginary through the gothic mode, thereby becoming the voice of an optimism rendered cruel.³ We find an obvious affinity towards death within this discourse, which lays its focus upon that which is parenthesized by a promise of optimism. In *Gothic*, Fred Botting asserts that, "[a] negative aesthetics informs gothic texts [...]. Darkness – an absence of the light associated with sense, security and knowledge – characterizes the looks, moods, atmospheres and connotations of the genre" (1). It is important to note here that it is a negative form of *aesthetics*, i.e., "a system of principles for the appreciation of the beautiful" (OED) that produces the gothic's appeal, thereby rendering pleasurable that which in actuality is negatively tainted; it is here that abject death, repudiated in its actuality, reemerges as an aesthetic in the American gothic.

The American gothic is infused with an obsessive depiction of death that is made manifest as the dark underbelly of an enlightened optimism that continuously strives to (re)create project America. It is this repetition compulsion, fueled by the *death paradox*, which ultimately develops as a serial dynamism. In order to illustrate this aspect, this chapter will focus on an exemplary selection of three short stories by Edgar Allan Poe as well as the entirety of David Lynch's television serial *Twin Peaks* alongside its reboot, *Twin Peaks: The Return*. The plethora of short stories that Poe devoted to manifold, aestheticized renditions of death speaks to the productivity that the *death paradox* sets in motion, particularly when examined against the backdrop of American optimism. Poe's short stories, while technically not devised as a serial, are independent of one another; however, they are tied together by their aesthetics of death and this becomes so overtly anthological that it reveals a repetition compulsion. Poe's short stories present, as a collection or *series* of individual pieces held together by a common theme, showcases its own

1 See Introduction for an in-depth discussion of Julia Kristeva's conceptualization of death as the abject.
 2 See Introduction for detailed explanation of what I call the *death paradox*.
 3 See Introduction regarding Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*.

potential for serial productivity in its continuous renegotiations of an aestheticized imagination of death. Anchored in the reproduction of figurations of death, these stories circle so obsessively around death that they become serial in their depiction; they serialize aestheticized renditions of death and, in their variability, illustrate the productivity that the *death paradox* harbors. It is this notion that David Lynch then explicitly reifies in staging the American gothic, fed by Poe's legacy, as a television serial in *Twin Peaks* and in *Twin Peaks: The Return*. The television show explicitly picks up on a death-as-serial content by cementing it within its episodic serial format.

The mode of the American gothic, thus, offers a manifestation of a revised conceptualization of death in which its abject actuality is superimposed by a plethora of an imaginary (un)real. The repetition compulsion that we find in the incessant circling around the aesthetics of death of Poe's stories is marked by variability. It is this mode of creation, rooted in the American gothic, that Lynch reinvigorates through the staging of seriality which is generated by the interpretability of gothic irrationalities. The supernatural undertone, which can be found throughout the works of both Poe and Lynch, serves as a way for the narrative to establish distance from the actuality of an abject death by means of the depiction of the unconscious and fantastic which is aimed at disturbing stasis, rather than establishing order. Botting claims that

[...] gothic styles disturb the borders of knowing and conjure up obscure otherworldly phenomena [...] arcane and occult forms normally characterised as delusion, apparition, deception. (2)

He makes a case for the supernatural tendencies that feed the American gothic's narratives. It is here that the aspect of artistic rendition is epitomized as a form of visualization of that which cannot be grasped otherwise: abject death.⁴ Botting further reflects on the limitless possibility of imaginations (we are reminded of Foucault's "limitless play of mirrors" which I have developed into the *death paradox*⁵) when stating that "[n]ot tied to a natural order of things as defined by realism, gothic flights of imagination suggest supernatural possibility, mystery, magic, wonder and monstrosity" (2). The gothic fixation with the irrational, which is to say with that which disturbs order, offers itself to the temporary stagnation of language when faced with the task of representing death specifically. The American gothic is rendered productive in the attempt to overcome its own stagnation, – in terms of the previously outlined *death paradox* – and tries to overcome a linguistic incapability to grasp death by means of superimposing an aestheticized death that is tainted by the supernatural. The resulting productivity manifests in a cornucopia of texts, each attempting to negotiate the absoluteness of death. It is this turn to the supernatural realm that

4 See Introduction for Wood's discussion of *taming*.

5 See Introduction for a detailed explanation of the *death paradox*.

ultimately allows for the serialized American gothic to overwrite death and to reinstate life, which will become evident in the analysis of *Twin Peaks*.

A tendency towards the serial emerges within the American gothic, which speaks to the hunger metaphor that this volume also aims to establish. It is the American gothic that whets the appetite, emphasizing the American cultural imaginary as being hungry for death.⁶ The plethora of Poe stories indicate both an aestheticized death and an insatiability for figurations of death and this seemingly limitless repetition finds its home in the same serial format that is, ultimately, found in *Twin Peaks*. Codifying insatiability towards an episodic format, in serializing the mode of the American gothic, the continuous superimposition of a subsequent episodic instance ritualizes the consumption of aestheticized images of death. It is within this ritual, the serialized narrative, that an aestheticized death resists absolution. Catering to an unwavering appetite for an aestheticized death, the serial appears to become the only appropriate format for this repetition compulsion precisely because it superimposes a continuous 'next' onto a state of pure inexistence. In the serialized American gothic, it is the text that is hungry for figurations of the dead that feed the narrative by filling the linguistic silence which otherwise would cause language to stagnate. What will become evident in the subsequent analysis is that the serialized text remains limitlessly productive against the supernatural backdrop of the American gothic where it comes as far as *devouring* the deceased and, ultimately, of reestablishing them as living.

In order to illustrate this development, this chapter opens with the analysis of three select short stories by Edgar Allan Poe; "The Fall of the House of Usher", "The Masque of the Red Death", and "Ligeia". While this selection highlights the variety of depictions of an aestheticized death, thereby serving as an exemplary topology, these three stories have further been specifically chosen in order to emphasize an ultimate passivity regarding the deadly agency which is at play in early American gothic texts. It is this form of reluctance that will come to be challenged by the episodic serialization of the American gothic text, which then allows for death to be overwritten. While Poe remains anthological, the reading of Lynch alongside Emerson's transcendentalist notion of circularity will illustrate the way in which the formally serialized gothic format becomes expansive to such an extent that it cancels itself out, which is to say that it overwrites death. This will become evident when reading David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* and its logical continuation *Twin Peaks: The Return* television serials as a direct inheritance of Poe's plethora of gothic representations of death. Contemporarily continuing the tradition of the American gothic, an analysis of David Lynch's 1990 TV series *Twin Peaks* as well as with its 2017 reboot *Twin*

6 See Introduction for an in-depth discussion of the way in which the American cultural imaginary develops the serialization of an aestheticized death in a manner that is analogous to an appetite.

Peaks: The Return will cement the argument that, ultimately, the serialized American gothic text overwrites the dead in favor of the living.

Harking back to various gothic elements, Lynch inherits and incorporates the American gothic within a serial context of contemporary tragedy that was adapted for the television screen. Unsurprisingly, the American Gothic has become a canonical genre of television, seamlessly lending itself to the hunger for the repetition of serial narration. In "Twin Peaks and the Television Gothic", Lenora Ledwon elaborates on the reconceptualization of the gothic in televised form when stating that:

[t]his new Television Gothic utilizes familiar Gothic themes and devices such as incest, the grotesque, repetition, interpolated narration, haunted settings, mirrors, doubles and supernatural occurrence [...]. (260)

It is these gothic motifs that Ledwon correctly characterizes as apt for the serialized text of television when stating that "these elements undergo a sea change once they are immersed in the "currents" of television" (260). It appears that the voices of irrationality find themselves at their most comfortable within a format of the serial by playing on the uncanny spatiality that the television obtains within the familiarity of a home. Allowing for potentially endless repetition, the serial also facilitates an endless multitude of depiction, in particular concerning the metaphorical imagination of death. With *Twin Peaks* not only re-conceptualizing the American gothic within the format of television, but also returning 25 years later as a reboot of its original we find its own potential for seriality being performed explicitly. The fact that murderous entity "Bob", ultimately, manifests specifically as a *serial killer*⁷ further reiterates the American gothic's subconscious tendency towards serialization. In *Natural Born Killers*, David Schmid highlights that:

[o]ne of the most striking features of much contemporary discourse on serial murder is the fact that the complex public reaction to the serial killer is often managed through the *language of the gothic*. [...] What can explain the prevalence of ancient gothic metaphors in making sense of a figure why is in so many ways emblematic of American modernity? (6, my emphasis)

This book develops towards an analysis of the serialized serial killer narrative; to that end it must begin here with the American gothic. It is a cruel American optimism that serves a precondition for an insatiable hunger for death, which initially emerges in the mode of the American gothic. The mode of the American gothic feeds off of a negative aestheticism that produces that repetition compulsion which continually recreates aestheticized imaginations of death and is still resonant, according to Schmid, in the language surrounding the serial killer. It is this aestheticization of

7 See also chapter 5 which explicitly focuses on the serial killer in American culture.

death in particular that becomes a catalyst for the development of the (gothic) narrative as serialized text, when viewed through the lens of the *death paradox*. Figurations of death feed the stories of Poe just as Laura Palmer's corpse feeds the narrative of *Twin Peaks*. This is, ultimately, illustrated with the final reinstatement of Palmer as living, which eliminates the progression of the narrative. It is thus that the serialized gothic text ultimately swallows and devours its own dead, reinstating them as living within the American cultural imaginary in the process.

1.1 Edgar Allan Poe – Various Figurations of the Same Death

Edgar Allan Poe's aestheticized representations of death are seminal in the development of the American gothic, but they remain at a sufficient remove from any actuality of abject death by means of othering the corpse. This form of othering marks a form of overwriting that will later develop into episodic serialized narration with *Twin Peaks*. With most of Poe's short stories bordering on the supernatural, these repeated aestheticizations of death tend to obtain a passive albeit haunting quality; murderous agency is attributed to a supernatural, spectral agency. Within the early mode of the American gothic, therefore, the confrontation with death lacks tangibility and manifests itself in abstraction through the supernatural mode, thereby crafting a significant metaphorical distance from any actual, abject death. What follows is an analysis of three exemplary short stories by Poe, all of which illustrate a different manner of aestheticizing abject death. It is this variation that also marks the productivity of the *death paradox* in gothic imagination, and on fruitful American soil in particular.

The first object of analysis, Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher", revolves around the cadaverous body's haunting quality and presents a metaphorical account of facing death that engages with fatality on an almost exclusively figurative level. The house within the story becomes a metaphorical figuration, an *aestheticization* of death, and exemplifies the repetition of the decaying body transferred to the House of Usher upon which death is written. This transference can be read as a form of repressing death by means of overwriting it. Not only is death othered, but it is furthermore ascribed to a different entity entirely: an inanimate object. The story's opening lines feed on the poetics of death that, in its sublimity, contains overtones of horror and awe as the unnamed narrator states:

[...] within view of the melancholy House of Usher. I know not how it was – but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible. (231)

The narrator, when faced with death's looming, indefinable power, is caught in a state of sublime anxiety. The picture of the house in decay puts the narrator ill at ease and, reading the House of Usher as a metaphorical corpse, this can be related to the confrontation with mortality i.e., with abject death. The house becomes emblematic of the corpse as a metaphorical repetition of death and, thus, sparks the narrator's insufferable gloom.

As the narrator continues his description, we can see echoes of the cadaverous body within the House of Usher, which is simultaneously both a crumbling mansion, serving as metaphor for the abject corpse, and a representation of the dying Usher family. Epitomized as an aestheticized figuration of death, the House of Usher emerges as a metaphorical corpse; this is evident in the narrator's description outlining human features and characteristics:

[...] I looked upon the scene before me – upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain – upon the bleak walls – upon the vacant eye-like windows – upon a few rank sedges – and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees – with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium – the bitter lapse into everyday life – the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart – an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. (231)

Death is not only aestheticized, but pushed towards an abstraction of the corpse by means of transferring the cadaverous body on the house. Death is not only euphemized in writing the cadaverous abject upon an inanimate object, but is also disarmed to a degree. This transference, then, works as a repression of abject death and, by extension, marks the manifestation of the textual productivity of a fictionalized death which, intangible by nature, is doubled or *repeated* when inscribed onto the more graspable house. The fact that the metaphorical corpse emerges as an object, rather than a subject, further creates distance between the individual and death, thereby suggesting a heightened level of aestheticization that simultaneously lends tangibility to an ungraspable death by rendering the abject pleasurable in its imagination.

The affective quality of death is also elevated to a figurative level through the story's opening lines, which mirror the narrator's unconscious fear of death which is reiterated through his anxious reaction towards the house. At the same time, the narrator speaks of the sublime and this implies both an indulgence in dangerous beauty and a fascination with that which he knows is about to come to an end. This paradoxical state of emotion, inhabiting both fear and fascination, repulsion and desire, is made even more evident in the following excerpt, which further draws on that sentiment which Sigmund Freud refers to as 'the uncanny': "[...] There can be no doubt that the consciousness of the rapid increase of my superstition [...] served mainly to accelerate the increase itself. Such, I have long known, is the paradoxical

law of all sentiments having terror as a basis" (232). This paradoxical law of sentiments with terror as a basis – a fear of death becoming the epitome of this terror – triggers the desire to abstract and textualize as a means to neglect an acknowledgment of the actuality of death. This dynamism is further illustrated in the narrator's depiction of the House of Usher in which he states that:

[...] I had so worked upon my imagination as really to believe that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity – an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn – a pestilent and mystic vapour, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued. (232 – 233)

Cloaked in a pestilent and mystic vapor, the House of Usher's cadaverous personification evokes the supernatural and this creates a distance from the abject reality of death. It is this gothic discourse that shrouds death in an air of gloom, thereby rendering it intangible in a way which allows for the othering or overwriting of death through its aestheticization. The extent of this repressive gesture is illustrated through this form of othering itself – not only is it another person and not the narrator himself undergoing death, but dying is further transferred to another object. Furthermore, the House of Usher is repeatedly connected to the aforementioned silent tarn throughout the story. Like a metaphorical inkblot, it is its black liquid which awaits to eventually engulf, which is to say, *swallow* the House of Usher. Read as a metaphor of the production of text, then, the image of ink as a form of self-referentially, hints at the notion of authorship, which not only allows for the writing of the cadaver upon the House of Usher, but ultimately also becomes that same ink that engulfs and, thus, overwrites death.

The cadaverous body's duality can be read as the euphemistic depiction of an aestheticized, abstracted version of death that is triggered by the underlying repression of its actual, abject nature. In this instant, the narrator transfers reality – the pending death of his friend Roderick Usher – to the mansion, a transference that manifests in the house becoming the metaphorical cadaverous body of the Roderick ancestry. Roderick's impending demise is written upon the House of Usher as the narrator elaborates on an omnipresent, figurative death when he laments that "I felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow. An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all" (234). The invoked metaphor serves to neglect the abject, the actual body that is in decay, through the superimposition of the actuality of death upon an inanimate other. The narrator's perception of his dying friend illustrates both his fascination with repudiating, as well as his need to repudiate, mortality because the dying evokes pity as well as awe: "I gazed upon him with a feeling half of pity, half of awe. Surely, man had never before so terribly altered, in so brief a period, as had Roderick Usher!" (234). As the narrator goes on, he claims

that Usher was suffering from “[a] cadaverousness of complexion” (234). In anticipation of death, he ascribes Roderick with the features of a cadaver, projecting the inanimate onto the (still) animate. In partly reversing the process of aestheticization, projecting the cadaverous onto the living and not vice versa, the narrator seems to facilitate Roderick’s acceptance of his eventual demise, while also superimposing the image of his own dead self onto another canvas; this is a process in which Roderick’s cadaverous complexion is reversed into the imagination of the narrator’s own demise.

However, death’s imminence, as well as the acknowledgment of its certainty which Roderick has to face, does not appear to decrease the narrator’s repression, but instead merely amplifies his fascination with it. As he copes with his own mortality reflected in (which is to say othered onto) Roderick, Roderick begins to transfer his own death onto the mansion:

He was enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted, [...] obtained over his spirit – an effect which the *physique* of the gray walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had, at length, brought about upon the *morale* of his existence. (235)

Evidently, the house not only serves as an object of transference to the narrator, but also becomes a reflective mirror for Roderick himself. As the house starts decomposing, so does Roderick’s health. As a carrier of both Usher’s legacy and the personification of the corpse, the House of Usher becomes resonant of a personal and a collective haunting of death. As Roderick’s mirror image, it stands as a manifestation of the decay of Roderick’s animated-yet-cadaverous body. Mortality ascribed to an inanimate object, then, becomes something that is ultimately uncanny and that has the ability to contain death-as-distanced-metaphor in a tangible vessel.

Finally, looking at the demise of Lady Madeline, Roderick’s sister, we see the passivity of illness overcoming life, rather than an active form of murderous agency: “[...] when, one evening, having informed me abruptly that the lady Madeline was no more, he stated his intention of preserving her corpse for a fortnight [...] in one of the numerous vaults within the main walls of the building” (240). Resonant of the *death paradox*, it is after the lady has deceased that there is a moment of preservation, a stagnating pause, performing an “entombment” (240). Becoming productive upon stagnation, Madeline’s abject corpse is henceforth elevated to a negative aesthetics, in the gothic tradition, which illustrates the corpse’s aestheticization:

The disease which had thus entombed the lady in the maturity of youth, had left, as usual in all maladies of a strictly cataleptical character, the mockery of a faint blush upon the bosom and the face, and that suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death. (240 – 241)

In its initial demise, Madeline's body is overcome by death without shedding a drop of blood. It is only in its supernatural resurrection that Madeline's corpse moves towards the abject, which is demonstrated through there being "blood upon her white robes" (245). Having transcended into the realm of inexistence, she temporarily comes back from the dead to grasp her brother when "[...] with a low moaning cry, [she] fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated" (245). In doing so, Madeline becomes the metaphorical agent of death and is empowered by her position of intangibility, which allows her to resurrect herself and to end her brother's anticipation of death. This supernatural agency illustrates Poe's portrayal of death as a euphemized version of the abject, in which an aestheticized death largely suppresses an abject death. The house repeats Madeline's and Roderick's death while marked by the dynamic of overwriting and then Madeline superimposes herself onto her brother as the agent of death. This notion is, ultimately, reiterated by the ink-like tarn that engulfs both the last remnants of the Roderick family as well as the metaphorical manifestation of their demise itself, the now *fallen* House of Usher.

Death's elevation towards an aestheticized imagination, written upon the inanimate as a metaphor, also illustrates a heightened level of textual productivity that circulates around depictions of death. Aestheticized texts depictions of death become manifold and feed the production of the American gothic and become manifest in myriad, plentiful ways, which is to say in a manner embedded in a repetition compulsion. This dynamic of repetitive, serial productivity is picked up in the story's epigraph which reads: "Son Coeur est un luth suspendu; Sitôt qu'on le touche il" (231). Inscribed with a dynamism of echoing – résonne – this prelude already hints at an inscribed repetition and, by extension, a potential endless doubling. This aspect ties back to the notion of authorship, which is implemented as the imagery of the aforementioned "black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre by the dwelling, and gazed down [...] upon the remodeled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows" (231). The allusion to black ink that is situated above that which is falling to its demise – the cadaverous House of Usher – is then eventually concluded by the engulfment of the analogous ink upon the dead as the story concludes: "and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the *House of Usher*" (254). If we accept the analogy of the ink-like tarn to textual productivity, it becomes evident that it is indeed textualization which is engulfing (and by extension overwriting) the dead. In so doing, the text is rewriting an abject death as a metaphor, which is superimposed onto the abject as one version of a multiplicity of aestheticized imaginations.

A further aestheticized imagination, which marks the second object of analysis in this exemplary topology of Poe's short stories, is the crafting of pestilence as a graspable murderous figure in "The Masque of the Red Death". The story works on a

similar level to “The Fall of the House of Usher” and draws a metaphorical picture of death, rather than outlining a literal representation of abject death. The story centers on a Prince whose land is devastated by disease, a disease that is personified as the Red Death. The presence of death, and the emotions triggered by it, is mirrored in the décor with which Prince Prospero adorns his castle, thereby illustrating the conflicting and multiple sentiments with which death is faced, evoking both beauty and terror as “[t]here was much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the *bizarre*, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust” (271). In comparison to “The Fall of the House of Usher”, however, the opening lines offer a higher degree of physicality, raising images of blood and abjection:

THE “Red Death” had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal – the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution. The scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men. (269)

The reader is immediately thrown into a scenario of blood and decay, an opening that J. Gerald Kennedy in *Poe, Death, and the Life of Writing* describes as Poe’s “most lavish evocation of fatality” (201). In the story, we find death to be more physical and, therefore, as resembling its abject imagination more closely than the more aestheticized personification of the house in “The Fall of the House of Usher”. In spite of its immediate evocation of fatality, the story employs the personification of a murderous disease as a figurative image, rather than as a literal murderer; it presents an imagination of death that is tied to the supernatural personification of pestilence as the Red Death and, thus, it remains heavily aestheticized.

The Prince, rather than facing the horrendous devastation of his land, a land haunted by plague, cloaks his fear and closes the doors against it. This lack of acknowledgment suggests that instead of looking death in the eye, he represses it in an attempt to overcome his own eventual demise; instead of engaging with the plague, he begins to simulate immortality. He constructs a fortress that contains the beautiful instead of the real, feeding that aforementioned illusion of immortality:

This wall had gates of iron. The courtiers, having entered, brought furnaces and massy hammers and welded the bolts. They resolved to leave neither of ingress or egress to the sudden impulses of despair or frenzy from within. The abbey was amply provisioned. With such precautions the courtiers might bid defiance to contagion. The external world could take care of itself. (296)

The Prince’s attempt at shutting out the Red Death can be read as being analogous to the repression of death; rather than facing the Red Death, he *creates* an aesthetic in order to *mask* the horror as “[t]he prince provided all the appliances of pleasure.

There were buffoons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet-dancers, there were musicians, there was Beauty [...]. All these and security within. Without was the 'Red Death' (269). Kennedy points out that "[t]he seclusion metaphorizes a denial of sorrow and death" (201) and this emphasizes the way in which the Prince crafts an illusion of immortality *within* which is superimposed onto the pestilent reality that lies *without*. The fact that the Red Death will eventually penetrate his sanctuary and, by killing him, reverse the superimposition of a crafted aesthetics onto the prevailing real then illustrates the ultimate inescapability of death, shattering American optimism's illusion of immortality. The Prince represses death and attributes it to an outside force, rather than acknowledging it within the walls of seclusion, a delusion that is bound to shatter as time progresses; this is a notion that Poe underlines by continuously drawing attention to an ebony clock which "with its disquieting chiming places the action within the framework of temporality and mutability" (Kennedy, 201), thereby highlighting the transience and ephemerality which interrupts the temporary illusion of stasis.

The Red Death is personified as an anthropomorphic, animate subject and remains uncanny in its characterization by features of the corpse; this is quite unlike the rendition of a cadaverous mansion in "The Fall of the House of Usher":

The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat. [...] His vesture was dabbled in blood – and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror. (272)

Unfolding in gothic tonality, the personification of pestilence is ingrained with reluctant tangibility in this description. Inhabiting an uncanny nature of cadaverous animateness, caused by the Red Death's demeanor, the personified pestilence upholds a sly nature, slowly gripping the revelers with a terror that leaves them unable to escape: "[T]he rumor of this new presence having spread itself whisperingly around, there arose at length from the whole company a buzz, or murmur, expressive of disapprobation and surprise – then, finally, of terror, of horror, and of disgust" (272). It is not only the revelers, but also the Prince who appear unable to escape the Red Death's presence. As he is pursued by the Red Death, the Prince's reaction is one of abjection: "When the eyes of Prince Prospero fell upon this spectral image [...] he was seen to be convulsed, in the first moment with a strong shudder either of terror or distaste [...]" (272). This implies that the haunting quality of the aforementioned 'spectral image' can be read as the crafted aestheticization of the repressed death that finds its form written upon a personification of pestilence. The image of death remains metaphorical, despite moving closer towards the abject, given that the depiction of the Red Death resembles merely the "figment of the imagination, a

man's 'self-aroused and self- developed fear of his own mistaken concept of death'" (Kennedy, 202). This 'mistaken' imagination is rewritten however, in its pursuit of the Prince who finds his perceived sanctuary and feigned immortality infiltrated by the actuality of pestilent death.

This notion finds its peak in the death of the Prince who, after having been overcome by the personification of death, falls to his demise and finds himself overcome by his own repression of his own mortality: "There was a sharp cry – and the dagger dropped gleaming upon the sable carpet, upon which, instantly afterwards, fell prostrate in death the Prince Prospero" (273). Humanoid in appearance and equipped with a metaphorical dagger, the portrayal of the Red Death is certainly closer to images of the abject than those found in the figure of the House of Usher. However, the fact that death remains an ungraspable entity becomes apparent in the story's final lines, which describe death as a "tall figure [standing] erect and motionless within the shadow of the ebony clock, gasp[ing] in unutterable horror at finding the grave-cerements and corpse-like mask which they handled with so violent a rudeness, untenanted by any tangible form" (273). Kennedy comments on the intangibility being portrayed, stating that "[the Red D]eath itself has no essence; it cannot be seized, known, destroyed, or avoided. It is a presence-as-absence whose meaning is forever denied to presence and already accomplished in absence" (202). Poe's depiction of the Red Death remains aestheticized and the Red Death remains intangible. The short story, thus, showcases the variability that figurations of death adopt in the American gothic. Based on the *death paradox*, this constructive textual repetition of an aestheticized image of death hinges upon interpretability. Highlighting pestilence, as overtly aestheticized rather than moving towards a rendition of the abject, is reinforced by the Red Death's suggestive mask; according to Kennedy, this is a "sign without a proper referent; [it marks] the semiotic impasse in which writing has begun to locate its own activity" (203). The ensuing possibility of limitless figuration becomes resonant of the productivity of the *death paradox*. In "The Masque of the Red Death", this textual productivity is illustrated through this 'semiotic impasse' in particular, which renders aestheticized imaginations of death so very interpretable.

Poe's seminal text "Ligeia" serves to outline the potent passivity that aestheticized renditions of death take on in early American gothic and it serves as a final exemplum of his serialization of death imagery; this is a dynamic that will later be advanced by Lynch's reinvigoration of Poe's legacy. In the story, we encounter a melancholic narrator who finds himself caught up in a seemingly endless state of mourning. Having lost his one true love Ligeia to an illness, he finds her doubled in his second wife onto whom he projects and writes an idealized version of Ligeia: "I have spoken of the learning of Ligeia: it was immense – such as I have never known in woman. [...] I have never known her at fault. Indeed, upon any theme of the most admired, [...] have I ever found Ligeia at fault?" (657). Within this description, we find

the purely idealized memory of the deceased, as is described by French Philosopher Maurice Blanchot in “The Two Versions of the Imaginary”: “[the deceased] is more beautiful, more imposing; he is already monumental [...] this magnified being, imposing and proud, which impresses the living as the appearance of the original never perceived until now” (258). It becomes evident that the narrator clings to an image that is neither real nor accurate, figuring Ligeia as such. The real Ligeia, whose last name the reader never learns, is a formality that points to the fact that she is only present as a fantasy, rather than being an actual person, and becomes an idealized memory after her demise. The corpse that she has become, an abject version of a deceased former Ligeia, is repressed by the narrator and substituted, overwritten, with an ideal, a superimposition that points towards her absence rather than presence, something inherent in the elusive nature that she obtains. In his lamentations, the narrator states that he cannot remember her and when attempting to picture her face, finds it unattainable:

[...] that, in our endeavors to recall to memory something long forgotten, we often find ourselves *upon the very verge* of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember. And thus how frequently, in my intense scrutiny of Ligeia’s eyes, have I felt approaching the full knowledge of their expression – felt it approaching – yet not quite be mine – and so at length entirely depart! (656)

In this instant, her demise finds language at a loss to grasp her features; this is a moment of stagnation that then becomes over-idealized in a performance of the *death paradox*; this emphasizes the textual productivity that is attained through the absence of the real and deceased Ligeia. The fact that the narrator has forgotten what exactly Ligeia looks like, and the resulting aestheticization of a lost love as well as the narrator’s difficulties to escape his melancholy state, attribute Ligeia with a certain omnipotence that was acquired by means of her demise. The narrator comments on her firm grip, even from beyond the grave, stating that she is in a position of “infinite supremacy” (657). In *Over Her Dead Body*, Elisabeth Bronfen points out that:

In contrast to the narrator’s inability to present any external facts about his first wife, his memory never fails him in respect to ‘the *person* Ligeia’. This description of her appearance also presents her in conjunction with death by emphasizing her ethereal being, her more than human, enigmatic perfection. She seems to be positioned between life and death. (331)

It is within this description that we find ‘enigmatic perfection’ being superimposed onto an abjected, actual cadaverous Ligeia. As Kennedy observes: “The insistence upon the beauty of the dead seems a mandatory reflex of belief, for the perceived loveliness of the girl’s corpse operates as a sign of redemption” (66). The narrator’s quest for redemption points to his refusal to accept Ligeia’s demise. He begins to produce an image, as a means of overwriting the cadaver with a reassuringly beau-

tiful albeit ultimately non-existent ideal, in an attempt to overcome her death and in order to reinstate her as living.

It appears that the narrator falls victim to the Freudian concept of mourning as elaborated in "Mourning and Melancholia", in which Freud states that mourning is an "expression of an exclusive devotion to mourning which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests" (244). On a first level, the narrator is consciously mourning Ligeia's death, or rather is clinging to an aestheticized version of the woman that is no longer. On a second level, however, the narrator is also repressing his own mortality, celebrating the deceased and consequently obtaining a status of immortality as Freud states that: "we perceive that the self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted away from it on to the patient's own ego" (248). The narrator that mourns the othered death unconsciously has a melancholic reaction towards their own demise and towards the acknowledgment of their own self, which is subjected to an eventual non-existence. Ligeia's demise forces the narrator to face his own mortality, which he has repressed. When watching Rowena, his second wife and Ligeia's double, fall ill and succumbing to death, we find a repetition of his initial loss and the narrator finds a further other onto whom he can project his own death. It is also this notion of doubling, a repetition geared towards compulsion, which hints at the serialization of aestheticized renditions of death.

As the narrator sits at Rowena's deathbed, looking upon her corpse onto which he writes his memory of Ligeia, the corpse begins to transcend death in a repetitious resurrection and demise, a "hideous drama of revivification" (665). We find the narrator's aestheticized imaginations challenged by the actuality of the abject within this "dreamlike repetition of a surreal back-and-forth movement between health and corruption" (Kennedy, 84); the added aspect of repetition heightens the resulting tension. Not only is the narrator repeatedly reminded of the corpse's actuality, but his sacred image of Ligeia is challenged further by the actuality of its doubling: Rowena's corpse. As Kennedy points out, "divested of sentimental illusion, the dead body has become a potentially revolting sight" (85). Partially stripped of "sentimental illusion", the corpse emerges as revolting, which approximates its abject reality. Yet, the corpse remains tied to its aestheticization with the narrator continuously re-invoking Ligeia's idealized image. He finds himself unable to accept human mortality and, in the end, he is overcome yet again by the fantasy of Ligeia even while repeatedly bearing witness to the demise of his female companions: "Here then, at last [...] these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes – of my lost love [...] of the LADY LIGEIA" (666). We find a form of seriality written into these female deaths as Rowena, who serves as an initial filler-in for the absence of Ligeia, also falls to her demise. The narrator's ultimate lack of acknowledgment of abject death bears the implication of a potential future wife onto whom his lamentations could also be written.

This projection of a sentimental fantasy is evoked by the capitalization of “LADY LIGEIA” (666) which is juxtaposed with the simplicity with which Poe announces the decay of Ligeia – “Ligeia grew ill [...]” (657). In lamenting the illusive nature of the deceased, the narrator speaks of Ligeia’s purity – a purity that she only obtains in death, and which contrasts her abject actual corpse:

My memory flew back, (oh, with what intensity of regret!) to Ligeia, the beloved, the august, the beautiful, the entombed. I revelled in recollections of her purity, of her wisdom, of her lofty, her ethereal nature, of her passionate, her idolatrous love. Now, then, did my spirit fully and freely burn with more than all the fires of her own. (661)

The reader is never presented with the ‘real’ Ligeia at any point in the story, but is instead always only a mere image, a character that is based entirely upon the narrator’s idealization and interpretation. Hence, Ligeia created the grounds for interpretability, thereby becoming a canvas for his fantasy in her demise. The fact that she does not even have a proper name evokes a further intangibility, one that makes her a pure phantom of thought which simultaneously harbors the potential for endless repetition. As exemplified by Bronfen in *Over Her Dead Body*, “the idea that for the lover she is from the start always already a representation, her presence arising out of an originary absence” (331). This suggests that the unnamed narrator is constructing his own image of an impossible Ligeia as a means of denying her demise. He becomes the author of an imaginary Ligeia and creates text as a means to fill her absolute inexistence, “[f]or the narrating lover she is no body because of alterity, because a body-image and a name, reproduced by and dependent on his spectatorial gaze” (Bronfen, 331). As a fantasy, Ligeia becomes serial, becoming a screen for the narrator’s projection of not only herself but also her double, Rowena. It is this doubling that repeats death, rather than life:

Because she (the second woman) is used as the object at which the lost woman is reformed or resurrected, the second woman’s body also functions as the site for a dialogue with the dead, for a preservation and calling forth of the first woman’s ghost [...]. (Bronfen, 326)

The spectrality that Ligeia obtains is tied to the narrator’s repetition compulsion and creates her as a fantasy, thereby serving as a “dialogue with the dead”. The narrator’s struggle, which we find portrayed in this rendition of death, is internal and psychological and hinges on the *death paradox*’s productivity. It is only *after* his love has passed away that his image of her becomes productive. Filling the void created by death, Poe’s aestheticized renditions of deaths imply that the absence created by death fuels the survivor’s imagination and flaunts its own textual productivity in its glorification. It is this textual productivity that Lynch translates to the serial currents of television with *Twin Peaks*, spurred on by the aestheticization of death that is

prevalent in the American gothic. While Poe's three exemplary short stories illustrate the variability of an aestheticized death, one spurred by the *death paradox* against the backdrop of American optimism, it is the figuration of death as an episodic television serial within a gothic discourse that highlights the ritualization of an American repetition compulsion to aestheticize death. In other words, it is Poe's variety of aestheticized images of death that caters to an American hunger for death, while it is Lynch's televised serialization that provides a format for a recurring and ritualized appetite.

1.2 Rewriting the Dead: *Twin Peaks*

I don't necessarily love rotting bodies, but there's a texture to a rotting body that is unbelievable. Have you ever seen a little rotted animal? I love looking at those things, just as much as I like to look at a close-up of some tree bark, or small bug or a cup of coffee, or a piece of pie. You get in close and the textures are wonderful.

David Lynch, Catching the Big Fish

This is how David Lynch, reflecting on the physicality of the corpse, describes 'texture' in *Catching the Big Fish*. Lynch implicitly draws an analogy, by means of its materiality, between texture – which he aligns with the corpse – and the text itself, the physicality of narration, that linguistically shares its roots with 'texture'. Lynch incorporates this level of materiality throughout his seminal television serial *Twin Peaks*, weaving together corpse and text and this comes to mark the show's texture. Inheriting Poe's legacy, the series immediately establishes its gothic overtones with its opening credits, which are uncomfortably long and offer a disturbingly colored apposition of gothic imagery. From the very outset, the series' eerie air is underlined by this choice of score. Inherent in the title of the series is also its hunger for repetition, i.e., its textual productivity. Hinging on metaphorical doubles throughout, the show's name itself begins with a double – 'twin' – the textual repetitiveness of its seriality and refusal of closure becoming inscribed in its titular paratext.⁸ As Lenora Ledwon states: "a characteristic of the "new" Television Gothic (as exemplified by *Twin Peaks*) is that the genre does not assure the interpretability of the text. Rather,

8 We are reminded of the epigraph of "The Fall of the House of Usher" which also invokes repetition through *le luth qui résonne*.

the genre assures a multiplicity of possible interpretations” (266). A level of textual productivity – or *texture* – is generated as a consequence, which ensures a continuous hope that the narrative of the dead may be repudiated in its ritualistic expansiveness. Death is aestheticized as a repetition compulsion that is navigated through the mode of the gothic staged in the television serial and that can, ultimately, be overcome, as will become evident in *Twin Peaks: The Return*.

The pilot opens with the discovery of beautiful High School student, Laura Palmer – homecoming queen – having died. Naked, stripped of life, and wrapped in plastic, the beautiful young woman’s corpse has washed ashore. In the style of the gothic tradition, her corpse carries overtones of the sublime, combining the dangerously horrific with the aesthetically pleasing. The scene that follows the corpse’s discovery highlights the absence of life paired with the presence of death as we find Laura Palmer’s mother, Sarah Palmer, frantically searching for her absent daughter in the idyllic family home, only to find her bed unmade and her daughter missing. Suffused with dramatic irony, these two scenes juxtapose existence and non-existence; while her corpse is highly aestheticized with the white plastic framing her beautifully innocent features, as we get a close-up of her face seemingly wrapped in peaceful slumber, her absence triggers insufferable despair which will come to be negotiated.

Illustration 2: Corpse of Laura Palmer, Twin Peaks, Episode 1.1



While her corpse, which is to say death, opens the narrative of *Twin Peaks*, the way it is staged visualizes that form of negative aestheticism with which the American gothic ornaments abject death.

As has already been illustrated in Poe's "Ligeia", read in terms of Blanchot's "The Two Versions of the Imaginary", Laura's corpse is similarly elevated to the status of magnificence:

This magnified being, imposing and proud, which impresses the living as the appearance of the original never perceived until now- this sentence of the last judgment inscribed deep within being and triumphantly expressing itself with the aid of the remote – this grandeur, through its appearance of supreme authority, may well bring to mind the great images of classical art. (258)

Laura Palmer is not rendered abject through this angelic staging, even in her demise; rather, she is presented as the self-same great image of classical art that Blanchot invokes. Nevertheless, it is her death that casts itself upon the town of Twin Peaks in the manner of a shadow, rendering it momentarily silent while the camera rests upon the picture of the homecoming queen,⁹ an image which will haunt the show, playing on the grandeur that the deceased suddenly obtains through her death.

Illustration 3: Homecoming Queen image Laura Palmer, Twin Peaks, Episode 1.1



Ignited by the corpse, we find the narratological quest for reinstating the dead as living displayed in serial form in *Twin Peaks*. It is, thus, only through her absence that Laura Palmer begins to generate a narrative.

9 This image also features as the haunting connective tissue between the original series and its return, given that this image opens the reboot's opening credits.

Laura Palmer's depiction, as beautiful even in death, echoes Poe's notorious assertion that "the death of a beautiful woman, is unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" ("The Philosophy of Composition"). However, she is not only the most poetical topic of the world, but it is her untimely death that renders the narrative of *Twin Peaks* productive. Laura is also literally the author of her own mysterious absence, having captured or *textualized* her despair and descent in her journal. She is revived after her death, through the parsing and interpretation of the pages of the journal; Laura has been preserved and contained in a state of close proximity to death. In her death, then, Laura Palmer becomes the center around which the community begins to revolve and, in an attempt to bring her back, produces narrative, thereby exemplifying the *death paradox's* dynamism.

In *Still the New World: American Literature in a Culture of Creative Destruction*, Fisher makes a claim for the necessity of *creative destruction* as part of the American optimistic mind set, in which "a merely temporarily unfinished newness [makes] it possible to sketch the philosophy for a new, permanently unsettled rhythm of creation and destruction" (Fisher, 3). The dynamic of repetition compulsion is inscribed into this concept. This implies that rather than merely repeating, *creative destruction* destroys in order to create something new and potentially better, rendering its repetition not only limitless but also constructive. *Creative destruction* destroys while carrying the promise of creation, something integral for American optimism that encourages a continuous and deserved strive for an ever-better version thereof; it creates a 'next' as well as a 'new' by means of superimposition of the aforementioned 'next' onto the already existing.

As is further stated by Fisher: "What does not exist, but might someday, takes on a half-real, half-unreal quality long before it exists. But all that now exists is equally half-real, half-unreal because it exists under the threat that it might soon become obsolete or be discarded" (13). Read in the context of the *death paradox*, the reason why the American gothic is particularly susceptible to the serial repetition of death becomes evident. The absoluteness of death hinges upon *creative destruction*, which bears hope for a new and better and shocks the American premise of a better next to its very core. The universality of death is stoutly absolute, even as many of the New World's aspects remain negotiable, creatively destructible and improvingly re-creatable. This notion finds voice and becomes a comfortable illusion within the serial representation. Read within the context of *Twin Peaks*, Laura Palmer's demise, her *creative destruction*, becomes negotiable within its literary depiction by means of interpretability, i.e., in terms of its texture. This interpretability then creates her narrative, which in turn is (in line with *creative destruction*) geared towards the reestablishment of her as living (and potentially better). It is thus that death when produced as text becomes negotiable and, framed by gothic discourse, ultimately reversible.

It is by means of Laura Palmer's body, then, that death is being negotiated against the backdrop of American optimism in an attempt to write a new onto an

old, an existence onto an non-existence. This can be contextualized through the lens of transcendentalism, as voiced by Ralph Waldo Emerson's musings on circularity. Emerson, starting with the pupil of the eye, elaborates on the fact that nature is built upon circles around which new circles are drawn: "Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on midnoon, and under every deep a lower deep opens" (225). Picking up on Emerson, Bronfen contends that "[if] the conclusion to any sequence always announces the next episode, the correspondence between nature's evolution and an individual's self-reliance, which transcendentalism speaks to, is predicated in a logic of serial repetition" ("Seriality", 273). Read alongside Fisher's *creative destruction*, it is within this dynamic of serial repetition that a repudiation of death is made possible as "[t]he Emersonian imagination sees that the next-on world will shatter and rewrite this circle that now seems already finished and fixed in its array" (Fisher, 17). It is through this dynamic that the aestheticization of death does not merely remain variable, but also becomes formulaic through its episodic format. A serialization of an aestheticized death, then, insinuates a comfort of perpetuity, even while its ritualization also endows the television serial with a formal predictability.

Hinging on American optimism's promise, the idea of a continuous serial, which allows for a new and potentially better, clashes with the universality of death. This exact conceptualization of constructive repetition is inscribed in Fisher's *creative destruction*, is tied to Emerson's circles, and results in a constructive seriality sprouting from that textual productivity which is rooted in the temporary linguistic inability to grasp death; it sprouts from the *death paradox*. The serial format is able to provide a circularity with regard to an American repetition compulsion that is tied to aestheticized figurations of death. This is exemplified in *Twin Peaks*, where the series continues to be dominated by uncomfortably long silences after the discovery of Laura Palmer's corpse. Language temporarily stagnates, something that is emblematic of the *death paradox*, only to then become over-productive in order to compensate for the absence which has been implemented by Laura Palmer's demise; this is illustrated by the way her corpse sets the narrative in motion. Faced with death, language is at a loss and the town of Twin Peaks temporarily struggles to re-establish its norm, its identity, and its language; it portrays, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick phrases it, "the difficulty the story has in getting itself told" (13). Rendered silent and seemingly unable to make sense of what has happened, the community opens its gates to a visitor – federal agent Dale Cooper – who is there to aid them in solving the case of Laura Palmer's murder and, by extension, to create a narrative that reinstates her absence as presence. In Emersonian terms, the outside voice of Cooper becomes the authority of a new circle to be drawn around the former one, which renders his external voice a metaphorically authorial one.

While the American proclivity to prosper through *creative destruction* harbors the potential for a new circle to overwrite the old, the abject actuality of death does not and remains absolute in its stance. However, its metaphorical depiction, its aptitude for narration, feeds into this exact dynamic and, thus, feigns the potential of reestablishment of the living. The initial silence that befalls Twin Peaks is then filled with Cooper's discourse who takes the position of author of the new circle that is intended to fill the absence created by Laura Palmer's inexistence. Cooper, in Emerson's terms, takes up the second man's position:

The man finishes his story, – how good! how final! how it puts a new face on all things! He fills the sky. Lo! On the other side rises also a man and draws a circle around the circle we had just pronounced the outline of the sphere. Then already is our first speaker not a man, but only a first speaker. (227)

Cooper becomes the agent of interpretation for the numerous supernatural instances that surround Laura Palmer's murder. These prophecies, spoken by those who are receptive to the otherworldly, the liminal forces suffusing Twin Peaks that Cooper literally translates and writes on the blackboard. As the Emersonian second man, he performs a hermeneutics of the liminal, of death; he can make intelligible that which is unintelligible, even as the local community's narrative stagnates.

Further supporting the claim that Cooper becomes second man to the community of Twin Peaks, we find the notion of metaphorical authorship of a new circle established to an even more significant degree when we observe that Cooper is communicating with the non-communal outside world through 'Diane', his assistant for whom he is recording his findings. By means of telling the story to a displaced outsider, he is turning it into graspable narrative. The fact that Diane (within the original *Twin Peaks*) remains disembodied, and neither appears nor responds, places her in the implicit position of pure reception, rather than agency. As the passive outsider listening to Cooper's account of what has happened exclusively, Diane remains canvas and provides room for Cooper's narrative, which is ultimately edged towards an overwriting of Laura Palmer's death.

In the manifestation of the aforementioned aestheticization of the deceased Laura, in a first instance towards the imagination of classical art partially being re-established, we find by means of the arrival of Madeleine "Maddy" Ferguson. Shortly after Laura Palmer's demise, Maddy, the deceased's cousin, arrives in Twin Peaks. This character is played by the same actress as Laura Palmer, albeit with a slightly altered appearance, now having dark hair and wearing prominent glasses. As Maddy, she becomes the embodiment of the concept of circular repetition that is so inherent in Fisher's *creative destruction*. In a similar fashion, as has been outlined in Poe's "Ligeia" and in Ligeia's doubled image in Rowena, the character of Maddy can be seen as having been superimposed upon the character of Laura Palmer – not only is she played by the same actress, but she also takes up the same position within

the structure of the community. The series draws on the gothic trope of the double by granting Maddy the position of Laura – she becomes a substitute daughter to Sarah and Leland Palmer and substitute best friend to Donna Hayward. As such, she also becomes reiterative of the repetition compulsion to which aestheticized images of death remain subject.

Initially glad to effortlessly step into a communal space in which there is already a pre-carved position available, Maddy agrees to act as Laura Palmer in a scheme of deceit targeted at Dr Lawrence Jacoby – a scheme in which she steps into her former self, her rendition of Laura being so accurate that even her uncle – Laura's father Leland Palmer – is deceived. With Maddy, Laura Palmer is repeated in the manner of *creative destruction*. Becoming an aesthetic imagination of a demise that has been partially repudiated, Maddy states that: “[a]ll I did was come to a funeral and it's as if I fell into a dream [...] and it's as if people think that I'm Laura and I'm not, I'm nothing like Laura” (Episode 2.3). Maddy speaks these bitterly ironic words while standing next to a picture of Laura, a picture of herself, illustrating the dynamic of superimposition by underplaying their similarity. As Ledwon outlines: “[t]he visualization of Gothic images heightens and intensifies the standard function of the double – to problematize the distinction between appearance and reality.” (263) The community's immediate acceptance of Maddy as Laura, then, illustrates its desperation to fill the absence that has been created by death with a repeated version, in spite of its obvious problematization of the impossible suturing of the gap between appearance and reality.

The implementation of long-lost cousin Maddy, then, aims at the repudiation of a dead Laura Palmer who is being replaced by her doppelgänger in order to neglect Laura Palmer's actual, abject death. The double (i.e., her repetition) serves as a clouding of the absoluteness of death – an inexistence of Laura Palmer in all her appearance is partially reversed by the instatement of doppelgänger Maddy. Therefore, it is also the character of Maddy that becomes the graspable manifestation of a repudiation of the absolute nature of death, which is avoided by means of the productivity of the serial providing room for the emergence of the double, all while structurally mirroring that same doubling. Laura Palmer has created an absence through her death that was superimposed by a rendition of herself. While the actress portraying both Laura and Maddy becomes an echo of both life and death, it is her staging as corpse that serves the canvas for a new interpretation of the character. As Maria M. Carrion outlines in “*Twin Peaks* and the Circular Ruins of Fiction”:

[I]t is *Twin Peaks*' potential for constant substitution of identities that helps the reader create a network of connections that do not depend only on a mechanical, passive, chaining process of isolated data from these different perspectives. In other words, all the units that constitute its thick web of stories can be mixed and matched to multiply and create new stories. (242)

Taking this a step further, the connection to Emerson's circles as well as to Fisher's *creative destruction* becomes all the more evident. In line with Fisher's thoughts a previous, which seemed final, was destroyed in order for a new, slightly different version to be (re-)established as a new (and potentially more capable) version. She simultaneously is and is not Laura Palmer; a superimposition of the former, she becomes the graspable performance of seriality, a seriality which hinges on the *death paradox*. Triggered by the productivity of death, figurations of Laura become excessive in the creation of Maddy as a substitute, a means of overcoming an absolute, abject death. Superimposed onto the character of Laura Palmer, Maddy comes to provide a narrative that fills the silences, as well as the linguistic stagnation, that Laura's demise created.

As an additional force within this web, we must consider the character of Bob as the agent of *creative destruction*. Bob remains elusive throughout the series. Present merely in the perceived unconscious of characters he appears in Cooper and Sarah Palmer's visions, as well as in the form of the personification of the serial killer in Leland Palmer. Part of a communal subconscious, Bob himself does not have an intelligible voice – his mannerisms are animalistic, and his appearance is unruly and wild. Sequences including Bob are filmed in an unsteady, even distorted, manner while the accompanying score is disturbing and drowned out by his animalistic cries. As he can be read as the actual murderous agency which possessed Leland Palmer in his misconduct, we could also go a step further and read Bob as an independently deadly agency. He becomes the moment of stagnation that language undergoes when faced with death and is symbolic of a lack of intelligibility. He is the destructive, unintelligible force that turns Leland Palmer into the serial killer that the town is searching for even though, at the same time, it is his possessive, deadly agency that sets the narrative in motion. Bob becomes the personification of the narratological productivity that the *death paradox* sets into place, given that it is his agency which produces the corpse of Laura Palmer.

Consequently, *creative destruction* makes sense if we read Cooper as the metaphorical author of a new circle and Maddy as the superimposed and newly established version, the positioning of Bob as the agent of death by extension. While the character of Bob remains elusive and unintelligible, and more animal than human, it is exactly this aspect that places him within the realm of interpretability, opening up a vast number of possible interpretations. This notion of interpretability, of production, becomes a vital part of both the *creative destruction* and its relentless constructive repetition in the form of serial narration. The newly drawn circle then draws itself to a close once again as Maddy is killed by the same murderer as Laura, which leaves the town desperate a second time, shattered anew and craving its orderly resurrection. It appears that the circle that had previously been drawn around Maddy by Cooper is, in the Emersonian tradition, not final after all, but immediately destroyed by the very same agent of *creative destruction*; namely, by Bob.

Relying on a circular seriality that refuses an inexistence created by death, there looms the overlying sense that a new circle will eventually be drawn provided by its serial format, as has also been the case in Poe's "Ligeia". Continuously haunting the screen, neither Laura nor Maddy are drawn as significations of an absolute death. Rather, their absences feed into the productivity of narration, one fueled by a gothic tradition which provides the potential of a circular overwriting; the continuous superimposition of a double and the limitless possibility of the production of a subsequent circle are ignited by the *death paradox*.

A less elusive manifestation of the serial characteristics is the television serial that we find depicted within *Twin Peaks*, the *mise-en-abyme* which is performed by and within the text. This television series within the television series, the soap opera *Invitation to Love*, which employs the same actors as *Twin Peaks* itself, pops up on television screens here and there throughout the show. This form of meta-serial self-reflexivity, reverting back to its own seriality, thereby reinforcing the series' performative circularity. This form of overstatement points to the aesthetic of the serial narration as a whole that we find described in Cavell's "The Fact of Television":

To say that the primary object of aesthetic interest in television is not the individual piece, but the format, is to say that the format is its primary individual of aesthetic interest. This ontological recharacterization is meant to bring out that the relation between format and instance should be of essential aesthetic concern. (79)

This concept of essential aesthetic concern, for the relation between format and instance which we find reiterated in *Twin Peaks*, further highlights the text's overt productivity. It appears that we find a successful entanglement of both the format as well as the individual piece within *Twin Peaks*. Form and content perform simultaneously and in a parallel manner in the television series, each aspect feeding off of the other, both equally greedy for the destruction of a former circle and the establishment of a new one. As we read in Emerson: "[e]very ultimate fact is only the first of a new series" (227). Picking up on this transcendentalist assertion, Bronfen consolidates the view that "[c]onceived in terms of seriality, all self-evolution (as well as all self-recovery) is aimed towards a future achievable but not yet achieved" (273); this highlights why not only gothic tradition, but also the serial narration in particular offers itself to the productivity of the *death paradox*. We find the potential of a repudiation of death exactly by means of creating a narrative that is embedded in the serial format of the *Twin Peaks* narrative. In the serial television gothic, then, death is staged as somehow seemingly negotiable.

The series eventually ends in uncertainty with regard to the state of Agent Dale Cooper whose body and mind are captured within the ambiguous spatiality of the Black Lodge. While he seems to maintain a human body, within the realm of the living, the final image reveals that within this body dwells the deadly agency of Bob. In

this sense, in his attempt to overwrite Laura's death, Cooper himself has come to be overwritten by the unintelligibility of death. Cooper becomes the literal Foucauldian mirror image of a language facing death, in which:

[h]eaded towards death, language turns back upon itself; it encounters something like a mirror; and to stop this death which would stop it, it possesses but a single power – that of giving birth to its own image in a play of mirrors that has no limits. (90)

This mirror image is quite literally shattered in the series and turns upon itself when faced with death which the series stages by positioning Bob as Cooper's fragmented reflection in the broken mirror:

Illustration 4: Fragmentation Agent Dale Cooper, Twin Peaks, Episode 2.22



In a very Foucauldian sense, the original series ends in death staring into a mirror, which is unable to contain the reality of death in its entirety, becoming shattered and turning on itself. Staged as such, the show visually reiterates that which it performs structurally. Drawing on the supernatural mode of uncertainty, which the American gothic sets into place, the show's first two seasons end in the liminal space of the Black Lodge, with a ghostly Laura Palmer whispering to Cooper that, "we

will meet again in twenty-five years" (Episode 2.22). Refusing to accept closure, the narrative states that it will lose its language for twenty-five years, as its metaphorical author of a subsequent circle, Agent Dale Cooper is overwritten by his attempt to capture death and finds himself incapacitated within an unreliable real, becoming trapped in the Black Lodge. Nevertheless, Laura's reassuring words – directed at Cooper, but arguably intended for the audience – secures the continuation of the tale and, in a sense, foreshadows her eventual resurrection in *Twin Peaks: The Return*.

1.3 Overcoming the Dead: *Twin Peaks – The Return*

Beverly Paige: "Who is Laura Palmer?"

Ben Horne: "That, my dear, is a long story"

Twin Peaks: The Return

Staying true to its final promise, twenty-five years later, *Twin Peaks: The Return* offers a performance of the previously established productivity of the *death paradox*. As Ben Horne responds to Beverly Paige, mentioned above, the question of Laura Palmer's existence is indeed a long story. The fact that Beverly Paige places her within the realm of the living – 'is', not 'was' – without Horne correcting her mistake alludes to the eventual consolidation of her (un)death in the series' reboot. Not only did the original refuse its own ending, but it also allows for a state of complete inexistence. At the level of content, it also did so by means of the corpse that originally set the narrative in motion; it is Laura Palmer (who still refuses to die) who lays the groundwork for an eventual continuation of the narrative. Emblematic of the serialized text, the narrative picks up on its own refusal of closure as the opening credits of the reboot still hinge on the demise of Laura Palmer, as her seminal image rests upon the screen and fades, ever so slowly, into darkness. This can be read alongside Barbara Johnson's elaboration in "The Last Man":

Isn't the end precisely that which never ceases to be repeated, which one is never done with? If man is truly, as Derrida says, "that which relates to its end," he is also that which is never finished with ending. Thus the question would not be to know how to begin speaking of the end but how to finish speaking of it, how to narrate something other than the interminable death of the penultimate, how to be finished with an end? (3)

Echoing this notion of refusing its own closure, of never being capable of "finish with ending", *Twin Peaks: The Return* performs this exact inability to finish speaking about the end; its seriality allows for an implicit, endless repetition that fills-in all absences

(including that of Laura Palmer), an absence which will eventually be overwritten and repudiated.

It is then all the more significant that the first words spoken in the opening episode belong to an undead Laura Palmer. They are directed to a seemingly undead Dale Cooper with her saying: "Hello Agent Cooper, I'll see you again in twenty-five years. Meanwhile" (Part 1). During this conversation, both characters are still situated in the Black Lodge's unreliable spatiality, somewhere between life and death, where we left the narrative twenty-five years previously. It is not just the spatial dimension that is situated outside of a real geography, but also its temporality, something that is illustrated by the sentence awkwardly ending in "meanwhile", leaving the question of whether or not we are past the meanwhile or in the midst thereof. This aspect, of an ambiguous temporality, is further exemplified by the one-armed man, in the same scene, asking: "is it future or is it past?" (Part 1). As this opening scene fades into darkness, what follows is a re-conceptualized version of the opening credits, which are dominated by Laura Palmer's notorious image with the narrative still hinging on her demise. Cooper and Laura further share the following exchange within the uncertain space of the Black Lodge: Cooper: "Who Are You?" Laura: (her speech distorted) "I am Laura Palmer" – Cooper: "But Laura Palmer is dead" – "I am dead, yet I live" (Part 1). It is this conversation between Cooper and Laura, which already foreshadows the reinstating of a living Laura Palmer, which is somewhere that the series will eventually lead. While the spatiality of the Black Lodge remains elusive, both Cooper and Palmer are immediately present in flesh and blood on the screen and this feeds into the American optimistic promise of life, the hope that their deaths can be reversed and that their bodies can be reinstated within reality. In the reboot's opening, then, it is their surroundings – temporal as well as spatial – that are staged as being uncertain, while the physicality of their bodies assumes certainty as living.

Evidently, a deceased Laura Palmer still makes up the fabric that renders the narrative of *Twin Peaks* productive. However, within *Twin Peaks: The Return* we find the previously established metaphorical author of the following Emersonian circle – Agent Dale Cooper – temporarily incapacitated, literally having become fragmented upon his language when faced with death. While the reboot's opening episodes reestablish Cooper's status as undead, he is simultaneously not reinstated in a "pure" human existence. Rather, we find that there are two doppelgangers in the real world beyond the Black Lodge who have been roaming the earth in his deadly absence; this is, on the one hand, Bad Cooper, his proverbial (evil) twin who is possessed by Bob (the image with which we left the second season of *Twin Peaks*). On the other hand, there is a character named Douglas "Dougie" Jones, about whose past we remain unsure. Twenty-five years after having been trapped in a half-real space, the real Cooper is able to escape the Black Lodge with Laura Palmer setting him free, telling him "you can go out now" (Part 1). Placing this in the context of

the *death paradox*, this can be read as the stagnant phase coming to an end and beginning to become productive by means of overcompensating stagnation.

This overcompensation is, of course, underlined by the fragmentation through which Agent Dale Cooper has himself become interpretable in manifold ways. As he is about to leave the Black Lodge, in order to finish his narrative, what identifies itself as “the arm”, we may assume that being the arm of the one-armed man, a fragment also, asks Cooper: “Do you remember your doppelgänger?” (Part 1). The scene that follows this query is spliced in from the conclusion of the original *Twin Peaks*, showing Cooper and Bob laughing in a horrendous frenzy, arguably having been overtaken by death. What is highlighted is their unintelligibility and their inability to transform their frenzy into understandable communication. Language, when faced with death, is at a loss for words, therefore. This metaphorical stagnation is then followed, or rather overcompensated, by two identical Coopers chasing each other through the Black Lodge, hinting at Cooper’s potentially endless reduplication, to which the arm states that: “[h]e must come back in before you can go out” (Part 1). While what we assume is the real Cooper is dwelling in the uncertain space of the Black Lodge, he has become a fragmented man in reality, himself having obtained the nature of the serial. Having not one but two doppelgängers roaming the actual space outside the Black Lodge, it is the unnamed Asian woman who tells Cooper, still attempting to leave the Black Lodge, that: “When you get there you will already be there” (Part 2). It is thus the author of the initial circle, drawn around a deceased Laura Palmer, who himself has become fragmented when he faced Laura Palmer’s death. His language has temporarily ground to a halt, stagnant – “meanwhile”. However, as time progresses, his language returns, his doppelgängers hint at the textual productivity, which is generated by the *death paradox*. Thus, before finishing the narrative, Cooper, as the author of an Emersonian circle geared towards the reinstatement of Laura Palmer, must become an integral single entity once again, ridding himself of all of his uncanny doubles; only then can he step back into his (metaphorical) authorial position and finish the tale. As the series unfolds, we find that the goal for him is to return to Twin Peaks and to reestablish this norm. In this sense, *Twin Peaks: The Return* can be read as symptomatic of the established thesis and of the *death paradox* – the entirety of the reboot revolves around the notion that a dead Agent Dale Cooper is repudiated and, in turn, focuses on the establishment of a living Cooper who will be able to reinstate the existence of Laura Palmer; this is achieved only by overcoming that demise which first set the narrative into motion twenty-five years ago.

In the reboot’s third episode, the real Cooper is finally able to enter the realm of the living through the body of one of his doppelgängers, Dougie Jones. Jones, in turn, is pulled into the spatiality of the Black Lodge while Cooper takes over Jones’ (his same) body. As Jones finds himself in Cooper’s chair in the Black Lodge, the one-armed man tells him: “Someone manufactured you. For a purpose but I think now

that has been fulfilled” (Part 3). Dougie Jones, then, can be read as a stagnant placeholder for a temporarily incapacitated narrative-producing force, Cooper, who is returning to finish telling the tale after these twenty-five years of silence. While Jones dissolves into black smoke, rendering Cooper’s fragmented seriality less dispersed, Cooper himself is left in the real world in a childlike state, as Dougie Jones. Over an excruciatingly long stretch of sixteen episodes, we follow a child-like Cooper as he struggles to find his voice and to assume intelligibility. As we recall, in “Language to Infinity”, Foucault states that:

In this sense, death is undoubtedly the most essential of the accidents of language (its limit and its center): from the day that men began to speak toward death and against it, in order to grasp and imprison it, something was born, a murmuring that repeats, recounts, and redoubles itself endlessly, has undergone an uncanny process of amplification and thickening, in which our language is today lodged and hidden. (91)

Taking over the body of one of his doubles, it is this “lodged and hidden” language that is only slowly returning to Cooper. Embarking on an excruciatingly lengthy journey over the span of sixteen episodes, we follow a Cooper that is on a quest to reinstate Laura Palmer as alive, thereby mending the broken mirror.

It is not just Cooper, who in himself has become serialized in his doppelgangers and who is struggling to eliminate his own fragmentation; it is also the living characters who are hungry for a reestablishment of a living Cooper, only to find out for themselves that he has become fragmented: “Two Coopers” (Part 7) shows a surprised Hawk telling Sherriff Truman and Bobby a piece of information which has been bestowed upon Twin Peaks by means of the supernatural as they find a note within an ominous metal container. While the real Cooper is caught up in the stagnant phase of rediscovering his language, his evil twin is attempting to deceive the FBI, claiming that he is the real Agent Dale Cooper. Upon arresting a man whose fingerprints match those of Dale Cooper “backwards”, it is none other than a no-longer-disembodied Diane who is asked to make a judgment about whether the arrested man is, in fact, the real Agent Dale Cooper who had been missing for twenty-five years:

- Bad Cooper:** “I knew it was going to be you. It’s good to see you again, Diane”
Diane: “Oh yeah? When was that, Cooper? When did we see each other last?”
 [...]
Bad Cooper: “At your house.”
Diane: “That’s right. Do you remember that night?”
Bad Cooper: “I’ll always remember that night.”
Diane: “Same for me. I’ll never forget it. ... Who are you?”
Bad Cooper: “I don’t know what you mean, Diane.”
Diane: “Look at me. Look at me.” (Part 7)

It is after meeting Bad Cooper's cold gaze that a distraught Diane closes the shutters, firmly placing a strong focus on the ability to see each other as an acknowledgment of the other. In urging him to look at her, Diane was able to see him and to recognize him for who he is not, as she confides in Albert: "Listen to me. That is not the Dale Cooper that I knew. [...] it isn't time passing or how he's changed, or the way he looks. It's something here [heart]. There's something which definitely isn't here [heart]" (Part 7). As Cooper's fragmentation seeps into the living realm's consciousness, so too does the slow elimination of his fragmented state seep through the acknowledgment thereof. With Diane problematizing the fact that it is not the real Cooper who was facing her, she also empowers the narratological force of the real Cooper who is slowly finding his language and is progressing towards textual productivity that aims to reinstate (Laura's) life. Insinuating that it is not the real Cooper, the quest for legibility is tackled from two sides – the living realm is searching for the real Cooper, while the real Cooper is simultaneously attempting to break free from his childlike, unintelligible linguistic state which manifests as the character of Dougie.

Cooper's serial fragmentation is further mirrored on a formal level, in the scattered geography of *Twin Peaks: The Return*. While the original series remained in the town of Twin Peaks almost exclusively throughout, the reboot is less confined to a single geographical spatiality. This also hints at the larger proportions that are at stake in the reboot. It is not just the fabric of the narrative which is in question, but also the metaphorical voice of the narration by means of Cooper's fragmentation. At best, the vast geographical distances may be read as being tied together by the familiarity of the final sequences that are set at the Bang Bang Bar in most, albeit not all episodes, which only serves as meagre cohesion for the chaotic storytelling. Adding to this dispersed dynamic is the Black Lodge's unreliable spatiality, which suggests that in Cooper's fragmentation there lies an implied fragmentation of the Emersionian circularity surrounding the narrative. Furthermore, embedded in the narrative is the (largely incoherent) eighth episode, which alludes to a dadaesque interspersing of (largely unintelligible) images. Arguably, the epitome of language turning on itself that the episode portrays, among other images, is the sublimity of an atom bomb explosion. Horrifyingly beautiful, we find a complete bewilderment of the narrative. Alluding to Poe's all-encompassing tarn in "The Fall of the House of Usher", *Twin Peaks: The Return* steps beyond an absolute death and employs gothic tradition as a means to eliminate death entirely. The reboot of *Twin Peaks* literally reboots itself upon stagnation, rather than stopping in the face of stagnation, triggered by the ingraspability of death and literalized by the tarn and the images of the eighth episode. While the story has an even more difficult struggle in getting itself told, this aspect also relates to its heightened interpretability and to the notion of linguistic productivity, something which is fueled by death in the reboot. While it is, thus, productivity that is expanding, the narrative's coherence is temporarily

called into question, once again illustrating a dispersed language that is struggling to capture death.

Bridging Cooper's doublings through formal repetition, a fragmented Agent Dale Cooper comes to replace the previous *mise-en-abyme* created by the original's implementation of the soap opera *Invitation to Love*. In *Twin Peaks: The Return* it is no longer a series within the series that highlights its circular repetitiveness, but rather Cooper as the metaphorical author drawing an Emersonian circle around Palmer himself. This heightening of self-reflexivity is illustrated by the literal incorporation of one of Cooper's fragments in the *mise-en-abyme*, highlighting not only his physical fragmentation, but also the series' own textuality. The sequence employs a strong, theatrical staged-ness in which the deadly agency, however, remains with Bad Cooper, simultaneously a part of the *mise-en-abyme* and as a partial narrator of the text, given that he will eventually leave the screen within the screen and step into his former, extradiegetic level portraying his narratological agency.

Illustration 5: Mise-en-Abyme Bad Cooper, Twin Peaks: The Return, Part 13



Ultimately, the real Agent Dale Cooper, dwelling in Jones' body, wakes up from a coma, which was caused by himself-as-Dougie. Still caught in a childlike state, he has electrocuted himself, sticking a fork into an electric socket. Upon waking up from this coma, any temporary uncertainty as to whether it is really him is immediately extinguished as his restoration is underlined by means of the all-too-familiar score playing in the background. Furthermore, this newly awoken character taking immediate agency illustrates the reestablishment of the original Agent Dale Cooper. As Cooper wakes up, his mannerisms immediately contrast his previously childlike movements as Dougie. Upon opening his eyes and sitting up, the one-armed man is superimposed on the hospital room. He tells Cooper: "You are awake" (Part 16).

Cooper answers in his familiar tone: "100 percent" (Part 16). The one-armed man answers with: "Finally. The other one... He didn't go back in. He's still out" (Part 16) problematizing Cooper's fragmentation. A self-assured Agent Dale Cooper is presently eager for the reestablishment of himself as a narrative force and takes immediate action; symbolically, he takes the wheel of the car in which he previously was a passenger throughout telling his wife that it "is okay" (Part 16). Confidently reclaiming his agency, Cooper is in possession of understandable discourse once again and this re-establishes him as still being the author of the Emersonian circle that he is attempting to draw around the deceased Laura Palmer. Once proverbially *returned*, he will find Laura Palmer and bring her back to Twin Peaks which will lead to the effacement of a narrative that no longer possesses a corpse and, hence, is no longer able to flaunt its own productive interpretability. It is the language that returns after a twenty-five-year long stagnation in order to re-establish the dead as living.

In a cathartic seventeenth episode of the reboot, the impossible is finally achieved. After having eliminated his final double, Bad Cooper, and having fully reestablished himself as a result, Cooper begins to write Laura Palmer's existence back into the fabric of the narrative. As the one-armed man tells him: "through the darkness of future past" (Part 17), Cooper begins to transcend the realm of the living. As a disembodied voice tells him: "It's slippery in here [...] you can go in now" (Part 17), Cooper steps through the aforementioned darkness of future past into the past where he is able to prevent Laura's death. Stepping beyond the original narrative, Cooper takes the hand of a living seventeen-year-old Laura Palmer. Upon this unison between author and fabric, the narrative jumps back to the opening of the pilot and extinguishes the corpse of Laura Palmer. In this sense, then, the textual productivity that has been provided by her corpse has been eliminated; the narrative has been able to overcome death; the text has devoured the corpse. There is one final reversal of the plot that performs the *death paradox*; language has overcome death by paradoxically having created more text originating in death, as well as obsessively circling around it. An American optimism clinging to life, even in its cultural imaginary, was able to extinguish the corpse, thereby rendering the narrative of Twin Peaks obsolete. The reinstatement of life marks the death of narration. This notion is further underlined by the scene that follows and in which mother of the no-longer-deceased, Sarah Palmer, frantically destroys the seminal picture of Laura Palmer as homecoming queen. Stabbing the image in a frenzy becomes the metaphorical destruction of the dead which has been elevated to the sublimity of art, a glorification of the dead that is no longer necessary.

The subsequent final episode then bridges the reboot's fragmented spatiality as Cooper journeys from Odessa, Texas back to Twin Peaks, Washington alongside a living Laura Palmer. Guided by his intuition, he found Carrie Page in Odessa, portrayed by the same actress who plays Laura Palmer, a merely temporary double. Carrie Page may be read along the lines of Dougie Jones, as a stagnant placeholder for Laura

Palmer. Another proverbial 'page' coming to an end, he brings her to Twin Peaks and resurrects her as Laura Palmer. The narrative of *Twin Peaks*, in this sense, never existed due to death never having stricken the town. Language was never brought to a halt in order to reestablish itself only as more productive somehow, as attempting to overcome death. Hence, the production of text has, in the manner of the gothic, extinguished death. Upon returning Laura Palmer to Twin Peaks, Cooper's authorial force succeeds in reinstating her position as alive, rather than dead. Standing resurrected, Palmer jolts out an excruciating scream extinguishing all light and leaving the screen black for an eerily long minute. Upon her proverbial *return*, which is brought about by means of Cooper's reestablished authorial force, the narrative of *Twin Peaks* as well as *Twin Peaks: The Return* is paradoxically extinguished. No longer a corpse to be narrated about, the narrative grinds to a screeching halt and disintegrates, leaving nothing but darkness.

As has been shown, *Twin Peaks: The Return* essentially tells the tale of a fragmented Dale Cooper's odysseysque return to Twin Peaks. With the reestablishment of his authorial discourse, as the Emersonian second man drawing a new circle around the deceased, he is able to rewrite Laura's death into an unreality. Hence, *Twin Peaks: The Return* illustrates what the American gothic has performed throughout its existence: a supernatural distancing from death that allows for an illusion of its inexistence. This repudiation and overwriting of an absolute death is made possible only by the serial superimposition of a vast array of interpretable deathly imaginations that originate in the productive interpretability of an inexperienceable death. As Derrida states in "The Reason of the Strongest": "Yet one more time, to be sure, but for me, yet one more time ever anew, in a way that is each time wholly new, yet one more time for a first time, one more time and once and for all the first time." (i). Within the gothic's literary framework, then, an American optimistic claim about death is made possible – once and for all for the first time. In line with both Emerson's circularity and Fisher's *creative destruction*, the American gothic indulges in linguistic productivity and in the textual interpretability that is provided by the *death paradox*. *Twin Peaks* as well as its reboot, then, works through the *death paradox* in its entirety and extinguishes the absolute sentence that death inhabits by means of creating more text. This text is able to perform an impossible American dream; it extinguishes the dead Laura Palmer in the reinstatement of her as alive and simultaneously extinguishes its own authority as narrative, illustrated by the black screen, the inexistence of narrative which is left. We may recall Foucault:

[...] to speak as a sacred orator warning of death, to threaten men with this end beyond any possible glory, was also to disarm death and promise immortality. In other words, every work was intended to be completed, to still itself in a silence where infinite Word reestablished its supremacy. (94)

Harkening back to the black tarn that engulfed the House of Usher, the show's seriality comes to an end with a self-referential play on black ink, with all that is left being further circles yet to be drawn, narrated, and overwritten. The final overtones insinuate that the entirety of the narrative was all but a dream, dismissing the gravitas of death to an unconscious meandering, thereby repressing its universality and superimposing an optimistically governed albeit false fantasy of eternal life.

