

SACRIFICE FOR NOSTALGIA:
THE AMERICAN SMALL-TOWN AND THE GROTESQUE

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by
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... ii

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION.....1

2. *WINESBURG, OHIO* AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE MODERN
AMERICAN GROTESQUE.....18

3. THE GROTESQUE GAZE: *TWIN PEAKS* AND MASCULINE
CAPITALISM.....45

4. THE GROTESQUE STRIKES BACK: *CARNIVALE* AND REMEDYING
THE AMERICAN SMALL-TOWN.....69

5. CONCLUSION.....96

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....99

1. INTRODUCTION

This project started with a simple question: what is the reason for the unexpected violence at the end of Shirley Jackson's famous story, "The Lottery" (1948)? In the story, the inhabitants of an unnamed American small town meet for an annual gathering, meanwhile talking about a lottery they hold, we understand, every year. The mood is festive. The people talk about who is going to win it this year with enthusiasm while they gather in the town center. As the story nears its climax, the winner is announced. An eerie silence takes place in the narrative as the town folk start to pick up stones from the ground, children included. They stone the winner to death.

The way in which the residents of a "normal" looking town ritually kill one of their own signifies a simultaneous occurrence of opposites, of a strong contradiction: people at a merry gathering are killing a person without flinching. In other words, something very unfamiliar and unexpected takes place in a setting that is familiar. My attempts to locate this occurrence of contradiction in the literary tradition led me to a mode that has been – it turned out – a common one in American literature: the grotesque. The grotesque, a "species of confusion," (Harpham xxi) seemed to provide an initial answer to the strange violence that takes place in Jackson's story. Apparently, a form of art that has been around for more than five hundred years (Krzychylkiewicz), the grotesque as a literary mode emerged, time and again, as a site that shelters violent contradictions. Then, as I delved deeper into the grotesque, I noticed that the grotesque

almost always went hand in hand with social changes, the alienation or displacement those changes brought along, and their effects on the individual.

However, there was still something missing. The American small town was supposed to be a place of unchanging tranquility, a place that protected the traditional American values for eternity. On the surface, the grotesque violence conflicted with the putative values of small-town America. However, Richard Lingeman notes that “history suggests that renewed interest in the small town comes in times of social upheaval” (Craycroft 13). When I looked back at the American small-town narratives that intrigued me from the perspective of social upheaval, within this frame, the grotesque turned out to be a recurring literary mode. *Winesburg, Ohio* was written in 1919, after World War I took place, and set in 1880s. *Twin Peaks* was shot and broadcast between 1990 and 1992, after the end of the Cold War, its events taking place at the same time. *Carnivalé* was shot and broadcast between 2002 and 2005, after the September 11 attacks, and took place during the Great Depression. It occurred to me, then, that meeting of the familiar and the unfamiliar, the funny and the terrible in the American small town narratives coincided with times of great social change. The small town was no exception in a changing world. On the contrary, because the change was seemingly imposed on it by the constantly modernizing world, the small town was the site of a violent tension.

This thesis is concerned with the American small town as a literary-visual construction, and the grotesque as a literary mode. Although there have been several works that examine the American small town in literature, there has not been any substantial work that examines the grotesque strain in the depictions of the American small town in written and visual media. In the thesis, I identify the grotesque as a

dominant strain in the American small town narratives that take place after social upheavals. I close-read three works, one written, two visual, respectively: Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg Ohio*, David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*, and Daniel Knauf's *Carnivalé*. I contend that in these works, this grotesque strain manifests itself in three inter-related notions: capitalism, nostalgia, and sacrifice. The historical phenomenon that is capitalism leads to a feeling of nostalgia, which, in turn, leads to acts of ritual sacrifice. This relationship, I argue, plays itself on a plane of grotesque tension.

An inherent basic assumption ruling this study, and also other studies that have been done on the small town, I believe, needs to be unpacked at this point. While it is hard to embark on a generalized study on cities, it is somehow implied that when looking at, or writing about small towns, there is a homogenous entity to be written on. This applies to both literary and critical writing on the small town. Sinclair Lewis explains in his introduction to *Main Street*:

This is America – a town of a few thousand, in a region of wheat and corn and dairies and little groves. The town is, in our tale, called ‘Gopher Prairie, Minnesota.’ But its Main Street is the continuation of Main Streets everywhere. The story would be the same in Ohio or Montana, in Kansas or Kentucky or Illinois, and not very differently would it be told Up York State or in the Carolina hills. (Lewis xii)

The American small town, by the singular use of the phrase, signals for a plurality. It stands for all the American small towns. Similarly, it is not surprising that in Jackson's “Lottery,” the fatal lottery is not peculiar to the town in the story, but, we understand, all the other towns (“in some towns there were so many people that the lottery took two days,” writes the narrator). In this respect, the name of Robert Pinsky's study strikes the reader: *Thousands of Broadways: Dreams and Nightmares of the American Small Town*.

This generalization is reflected on the level of the individual too, as at the end of *Winesburg, Ohio* the train conductor smiles at George Willard leaving the town, because he “had seen a thousand George Willards go out of their towns to the city.” Richard O. Davies, explaining the reason for the subject of study in *Main Street Blues*, writes not much differently: “Camden’s story is not especially exciting or special, but it is one that is replicated throughout the United States. Camden is merely one of thousands of small towns that modern America has left behind. Its history contains, perhaps, a few special quirks that give it a modest claim to uniqueness, but the overall pattern of settlement, growth, and eventual stagnation is familiar” (Davies 2). A strong sense of replication that transcends time and space pervades both the literary and the critical narratives that focus on the American small town. This is the reason I do not have hesitations in picking works that are not only both written and visual, but also belong to drastically different eras in history, as the subject and nature of the subject remained unflinchingly same: thousands of American small towns.

How to locate the American small town in this context, then? The American small town is a settlement that signifies simplicity. Its population is not more than a few thousand; it has a Main Street or a Broadway, and several shops with each one of them selling its own specialty. The small town is nestled in nature, therefore easily perpetuating a myth that preaches it is in direct contact with its environment, providing a supposedly more immediate presence of life. Davies explains that he embarks on his work because of a lack of studies on “the pervasive impact that the forces of modernization and urbanization have had on small towns” (Davies x). He further notes that the towns

still dot the map of America, some 11,897 of them according to the Census of 1990. Often quaint reminders of an earlier and more ebullient time, with populations ranging from several hundred to a few thousand, they are the incorporated small towns of America. Now shunted to the margins of national life, located in rural areas that lie beyond the borders of metropolitan America, they live a present that is less and less appealing while confronting futures that are bleak at best. (Davies 1)

We encounter a narrative of decline, here. The American small town, once a founding unit of the United States, has slowly been relegated to the sidelines, neither flourishing, nor dying. This decline started to take place from the beginning of the twentieth century, while the cities emerged as the new living centers for people. When we look back the first observations on the decline of the small town, this has indeed been a slow relegation. “Rural civilization,” Frederick C. Hove wrote in 1906, “whose making engaged mankind since the dawn of history, is passing away. The city has erased the landmarks of an earlier society. Man has entered an urban age” (Davies quoting from Howe, 3). Similarly, an anonymous official from an Illinois small town wrote in 1934 that “there is no hope for the small towns of America. They are doomed” (3). Indeed, they may be doomed, as we learn from studies such as Vidich and Bensman’s *Small Town in Mass Society* (1958) which focuses on a small town, Springfield, New York and its relationship with the larger, increasingly centralized administration in the country, and the “translocal” forces that impose themselves to the small town from outside. Yet, somehow, neither dying nor flourishing, the small town continues to occupy a presence in society. Nonetheless, the effects of this limbo state have not been studied extensively. As I show in the thesis, time and again, these small towns emerge as literary or visual construction of the grotesque. This occurrence, I believe, should receive the attention it deserves.

What is the grotesque? The question does not have a definitive answer. However, a short review on the grotesque is necessary and helpful¹. John Ruskin is the first figure in literary tradition providing a conception of the grotesque in *The Stones of Venice* (1853):

First, then, it seems to me that the grotesque is, in almost all cases, composed of two elements, one ludicrous, the other fearful; that, as one or the other of these elements prevails, the grotesque falls into two branches, sportive grotesque and terrible grotesque; but that we cannot legitimately consider it under these two aspects, because there are hardly any examples which do not in some degree combine both elements: there are few grotesques so utterly playful as to be overcast with no shade of fearfulness, and few so fearful as absolutely to exclude all ideas of jest. (Ruskin 151)

After Ruskin's location of the grotesque as a harbor for incongruities, in the twentieth century, Mikhail Bakhtin and Wolfgang Kayser are the first critics who examine the notion of the grotesque in literature extensively. Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (1941) and Kayser's *The Grottesque in Art and Literature* (1957) signify two different approaches in the formulation of the grotesque. While Bakhtin's focus, examining the

¹ Originally < early modern French *crottesque* n. feminine, an adaptation (by assimilation to Old French *crote* = Italian *grotta*) of Italiangrottesca 'a kinde of rugged vnpolished painters worke, anticke worke' (Florio 1598), 'anticke or landskip worke of Painters' (Florio 1611), an elliptical use (=opera or *pittura grottesca*) of the feminine of *grottesco* adj. < *grotta*: see grotto n. and -esque suffix. (Compare Spanish *grutesco*, Portuguese *grutesco*, an alteration of the Italian word after Spanish *gruta*, Portuguese *gruta* = Italian *grotta*.) It is remarkable that Florio in both his Dicts. (1598 and 1611) has *crottesca* as an Italian word, explained as 'antique, fretted, or carued worke'; this, if genuine, would seem to be a readoption from French. Before the end of the 16th cent. the French word was occasionally spelt *grotesque*, after the original It; this form was adopted into English about 1640, and has been the prevailing form ever since. But early in the 17th cent. writers acquainted with Italian had introduced the masculine form of the adj., *crottesco*, which occurs as late as 1646; the more usual Italian form *grottesco* appears as English first in the 1632 edition of Florio's translation of Montaigne, and did not become obsolete until the 18th cent.

The etymological sense of *grottesca* would be 'painting appropriate to grottos'. The special sense is commonly explained by the statement that *grotte*, 'grottoes', was the popular name in Rome for the chambers of ancient buildings which had been revealed by excavations, and which contained those mural paintings that were the typical examples of 'grotesque'. (See *Voc. della Crusca*, s.v. *Grotta*, §iv.) Although this seems to be only a late conjecture, without any actual evidence, it appears to be intrinsically plausible (OED).

Middle Ages and the Renaissance, is more on the revolutionary aspect of the grotesque, and the way it challenges established authority in society, Kayser, looking at Romanticism and the nineteenth century, concentrates on the uncanny, horrific aspect of the notion. Meindl's summation is illuminating. Here, we encounter two different attitudes – one revolutionary, one conservative – toward the idea of social change. “For Bakhtin, the earlier or carnivalesque grotesque defines the essential nature of the grotesque” (Meindl 18). Bakhtin suggests that “the medieval and Renaissance grotesque, filled with the spirit of carnival, liberates the world from all that is dark and terrifying; it takes away all fears and is therefore completely gay and bright. All that was frightening in ordinary life is turned into amusing or ludicrous monstrosities” (Bakhtin 47). Kayser, on the other hand, explains that “the grotesque world is – and is not – our own world. The ambiguous way in which we are affected by it results from our awareness that the familiar and apparently harmonious world is alienated under the impact of abysmal forces, which break it up and shatter its coherence” (Kayser 37). George Galt Harpham's *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (1982) is another major study that benefits both from Bakhtin and Kayser, bringing in psychoanalysis as an important tool. Harpham's emphasis is on the elusiveness of the grotesque as a literary mode. “The grotesque is embodied in an act of transition, of metonymy becoming metaphor, of the margin swapping places with the center,” writes Harpham. “It is embodied in a transformation of duality into unity, of the meaningless into the meaningful” (71).

Dieter Meindl himself examines the grotesque from a perspective of metaphysics, mainly using Martin Heidegger to locate the grotesque as a site of tension that takes place

between the World and the Earth, between Being (*Dasein*) and beings. Meindl suggests that “the new metaphysics conveyed by the grotesque in classic and modernist American fiction, an existential metaphysics of presence, grants priority to Being (life as a whole, the existential dimension) as the context in which cognition may, but need not, occur. (Meindl 10) More recently, James Goodwin’s *Modern American Grotesque* (2009), in a different vein, looks at the impacts of the grotesque in literature and photography, concentrating on the visual aspect of the grotesque. Goodwin helpfully explains that “in modern literary and graphic modes alike, the grotesque is predominantly visual and descriptive rather than ideational or narrative. This is an assertion I challenge in my readings of *Twin Peaks* and *Carnivale*. “Without a certain collision or complicity between playfulness and seriousness, fun and dread, the grotesque does not appear to exist,” Dieter Meindl explains (Meindl 14). The common points that emerge in these different accounts of the grotesque is its dreadfulness, strangeness and at the same time funniness that is combined with an elusiveness that is hard to pin down. The grotesque, one could say, exists in the invisible cracks of a work of art, defining it significantly with oppositions.

Sheltering these seeming opposites in itself, the grotesque surfaces as a site of tension. The grotesque, then, with its basic signifiers such as incongruity, collision, opposition, and alienation is a helpful tool in looking at what takes place in the American small town after social upheavals, as the small town finds itself as a site of tension being pulled apart by capitalism on one hand, and trying to anchor itself down by nostalgia on the other.

At this point, in order to have a better understanding of small town narratives and their relationship with the grotesque, it is necessary to look at the notions I mentioned earlier. The rapid change the United States underwent during the second half of the nineteenth century with the Industrial Revolution attested to the widespread emergence of capitalism around the country. With the city's emergence as the new center, the American small town was left behind, with the role of leading the country in the race for progress left to the rapidly growing, huge human settlements (Chi 73). Moreover, the commodification of labor and alienation capitalism brings along also put new tensions on the individual, whether living in the city or in the town, trying to uproot them, making them join to the throngs of the new world.

This, however, would not be a complete account without mentioning the Protestant roots of capitalism in the United States. Henretta's concise explanation of Weber is as follows: "The Protestant ethic produced not only disciplined and rationalized lives that embodied the 'spirit' of capitalism but also the actual expansion of capitalist activity" (Henretta 41). Nonetheless, there are also complex tensions in this spirit that Weber does not touch on. "The contradiction was palpable," Henretta writes. "How many men and women could avoid the sin of covetousness, could pursue profits without succumbing to the temptations of profit?" (38). This, I argue, leads to a significant grotesque tension in the small town narratives. Capitalism as a new world order for America was a strong, unrelenting force. As the world around the individual rapidly changed, however, this brought a sense of being lost in this newly-emerging America. "The central paradox of American history," Levine writes, "has been a belief in progress coupled with a dread of change; an urge towards the inevitable future combined with a

longing for the irretrievable past; a deeply ingrained belief in America's unfolding destiny and a haunting conviction that the nation was in a state of decline" (Levine 191). This longing for an "irretrievable past" is the link for the other notion I examine in relation to the grotesque: nostalgia.

Nostalgia, literally meaning "longing for home" (OED) has been a present force not only during 1920s when the country went through a rapid transformation, but also at the aftermath of any immediate social change the United States experienced, as I will show in the following chapters. However, the immediate source of nostalgia for the Americans of the early twentieth century lies in the Puritan roots of the foundation of the United States. "The United States was the only country in the world that began with perfection and aspired to progress," Richard Hofstadter writes (Hofstadter 28). A quick look at the Puritan beginnings of America can be helpful to answer where this "perfection" came from. The Puritans that first arrived at the New World, and the imagery which pictured them later in the nineteenth century as "latter-day Adams in an Edenic 'Garden of the World'" (L. Levine) indeed signify an America of a heavenly beginning. Similarly, Ludrens and Bradbury notes, "the Puritans persist in writing for themselves a central role in the sacred drama God had designed for man to enact on the American stage, the stage of true history" (13). Therefore, it would not be too wide of the mark to claim that Americans have a deeply ingrained, continuous longing for a purer past. Ruland and Bradbury once more explain that "the essential tale was a religious one of travail and wandering, with the Lord's guidance, in quest of a high purpose and a millennial history. When Puritans wrote of the New World and the allegory of the Puritan diaspora, they were, by following out the biblical types, telling nothing less than the tale

of God's will revealing itself in history (Ruland 9). Levine, in a similar vein, goes on to state that in the beginning of the twentieth century, there was “a national movement to restore to America a former purity, cohesiveness and national purpose which had been diluted by the introduction of ‘alien’ elements and ideologies; a cultural schism which saw a large segment of the population alienated from modernity and longing to return, at least symbolically, to a golden past” (L. Levine 191). In this regard, Svetlana Boym’s discussion of nostalgia is illuminating: “Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy,” Boym writes. “Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals” (xiv). Nostalgia, then, is another pulling force, which finds itself on the opposite side of capitalism. This feeling of nostalgia, a longing for a home that no longer exists manifests itself both on the level of the individual, and the social. While the individual strives to find a former glory in this lost history for herself, small town as a social body attempts to protect itself from change.

The seeming opposition between capitalism and nostalgia that results in a breeding space for the grotesque brings me to the last notion of my formulation: sacrifice. The individual caught between the two opposing forces is torn apart. S/he wants to progress, but also longs for a pure past. This is also reflected on the social: the town wants to be a part of the innovation and progress that is taking place around the nation, but it also wants to protect itself from that very change. This situation, I argue, results in acts of ritual sacrifice. The ritual is attempted to mark a moment, to consecrate that moment, and use that consecrated moment to bring back/recreate a past that no longer exists. “Sacrifice stands as a link between an analysis of models of representation and a

critique of the relations of exchange intrinsic to capitalism,” writes J.M. Bernstein (83). A presence that does not comply with the present of the small town is sacrificed in an effort to recreate. Accordingly, Susan Mizruichi comments that “in both fiction and works of sociology, vigilance is the privileged sense, and sacrifice is the privileged act. Sacrifice is necessary to the maintenance of social order, the achievement of a certain level of culture, and the perpetuation of a certain kind of economy” (Mizruichi 22-23).

Combining Bernstein’s and Mizruichi’s comments, I argue that during social upheavals, the small town engages in acts of ritual sacrifice in exchange for a past long gone. On one hand, we have a social order that is rapidly changing due to industrial capitalism, and on the other hand there is a constant longing for a golden age. Sacrifice, as an act of “maintenance of social order,” emerges as a third notion that results from the tension between the pulling forces of capitalism and nostalgia.

Indeed, what happens if this “social order” fluctuates all the time? In the context of our subject, the vigilance aims to keep the small town intact, unharmed, protected. While the pulling forces of capitalism that call for progress, and of nostalgia that signal for a return to old ways make that vigilance problematic. Keith Booker notes that “nostalgic representations of small-town life are, in fact, so ingrained in American popular culture that they would seem to be virtual paradigms of Americanness (and thus capitalism), except for the fact that capitalism is a fundamentally urban-centered phenomenon devoted to innovation, making small-town nostalgia the virtual antithesis of capitalism” (*Disney* 97). However, I argue, against Booker’s urban-centric view, that capitalism precisely aims for the reproduction of that small-town nostalgia. Capitalism could be an urban-centered phenomenon, but its effects are not limited to the urban

environments. On the contrary, I argue that because the small town is in a position that is relatively passive in its relationship with capitalism, small-town nostalgia for the ones who are living in thousands of small-towns spread around the country is not an antithesis of capitalism, but a necessity. The small towns have to feel that nostalgic representations of themselves are themselves. Therefore, when that representation is disturbed – whether from inside or outside – the small town takes measures to keep that nostalgic ideal. “The town can seem benignly welcoming, but its embrace can also suffocate, or turn nasty and punitive,” writes Robert Pinsky. “It can kill with a brutality all the more terrible because it is unaware.” I contend that the town can kill with a brutality precisely because it *is* aware. The town is aware that there is a vast change taking over the country, and it wants to keep itself as it has always been. Therefore, the town aims for the kill. However, this awareness may turn out to be a false one, as I show in the thesis. Thus, the act of sacrifice comes to surface, bringing capitalism and nostalgia together in a violent relationship. These inter-related paradigms all enact themselves as a grotesque strain in the small town narratives that I focus on in the thesis.

I contend that the small town emerges as a site of tension where the longing for a blissful past and the inescapable progress that comes with industrialized capitalism engage with each other violently. This violence, I argue, reflects on the depictions of small-town America after certain social upheavals, which is embodied both in the small town as a social body, and its inhabitants as physically and/or mentally grotesque characters. This tension causes the construction of the small town to attempt an act of resurrection of a pure past that goes back to the Protestant/Puritan roots of the country, which takes shape as an act of ritual sacrifice.

In my study, I trace different constructions of the small town and their varying relationships with and use of the grotesque in three written and visual works of art. These three texts use the grotesque differently. The use of the grotesque as a literary mode in Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* finds itself in the characterization of the fictional town and its inhabitants, caught between the progress of capitalism, and nostalgia. In *Twin Peaks*, the grotesque is visual and narrative, showing itself in juxtaposing images of the mundane life of a small town and the horrors that lurk beneath it. *Carnivale*, while the grotesque is also visual and narrational, this time it is employed almost to its literal meaning: a traveling troupe of freaks populate the series, constituting a mobile small town of grotesqueries, visiting one identical town after another.

The first chapter deals with Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), and the emergence of the modernist grotesque in the American literary tradition. Anderson's collection of inter-connected stories of a fictional small town in the Midwest is an intriguing text that teems with the strangeness of the familiar, the uncanny grotesque. *Winesburg, Ohio* brings life to a town that is on the brink of a decision of a change. The time is directly after World War I in the. Winesburg, Ohio feels left alone as the nation progresses with its cities, with the small town filled with a sense of being left behind. Anderson's text, presenting a strong criticism on the Puritan work ethic (Crowley, Frankwitz, Spencer), depicts characters that are haunted by a capitalist future that is ominously close, and the receding memory of a golden past. The grotesque is the work's central trope. This grotesque tension is palpable throughout the text, in particular in "Godliness," with its characters' feeling pulled apart in opposite directions observable in other stories in the book. "Godliness" in *Winesburg, Ohio* shows a failed act of sacrifice

in Jesse Bentley. The small town as a collectively protective unit is also a motif that is recognizable in *Winesburg, Ohio*, which is another hint of the tension that underlies a collection that is hailed as one of the first American modernist texts.

The second chapter considers *David Lynch's Twin Peaks* (1990) as a form of episodic, visual narration of an American small town in an era of rampant capitalism, right after the end of the Cold War. The town of Twin Peaks, a settlement founded on the lumber industry, is constructed as a sacred site of the American repressed. From America's foundations to the tension between itself and the city to pervading notions of sexuality, another town obsessed with keeping itself perfectly happy on the surface emerges as, in Mizruichi's words, "a theater of sacrifice." This, I argue, is because of capitalism, which works as an absent presence throughout the work. As the murder of a young girl who used to be a beloved of the town folk but turns out to be a promiscuous, drug-using woman kick-starts the story, Lynch delves into the Puritan constructions of America in an unflinching manner. The murder takes place in the woods, a source of both horror and also income for the city. The visual narrative and style Lynch opts for in this endeavor is the crucial part. Although *Twin Peaks* follows, on the surface, a traditional flow of televised episodes, the pervading style in the series is that of a discontinuous, at times non-linear one. This is not a coincidence, as the time the show is set is 1990s, the aftermath of the Cold War era. Cold War era was a time of strict dualities, most prominently of the United States' "good" vs the USSR's "evil." Though *Twin Peaks* at first seems to be relying on these binaries, it reveals with a closer and careful reading that it in fact undermines them. In this manner, the visual and narrational grotesqueness of the series makes itself obvious. Employing defamiliarization of the familiar as a recurring

theme, *Twin Peaks* presents the viewer with another cyclic/episodic grotesque narrative of the American small town.

The third and the final chapter deals with another TV series, HBO's *Carnivalé*, (2003) created by Daniel Knauf. Hailed as a natural successor of *Twin Peaks*, *Carnivalé*'s adoption, execution, and presentation of the grotesque strain in the American written/visual tradition is inescapably different. Set in 1930s Dustbowl America, but produced after the 9/11 attacks, the series – a text after a social upheaval, a text about a social upheaval – deals with a traveling carnival whose member, a wandering, poor boy Ben Hawkins, is pitted against a minister, Brother Justin, each symbolizing the good and the evil forces in the world. Brother Justin rises to power by preaching and conjuring the Puritan founding mythology of America – his initial power being to show people their past, secret sins. What he claims to bring to America is a “new beginning.” Ben Hawkins, on the other hand, has the power of healing – with one caveat: something/someone has to die in return. In other words, a continuous act of sacrifice repeats itself in the characterization of Ben Hawkins. Moreover, the very foundation of the series, the carnival, is a site of literal grotesques, in Hawkins' words, “nothing but half-wits, whores and two-bit freaks” (2:5). The counterculture Frida Beckman locates in *Carnivale*, I argue, is inescapably grotesque, reflected in both the series' form and content. Brother Justin's claim of a new beginning should be evaluated within the context of a post 9/11 era. Moreover, the way the traveling carnival is received by the small towns identical in their desolation of the Depression era is a particularly helpful mirror in terms of assessing not only the attitude of the American small town towards its surroundings in the twenty-

first century, but also the American attitude to the surrounding world, bringing my interrogation to its end.

The grotesque in the way Anderson uses it in *Winesburg, Ohio* is descriptive. The mode is used to depict a town that is torn between two pulling forces. A strong binary between industrialized capitalism and nostalgia is constructed. However, *Twin Peaks*, with its visual and narrational use of the grotesque, slowly dislocates this opposition. The series presents a narrative that aims to show that the capitalism and nostalgia are not necessarily two opposing forces, but one is produced paradoxically because of the other. And *Carnivale* takes this act of dislocating one step further, persuasively undermining the foundation of the binary by explicitly showing how a totalitarian capitalistic vision not only produces, but needs that nostalgia. These findings also have resonances on the perspectives we impose onto the American small-town, implying that we must regard the small town not someplace that is either a preserver of traditional values or a dead human settlement no longer relevant, but a fertile site that harbors several incongruities in itself, like the grotesque.

2. WINESBURG, OHIO AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE AMERICAN GROTESQUE

My investigation into the grotesque and the American small town starts with one of the founding texts of American modernism. Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) is a text that consists of stories that are interconnected. These stories depict the characters living in a fictional town in Ohio. The figure that turns out to be the central character is George Willard, a young man working as a reporter, who, at the end, leaves the town for the city to become a writer.

Naturally, there has been an incredible amount of criticism on *Winesburg, Ohio* so far. As a founding text of American modernism, the collection has a significant place in the American literary tradition, influencing Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, William Gass, etc. Moreover, it has been studied in terms of the grotesque, the way its characters' bodily and spiritual excesses are depicted. However, so far there has not been a study that examines the possible links between the grotesque strain in the text and its setting: the American small town. In this chapter, my aim is to trace any connections between these two concepts, trying to extricate the text's "grotesqueness" in its relation to the oldest of American settlements. I argue that Anderson's text should be located within a framework that includes tools to study the relationship between its characters, the oppressiveness of the small town, and the looming abstract figure of capitalism that is embodied in the city throughout the text. I contend that Anderson's *Winesburg* – both as a literary text and a literary construction of a town – is a work of grotesque tension that

results from the drastic transformation the United States went through during the Industrial Revolution, the country's emergence as a transformed world power after the World War I, and the small town's nostalgic desire to protect itself from these changes.

The World War I was certainly a defining moment in the history of the US. The transformation was not only economical, but ideological too. The US emerged from the war as a world power having completed its industrialization, but this transformation had important ramifications on the psyche of the nation (Rockoff 6). Rockoff, on the impact of the war, also comments that "although it is true that America's losses paled in comparison with those of the European combatants, and were substantially less than those America experienced during the American Civil War, they were nonetheless substantial" (19). It is therefore not surprising to see *Winesburg, Ohio* to be published in 1919, right after the war. After the violence of the war, a longing for a home which is supposed to be a haven for the original American values is expected. However, as we see, things are grotesquely complicated than that.

Winesburg makes its relationship with the grotesque as a literary mode that harbors opposing forces explicit from the very beginning. The text's grotesquery mainly manifests itself on the characterization. This characterization applies both to the town and its inhabitants. Goodwin, commenting on Anderson's body of work, notes that "the books of fiction where his best writing is to be found work mainly as assemblages of anomalies and exceptional cases conveyed through a focus upon incongruity, absurdity, failure" (Goodwin 67). The very structure of *Winesburg*, the fact that it is a compilation of loosely inter-connected stories, confirms this statement. A fragmentation forms the basis of *Winesburg, Ohio*. The stories which do not follow each other in terms of plot and

chronology point to an incongruity, to a fragmentation, which result from the grotesque construction of the book. Let us have a look at the opening piece of the book, “The Book of the Grotesque”:

That in the beginning when the world was young there were a great many thoughts but no such thing as a truth. Man made the truths himself and each truth was a composite of a great many vague thoughts. All about in the world were the truths and they were all beautiful.

The old man had listed hundreds of the truths in his book. I will not try to tell you of all of them. There was the truth of virginity and the truth of passion, the truth of wealth and of poverty, of thrift and of profligacy, of carelessness and abandon. Hundreds and hundreds were the truths and they were all beautiful.

And then the people came along. Each as he appeared snatched up one of the truths and some who were quite strong snatched up a dozen of them. It was the truths that made the people grotesques. The old man had quite an elaborate theory concerning the matter. It was his notion that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood. (Anderson 25)

This passage not only acts as a foundation for the stories to follow, but also as an offering that presents its own foundation myth of the country. The fixation of a “truth” emerges as the source of the grotesque according to Anderson’s narrator. What is this truth, then? How can a person take a truth and then turn into a grotesque? Henry F. May explains that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, “the first and central article of faith in the national credo was, as it always had been, the reality, certainty, and eternity of moral values. Words like truth, justice, patriotism, unselfishness, and decency were used constantly, without embarrassment, and ordinarily without any suggestion that their meaning might be only of a time and place” (May 9). Anderson, then, by underlining the existence of several truths, points out to an effort of homogenization prevalent at the time. The truth at the time was the construction and progress of America as a nation. “A

heterogeneous conglomeration of peoples, Americans above all other nationalities have had to strive for a sense of national identity and speculate endlessly about the process by which the diverse national and ethnic groups emigrating to the United States became American,” Levine notes (193). Significantly, this process was tinged with the flavor of religion. “A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians – into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American,” says a character in a play written in 1908, *The Melting Pot*. (May)

Following this thought, it is hard not to go back to the Puritan roots of the first settlers of the United States, and their views of the world. The coming to America, for the first settlers, was a test. They were coming to a new land that is both dangerous and beautiful, a land that is to be filled not only by their physical presences, but also with their minds. Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury, in *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*, provide illuminating insights on the matter:

The Puritan imagination, it was acknowledged, was central to the nature of American writing. One reason for this was that it brought to the New World not only a Judaic sense of wonder and millenarian promise - the "American dream" that is still recalled in so much modern literature, not least in the famous ending of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* in 1925 - but a vision of the task and nature of writing itself. Puritan narratives defined a shape for the writing of America, but they also questioned how and whether language could reveal the extraordinary experience. As a result, from the very beginnings America became a testing place of language and narrative, a place of search for providential meanings and hidden revelations, part of a lasting endeavor to discover the intended nature and purpose of the New World. (9)

This was because America was “the New World,” a world that was ready for the Puritans to fill it with their signs, their version of the truth, which is based on the Word of God, the Bible.

The Puritans were, after all, attempting to found a new order of society based on a new covenant of men and a new relation of religion and law.

Everything was thereby made ripe for interpretation. For those charged with the quest, it seemed that the whole world watched as God and Satan contested the meaning of human time on the American shore. The writer's urgent task was to displace the traditional center of historical significance in Europe and direct it onto the small band of spiritual pioneers who, for the world's sake, had accepted God's injunction to establish His Kingdom in the wilderness. (14)

These notions of travail, hard work, and consistent struggle against the dangers waiting in the wilderness are the dominating feature of the Puritan view of America. In this regard, the American small town is a unit of perseverance against the dangers of this new world, a body that consists of families which provide the bases of this small society. However, it must be noted that this is the Puritan's version of "the truth." What William Gouge, the English Puritan, writes in *Of Domestical Duties* (1622) is striking within this perspective:

Besides, a family is a little Church, and a little Commonwealth, at least a lively representation thereof, whereby trial may be made of such as are fit for any place of authority, or of subjection in Church or Commonwealth. Or rather it is as a school wherein the first principles and grounds of government and subjection are learned: whereby men are fitted to greater matters in church or Commonwealth. (Gouge 11)

The identification of family with the Church, and then with the "Commonwealth" is indeed significant. The construction of the society is based on "family," which is modeled both as a religious body, and a governmental one. Bestowed with educational powers, the notion of family that Gouge formulates not only applies to the domestic households, but also the one big family that they constitute as the United States. In this sense, the small-towns that make up the country at the time can also be regarded as small families. Indeed, those are the places where "grounds of government and subjection" are learned. It is interesting to compare this to the writings of John Winthrop and William Bradford, as Bradbury explains: "Winthrop carefully reads every natural sign for meaning and like Bradford projects a drama rooted in time's beginnings, where God charges His people to confound the ever-vigilant machinations of Satan by building

villages and lives that would embody and enact the divine will” (Bradbury 11). Villages and small towns, then, are like sentinels that are charged with keeping the Puritan ideal intact.

Where does Anderson’s text stand in the Puritan context, then? John H. Ferres’s description of the setting for *Winesburg, Ohio* is “then as now the puritan heartland of America.” A review in *The New Republic*, written in 1919 should be quoted at length as it presents a concise reception of the text, and hints at the conception of the text:

The story of a small town anywhere is the story of the revolt of youth against custom-morality; with youth winning only occasionally and in secret, losing often and publicly. In the middle west the dominant morality of the crossroads is a puritan inheritance.

The Winesburg of twenty years ago was like the Kansas of today, at least in philosophy. The known and accepted standards were those laid down some thousands of years ago by the leader of one of the nomadic tribes of Asia Minor, crudely adjusted to fit a more complex situation. In many ways the ancient laws could not be adjusted at all; they seem to have confused and darkened more often than they shed light. . . . Five hundred sensitive individuals isolated in a haphazard spot in the prairie and seeking to express themselves through the forms of a religion ill-understood, the methods of a business system inherently unjust, and the social customs of a more brutal and bitter era were fated to come upon tragic and pathetic difficulties. (Idema 89)

The reviewer’s emphasis on the ancient laws of the Bible as practiced by the Puritans is certainly significant. These laws are dead, and they are still trying to be used, the reviewer seems to say. Similarly, Sherwood Anderson, in a letter to M. D. Finley, writes: “At times there comes over a terrible conviction that I am living in a city of the dead. In the office dead voices discuss dead ideas. I go into the street and long rows of dead faces march past. Once I got so excited and terrified that I began to run through the streets. I had a mad impulse to shout, to strike people with my fist. I wanted terribly to awaken them” (Anderson, *Letters*). As Crowley comments, it is hard not to remember the scene where the narrator sees all the people walking in a long procession before his eyes in the

“Book of the Grotesque.” Crowley suggests that “this was Anderson’s vision of Puritan America” (Crowley 44). This emphasis by Crowley underlines the Puritan past presenting a single truth that is no longer available. Anderson’s seeing “dead” people confirms this.

On the other hand, another aspect of Puritanism emerges. John William Crowley explains that for Anderson, “the cult of the primitive was a way of rebelling against the repressive work ethic of Puritanism, the specific legacy of American history” (Crowley 33). Just as the expressionists’ use of primitivism to express “humankind’s impotence in the age of the machine,” Anderson uses it to delineate the Industrial onslaught with its Puritan roots the small town suffers.

To sum up, the United States in the early twentieth century with its attempt to melt several heterogeneous identities is itself a grotesque creature that tries to totalize the differences into one single Anglo-Puritan truth. In this regard, “the beginning” Anderson mentions points us to a foundation myth, the starting moment of this process. The claiming of a truth as one’s own points out to a moment of freezing, a capturing of time that brings along a fixation that deems the truth incompatible with the changing truths of the world. However, as Anderson’s narrator emphasizes, those truths were always multiple and various.

Similar to those truths, the families depicted in *Winesburg, Ohio* that make up the small town are mostly dysfunctional and distorted; in other words, fragmented. There is no longer a sense of unity that brings them together against the wilderness, as that wilderness is being conquered by each passing day during the Industrial Revolution in America. “The commanding reality in the United States during the nineteenth century was an ever-accelerating industrial revolution that transformed the very nature of social

life and generated a conspicuous new urban consciousness and culture,” David E. Shi explains. “With each passing year, the myriad effects of urban-industrial development led more and more people to jettison traditional folkways associated with rural life in favor of new urban environs, a more secular outlook, and enticing new economic and social opportunities” (79). However, as can be guessed, this “jettisoning” did not take place easily. The small town and its surroundings, the habitat of the “rural life” that Chi mentions were filled with a tension resulting from the industrial revolution. Instead of an opposition between the settlements and the wilderness, a new one, one that is between the town and the city was emerging. This tension is palpable in almost every story of *Winesburg, Ohio*, resulting in the grotesques of the town that are torn between their old, individual truths that are the remnants of the first settlers, and the myriad new truths of the industrialized country that is the United States.

An outline of this grotesque tension that is reflected in both the form and the content of the text should be mentioned at this point. *Winesburg, Ohio – “A Group of Tales of Ohio Small Town Life”* – consists of twenty stories, each fragment of a text focusing on a character and their relationship to the town and the other characters that take lead roles in the other stories in the book. “Anderson’s isolated figures, sequestered in self-contained stories, make modern alienation palpable,” Dieter Meindl notes, “with the cycle representing the community that fails to function as well as suggesting the flow of life that passes the ‘grotesques’ by and leaves them stranded” (208). This feeling of fragmentation permeates the text, reflects on its form, style, characters, and on the town itself. The transition from one story to another is, on the most part, abrupt, the narrator providing the reader with no clues on the reason why one story comes after another. If we

are to remember Godwin's constitution of the family as a unit, and Shi's comments on how Americans found themselves longing for a past in the rapidly changing country, *Winesburg, Ohio*'s structure as a de-centralized text makes more sense as the book itself finds itself on a matrix of incongruities that result from the transformation the United States is going through at the time. In this newly-emerging world, just as Gouge's notion of family that signifies a single unit of a Puritan truth fails to reflect the happenings in the world, so does a written work of a coherent structure. Seemingly in a similar vein, Malcolm Cowley describes the stories in *Winesburg* as "moments," that exist "separately and timelessly" (*Winesburg* 251). Though I agree with Cowley on the stories' timeless existence, separation also brings along the notion of disconnectedness, which should be emphasized in terms of the grotesque. Although the whole text as a structure constitutes the depiction of a small-town, the feeling of disconnectedness that is reflected in this very structure undermines this claim of depiction. It is almost that, as Meindl notes, the text itself leaves its characters stranded in its structure, though appearing in the background at times, unable to move within it.

The style of *Winesburg* also confirms this claim. Sherwood Anderson's attempt to create a style that is clear and plain is an effort that needs to be unpacked within a framework that includes the grotesque as a literary mode. In *Winesburg, Ohio*, Anderson's sentences are not complex, but simple, lacking in subjunctives. "His style is plain, staccato, perhaps a little deliberately unliterary," writes a reviewer in "The Bookman" journal in 1919 (729). Accordingly, Kenny J. Williams writes that Anderson was committed "to clarity and simplicity. He captured rhythms of midwestern speech, achieving power from its plainness and cadences" (Williams). Anderson's style is one of

the important reasons that *Winesburg, Ohio* was hailed as an early modernist text. When closely examined, though, this attempt also finds its roots in the past of the United States. Writers like Winthrop and Bradford aimed for a “plaine style” that, according to Bradford, looked for a “simple truth” (Bradbury). “Running through their concerned recording was a metaphysic of writing which endlessly sought meaning by separating the word from ornate and ceremonial usage to attach it again to good conscience and revelation,” Bradbury explains (15). Thomas Hooker, the early Puritan colonial leader writes that plain style comes from “out of the wilderness.” At this point, at first it might be easy to claim that what Anderson does by going back to the style opted by the Puritans instead of the eloquent style of the American romantic era that dominated the Civil War is an attempt to resurrect that simple past. However, that would be a simplifying explanation that ignores not only the stylistic incongruities *Winesburg, Ohio* shelters in itself, but also the way that plain style operates in the text. Because, if we are to remember the very opening of the book, Anderson makes it explicit that there is no more a single truth, but multiple ones. This multiplicity is also reflected in this plain-looking style. Irwin Howe explains:

The prose Anderson employs in telling these stories may seem at first glance to be simple: short sentences, a sparse vocabulary, uncomplicated syntax. In actuality, Anderson developed an artful style in which, following Mark Twain and preceding Ernest Hemingway, he tried to use American speech as the base of a tensed rhythmic prose that has an economy and a shapeliness seldom found in ordinary speech or even oral narration. (Howe 7)

This deceptive plainness of style and structure of *Winesburg, Ohio* is hinted in the text itself. Let us take a look at this description of the town towards the end of the book: “In the main street of Winesburg crowds filled the stores and the sidewalks. Night came on, horses whinnied, the clerks in the stores ran madly about, children became lost and

cried lustily, an American town worked terribly at the task of amusing itself” (233). The personification of the town as an entity who works “terribly” at “amusing” itself is indeed significant. The excerpt not only points out to the paradoxical existence of the grotesque that harbors both entertainment and horror, but also the onanist nature of this amusement². Onanism, an act that takes place at the whim of the individual could well be the actual, hidden way of Winesburg’s “amusing itself” not only as a town, but also as a text. By hinting at onanism, Anderson, with a distorted sense of nostalgia that longs for a plain style, may be undermining the prescribed literature of the time, looking at his own. What the narrator tells about Doctor Parcival in “The Philosopher,” in this aspect, is significant: “The tales that Doctor Parcival told George Willard began nowhere and ended nowhere. Sometimes the boy thought they must all be inventions, a pack of lies. And then again he was convinced that they contained the very essence of truth” (51). Certainly, the stories in *Winesburg*, too, begin nowhere and end nowhere. They do not provide definitive explanations or resolutions in the characters’ lives. However, the stories contain individual essences of truth that are hinted at in Anderson’s opening. We have a text/town that tries to terribly amuse itself, with its stories that do not have specific beginnings or endings. In this way, *Winesburg, Ohio* points to the way it adopts the grotesque as a form, and the way the grotesque, with the instability it brings to the construction of the text, is used to amplify the tension and instability Anderson is trying to convey to the reader.

Winesburg, as mentioned earlier, has several inconsistencies throughout, at times resorting to narration in a plain style, and at times opting for a more convoluted prose.

² As Svetlana Boym points out, “in nineteenth-century America it was believed that the main reasons for homesickness were idleness and a slow and inefficient use of time conducive to daydreaming, erotomania and onanism” (Boym 6).

This is reflected in the town of Winesburg, which, as we learn throughout the text, was much smaller, and grew bigger in approximately the last hundred years or so. The town itself, like the text, is in a state of indecision, or behaves as a site of incongruity because of its relation to its surroundings. Consider the passage in “Paper Pills, Concerning Doctor Reefy,” where the narrator starts the story of the doctor and his relationship with a woman. The story is

delicious, like the twisted little apples that grow in the orchards of Winesburg. In the fall one walks in the orchards and the ground is hard with frost underfoot. The apples have been taken from the trees by the pickers. They have been put in barrels and shipped to the cities where they will be eaten in apartments that are filled with books, magazines, furniture, and people. On the trees are only a few gnarled apples that the pickers have rejected. They look like the knuckles of Doctor Reefy's hands. One nibbles at them and they are delicious. Into a little round place at the side of the apple has been gathered all of its sweetness. One runs from tree to tree over the frosted ground picking the gnarled, twisted apples and filling his pockets with them. Only the few know the sweetness of the twisted apples. (Anderson 36)

The passage shelters and reflects several incongruities in the text. In terms of plot, the narration abruptly leaves the doctor and concentrates shortly on the story of the apples and the way they are picked and shipped to the city. Probably the better looking apples, once picked for the city, become reified, counted as things alongside books and furniture. This story, however, the narrator claims, tastes like the “twisted little apples” which are in fact the leftovers deemed not good enough for the city. In this manner, the whole narration acts as a metaphor for Anderson’s understanding of the small town fiction. These are the stories of the people not good enough for the city; nevertheless, though twisted and gnarled, they have a place where sweetness is gathered. It is in this way Anderson constructs the whole text of *Winesburg, Ohio*: gnarled, twisted pieces of text which also have a strange, intoxicating taste.

The grotesqueness of style and structure of the text which results from the tension between the rapid industrialization of a country and its longing for a simpler, purer past is observable in the characters, too – both physically and mentally. Anderson, nonetheless, subtly shows that to resurrect that past is an act in vain. In “Hands,” the story of Wing Biddlebaum, Anderson’s narrator narrates the encounter between George Willard and Wing, whose hands are at the same time a source of pride for Winesburg: “Winesburg was proud of the hands of Wing Biddlebaum in the same spirit in which it was proud of Banker White's new stone house and Wesley Moyer's bay stallion, Tony Tip, that had won the two-fifteen trot at the fall races in Cleveland” (29). As we read along, however, it turns out that Wing’s hands are also the source of his troubled past. Because of the activity of his hands, he has been wrongly accused of molesting children when he used to teach in another town in Pennsylvania, and was driven away. Wing, as he talks to George, speaks “as one lost in a dream,” (30) explaining his longing for a pure past. In this manner, the hands also act as a metaphor for the grotesque mode itself. The hands, whose story is “worth a book in itself,” both have a “strange activity” that draws the eye to themselves, but also incline to “keep hidden away,” an incongruity that is inherent to the grotesque (29). Still, the hands, with their physical activity, can create a story that is visual: “Out of the dream Wing Biddlebaum made a picture for George Willard. In the picture men lived again in a kind of pastoral golden age. Across a green open country came clean-limbed young men, some afoot, some mounted upon horses. In crowds the young men came to gather about the feet of an old man who sat beneath a tree in a tiny garden and who talked to them” (30). This passage has significance on several layers. The pastoral golden age depicted in Wing’s picture is no longer available, we understand,

because men live in that age “again.” By the evocative ability of art, at least, the creation of the artist can live on. Moreover, this idyllic age presented in the imagined painting is one that idealizes men’s unmediated connection with others and with nature: “a green open country” with men afoot and men with horses that are in direct connection with nature, listening to a man under a tree. Recalling Chi’s comments, with the advent of capitalism, the individual’s alienation from her vocation and from her surroundings was becoming more obvious in the early twentieth century. It wouldn’t be so surprising, then, to see an excerpt like this in *Winesburg, Ohio*, which concerns itself with the transforming country and a small-town that is lurching back and forth in this process. However, read/looked at closely, it emerges that this longing for a past that is unmediated, or in “plaine style” is unattainable precisely because of the means to reenact that past. The text mentions an imagined painting, and then paints it. Writing, an art that is already mediated constructs a painting in itself, thereby presenting a further mediation. In this manner, the way to relive the past that is purported to be a pastoral golden age turns out to be a paradoxical attempt, a site of incongruities. This situation has repercussions for the small town, too. The way the small town is perceived as a site of immediate presence is also replicated here, just to be undermined. The passage signifies not only the transformation Winesburg is going through, but also the general idea of a small town that is in unmediated connection with nature and wilderness.

The feeling of nostalgia can be helpful to understand what is happening here. “Nostalgia (from *nostos* – return home, and *algia* – longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed,” explains Boym. (Boym xiii) “Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy. (...)

Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals” (Boym xiv). What we have in Wing’s case is not only a historical upheaval that takes place around himself, but also a personal one. For Wing, the thoughts are no longer simple, “natural,” but unclear – including his, one suspects. Instead of the Word of the God that is the Bible, which used to be the leading signifier for the Puritan settlers, now there are multiple “Words” out there which stake their claim on the individual. This is why Wing tells George to forget “all you have learned:” “You must begin to dream. From this time on you must shut your ears to the roaring of the voices” (30). By an attempt to shut out the voices that surrounds the individual and going back to a state of dream which harbors the untainted past, Wing attempts to salvage his own, too. Nonetheless, this is no longer possible as he looks “long and earnestly” at George, as when he raises his hands to caress the boy, “a look of horror” sweeps over his face (30). The horror is the acknowledgment of the irreversibility of the past which is also in parallel with the lost “innocence” of the American past of the first settlers. Wing, existing at a crucial time of transition in the history of the US, is unsurprisingly “one of those men in whom the force that creates life is diffused, not centralized” (31). The force that creates life can no longer be centralized, as those very centers are being diffused throughout the country by way of industrialization. In this regard, when Fredrik Jameson comments that “the autonomy of the small town has vanished,” and that “what was once a separate point on the map has become an imperceptible thickening in a continuum of identical products and standardized spaces from coast to coast,” (Jameson 281) the situation of *Winesburg, Ohio* becomes more perceptible. Anderson’s story is located near the very beginning of the “thickening” Jameson points to. It is not, therefore, surprising

that Wing Biddlebaum is looking for a “pastoral golden age” that no longer exists. This is the reason why Biddlebaum wants George to close his ears to the “roaring.” The choice of word is significant, as it brings along the connotations of machinery, and in particular, roaring of a train. Melissa Gniadek notes that “the train is the most pervasive indication of the encroachment of the outside world on Winesburg, and in several stories its noise is noted in the background.” For Gniadek, the city is “a space that is in the process of consuming Winesburg, both its products and people, its ways and values, and is rarely described positively” (Gniadek 29). Following Gniadek, we can say that as the city closes down on the town, the reaction of the inhabitants of the town finds voice on a grotesque level.

Certainly, this “encroachment” takes its toll on the characters that fill *Winesburg, Ohio*. In “Mother, Concerning Elizabeth Willard,” George’s mother is described as “tall and gaunt,” with a face “marked with smallpox scars.” She is forty-five years old, but “some obscure disease had taken the fire out of her figure” (39). The woman’s physical condition is also reflected in her “disorderly, old” hotel with “faded wall-paper and the ragged carpets” (39). Elizabeth’s condition is similar to that of Biddlebaum, who is “but forty but looked sixty-five” (33). In a similar vein, Jesse Bentley in “Godliness” is at one point in the story only fifty-five years old but looks seventy. It is almost like the whole town – or specifically, all the characters of *Winesburg, Ohio* – is suffering from that “obscure disease” that Elizabeth Willard is suffering from. These characters look older, but what does this exactly mean? It could be that either they are too old for the times they inhabit, not being able to keep up with it, or the zeitgeist of the period is the very reason that ages them prematurely. It is almost that the pervading feeling of non-stop progress as

exemplified by the trains flings them into their own, aged futures. This obscure disease, one could say following the lead of Jameson, may well be the advance of a new paradigm that dominates the country, capitalism, leaving the town and its inhabitants in a state of tension and contradiction with the times they inhabit. Their actual ages are younger than what they show, or they are scarred. Either way, they are not synchronized with the age they inhabit bodily and characteristically. However, like the apples not deemed good enough to be picked for the city, these characters still have attributes that give taste to the reader.

The results of the grotesque tension that manifests itself in apparent physical discrepancies in the characters mentioned above becomes much denser in “Godliness,” and in the life of Jesse Bentley, this time showing a desynchronization with the present so intense that its effects are both mental and physical, as are the supposed remedies Jesse Bentley turns to. “Godliness” is concerned with the Bentley family, beginning from their settlement in Winesburg. The story takes shape as the narrator goes back to the Bentleys’ first coming to the Midwest from New York State. Interestingly, in “Godliness” the narrative style takes a naturalistic tone, as if to imitate the old times it depicts: “Into their lives came little that was not coarse and brutal and outwardly they were themselves coarse and brutal” (64). Jesse Bentley emerges as the only survivor of the Civil War to which the other brothers had enlisted, as he leaves home to become a minister in a Presbyterian Church. His features and body is of a grotesque nature. The fact that he does not belong to the times he has been living in is reflected both in his physical appearance and mind. He is “a man born out of his time and place,” who because of this, “suffered and made others suffer” (67). Moreover, Jesse is “small and very slender and womanish

of body,” (66) and he never succeeds in “getting what he wanted out of life.” And, “like a thousand other strong men who have come into the world here in American in these later times, Jesse was but half strong. He could master others but he could not master himself” (68). This is because Jesse exists at a time of great social upheaval. “Small towns, initially symbols of ‘civilization’ in the wilderness of the frontier, became sites of ‘incompleteness, anticipation and...practice,’” Gniadek suggests, “as they grew into larger cities, rather than places offering stability or any kind of solution to the problems of settlement” (Gniadek 27). Jesse, reflecting this incompleteness in his grotesque body and mind, probably involuntarily, transfers and translates his religious fervor into economical terms, as he begins to think of himself “as an extraordinary man, one set apart from his fellows.” Having studied and thought “of God and the Bible with his whole mind and heart,” “the passionate burning thing in his nature” flames up and Jesse wants “to make the farm produce as no farm in his state had ever produced before” (68).

The way Jesse juxtaposes God and the Bible with a concept of production that will know no rivals is striking as it signals a paradox. While Jesse longs for the lost past, in this sense, Jesse’s disjunction in life as a human being coincides with the overlapping of Puritan ideals and individual’s venture into the capitalistic world. O’Neill notes that the story “dramatizes not just the fusion of Calvinism and capitalism but the emotional and moral processes by which, in the minds of certain Americans of the period, the Old Testament became a living metaphor for the life they lived on the land” (O’Neill 78). Jesse wants to be disseminator of this new kind of man. His mind going back “to the men of Old Testament days who had also owned lands and herds,” Jesse exclaims: “O God, create in me another Jesse, like that one of old, to rule over men and to be the father of

sons who shall be rulers!” as he walks up and down in his room (70). It is, therefore, no wonder that his womanish body wants to give birth to another Jesse. Within this perspective, Bakhtin’s understanding of the grotesque body is significant. For Bakhtin, a fundamental tendency of the grotesque image of the body is “to show two bodies in one:” “the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated, and born” (*Rabelais* 26). Instead of looking older than his age like, for instance, Elizabeth Willard, Jesse shelters two beings in himself, one that is like the men of old times that fought with evil, and the other a man looking to synchronize with industrial production. Jesse Bentley, then, just like his body, and just like the small town of Winesburg, bears grotesque features in his mind, too, which is reflected in his musings. Jesse, trying to give birth to a new Jesse, wants “God to notice and to talk to him also” because “the importance of his own figure in some divine plan” grows in his mind (72). As Ruland and Bradbury explain, “despite their failings, the Puritans persist in writing for themselves a central role in the sacred drama God had designed for man to enact on the American stage, the stage of true history” (13). However, this central drama is stillborn from the beginning as there are two entities striving for that very role in Jesse. This is what Jesse tries to enact through himself, to no avail. Dewey suggests that “if the central drama of the Puritan experiment was the relationship between man and his God, it was often a heartcrushingly one-sided communication” (Dewey 254).

Jesse’s aim to give birth to another Jesse from inside of his self that results from the tension between his desire to integrate himself to capitalism and simultaneously live in a simpler time is a grotesque desire. This desire, unfulfilled by god, makes him turn to his grandson, David, which will lead to an act of failed sacrifice. Desperately longing for

a “simpler and sweeter time when at the beckoning of some strange cloud in the sky men left their lands and houses and went forth into the wilderness to create new races,” Jesse also hungers for something else: to make money “faster than it could be made by tilling the land” (80). Filled with these contradictions, Jesse takes David to an excursion into the forest. There, identifying David with the Old Testament figure, Jesse asks for a sign from God. David is terrified, feeling a conviction that “by some miracle a new and dangerous person had come into the body of the kindly old man” (86). It is as if Jesse Bentley sheds his outer skin, and there emerges one of the mental bodies that have been vying for contention, which Bakhtin speaks of. Later in the story, after seeing a dream concerning a lamb born “out of season,” Jesse takes David once more into the woods, this time with a lamb tied in his grandson’s lap, having decided that “like the men whose stories filled the pages of the Bible, he would make a sacrifice to God” (99-100). What Jesse aims by this sacrifice is to get a confirmation from his God that he is on the right path in his estimation of the world. By sacrificing the lamb (and his grandson, too?) he wants to disseminate his inner world to his surroundings, to create and reenact that glorious past of the settlers where he could use “his own restless energy in the building of temples, the slaying of unbelievers and in general in the work of glorifying God's name on earth” (80). What Jesse is not aware of, though, is that he himself is a part and enactor of a new world that is at the process of emerging with the industrialization of the United States. His orientation is no longer toward the land that is part of the small town, but to the city, as he advises his son-in-law to do so. Jesse Bentley attempts an act of sacrifice to go back a past that can no longer be procured. On the other hand, David, thinking that he has killed the “man of God,” heralds himself into a new era that does not necessarily need a

confirmation to be “a man.” David’s fear as he thinks that he is going to be sacrificed results in an attempt of a sacrifice of his own, because, as he knocks Jesse out with a stone, he proclaims that he has “killed the man of God” and now he will himself “be a man and go into the world” (102). Agamben comments that “the victim is sacrificed not because he is weak or inferior (or strong and superior), but paradoxically because he is like us, because he resembles the community of those who would otherwise be engaged in an endless frenzy of retaliations” (Chow quoting from Agamben 145). Although Jesse wants to shape David into the shape of the new era that he sees, David, because of his youth, simultaneously reminds him of the past, times of “old brutal ignorance that had in it also a kind of beautiful childlike innocence,” in other words, of the other man in Jesse’s body that Jesse wants to get rid of (71)³. Once more the grotesque emerges as a defining mode of *Winesburg, Ohio*.

At this point, it is necessary to study the grotesque as a disseminator of both horror and comfort from a psychoanalytic point of view. Sigmund Freud’s notion of “The Uncanny,” I believe, is a tool that can be employed in this effort. In his titular essay, Freud traces back the etymology of the word “Unheimlich,” meaning “Unhomely,” in several languages, and in particular German, then reaching the conclusion that the German word “Unheimlich” is both an antonym and a synonym to the word “Heimlich,” “homely.”⁴ In *Winesburg, Ohio*, with the unprecedented social change affecting Winesburg, the uncanny manifests itself in a double-layered manner: on the characters,

³ This paradoxical situation is also reflected in the setting that enables Jesse to follow his intention. David comes to the woods with his grandfather because he feels very much comforted by them. The horror that results from this sacrificial confrontation stems from the very setting that is a source of pastoral comfort.

⁴ Freud then moves on to describe uncanny as “in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old – established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression” (Freud).

and on the social body of the town itself. Although a home for its inhabitants, as the town changes rapidly, it becomes a place that is homely and “unhomely” – or, uncanny – at the same time, because they are in the process of being alienated from their very surroundings, which in turn define their mental conditions. In “Drink,” when Tom Forster’s grandmother comes back to Winesburg, she is shocked: “She could not believe that the tiny village of fifty years before had grown into a thriving town in her absence, and in the morning when the train came to Winesburg did not want to get off” (211). In Jesse Bentley’s case, as the times change rapidly, the Puritan spirit that permeates the character’s mind is distorted. Another instance would be Elizabeth Willard, George Willard’s mother. “I wanted to go at a terrible speed, to drive on and on forever. I wanted to get out of town, out of my clothes, out of my marriage, out of my body, out of everything,” tells Elizabeth to Doctor Reefy (227). With the feeling of confinement that invades her being, it is not enough for Elizabeth just to get out of town. She has to get out of her own body, too. In a larger scale, the town is too struggling with itself, going through the process of industrialization whether it wants or not. “If psycho-analytic theory is correct in maintaining that every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into anxiety.” says Freud⁵. A fragment of *Winesburg, Ohio*, in this respect, is a striking example to show a trace of the repressed concerning the small town and its inhabitants. “Loneliness” is a particular instance. Enoch Robinson goes to the city to become a painter, fails, and comes back to

⁵ “Then,” Freud goes on to say, “among instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs*. This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny; and it must be a matter of indifference whether what is uncanny was itself originally frightening or whether it carried some *other* affect. In the second place, if this is indeed the secret nature of the uncanny, we can understand why linguistic usage has extended *das Heimliche* [‘homely’] into its opposite, *das Unheimliche*” (p. 226)

Winesburg. When living in the city, Enoch wants but fails to tell his friends that the picture he painted and they are now looking at “doesn't consist of the things you see and say words about. There is something else, something you don't see at all, something you aren't intended to see” (169). Enoch continues:

Look at this one over here, by the door here, where the light from the window falls on it. The dark spot by the road that you might not notice at all is, you see, the beginning of everything. There is a clump of elders there such as used to grow beside the road before our house back in Winesburg, Ohio, and in among the elders there is something hidden. It is a woman, that's what it is. She has been thrown from a horse and the horse has run away out of sight. Do you not see how the old man who drives a cart looks anxiously about? That is Thad Grayback who has a farm up the road. He is taking corn to Winesburg to be ground into meal at Comstock's mill. He knows there is something in the elders, something hidden away, and yet he doesn't quite know. (169-70)

As Enoch tries to tell his friends how they should try to look at a picture, that there is always something hidden in plain sight of their eyes, he also – knowingly or not – makes explicit his repressed relationship with his hometown. Just as the figure in the painting, Thad Grayback, does not quite know what is hidden in the trees, Enoch Robinson is also not completely aware of how his past in the small town of Winesburg has an effect on him. In a way, what is being repressed in a small town like Winesburg is a past that is tried to be resurrected, but is slowly disappearing into a void. In this sense, if we are to go back and once more view the scene in which Wing Biddlebaum “paints a picture” for George Willard, we may realize that, all along, there may have been something wrong with the picture: “Across a green open country came clean-limbed young men, some afoot, some mounted upon horses. In crowds the young men came to gather about the feet of an old man who sat beneath a tree in a tiny garden and who talked to them” (30). If we are to adopt Enoch's view of paintings, then there should also be something that we are

not supposed to see. This “something” could be no other than Biddlebaum’s fleeing of the town because of accusations regarding sexual harassment. The uncanny aspect of nostalgia comes to surface. These two concepts may seem contradictory at first. However, as Boym, commenting on the “terrifying aspects of what was once homey,” explains, they are situated on the same paradigmatic plane: “At first glance, it appears that the uncanny is a fear of the familiar, whereas nostalgia is a longing for it; yet for a nostalgic, the lost home and the home abroad often appear haunted” (Boym 251). The nostalgia we locate here, then, aims for a past that is not in actuality the pure past, as Enoch points out to the reader, and as the mediated nature of Wing’s painting signifies. The feeling of hauntedness signifies for nostalgia, the grotesque, and the uncanny.

The town, though, is having trouble dealing with its own fragmented grotesqueness. As Winesburg is torn between the two pulling forces of capitalism and nostalgia, it tries to keep itself unified, stable, trying to keep the untainted image of itself, not unlike the picture Wing Biddlebaum paints with his hands. In this respect, the town’s construction as a social body should be examined with a closer look. The narrative brings life to Winesburg piece by piece, in each its fragment. The town is both a settlement for its inhabitants, and also a source of meaning for them. Robert Pinsky notes that “the town can seem benignly welcoming, but its embrace can also suffocate, or turn nasty and punitive. It can kill with a brutality all the more terrible because it is unaware” (Pinsky 61). The town of Winesburg is also a collective body that passes judgments on its inhabitants. The characters that are mentioned in the text, accordingly, are defined by Winesburg. Enoch’s story is, once more, striking in this aspect. The reason the reader gets to know Enoch’s story is because of his return to Winesburg: “That is why he went

back to live in Winesburg and why we know about him” (173). If there are doubts about the syntactical meaning of this sentence, another sentence following soon after this one makes the situation clear: “Something had to drive him out of the New York room to live out his life an obscure, jerky little figure, bobbing up and down on the streets of an Ohio town at evening when the sun was going down behind the roof of Wesley Moyer's livery barn” (173). As soon as Enoch returns to town, his existence and perception is swallowed by it. The sun does not go down behind any natural scene, but behind “the roof of Wesley Moyer’s livery barn.” A celestial object that is universal to all humanity is tied down with the roof of a known figure’s barn, deeming it mundane, usual, and part of the town’s being. It is not a universal sun, but that of Winesburg.

The town’s role as a definitive social body – a collective entity – affecting the individual also hints at itself in “The Teacher,” Kate Swift’s story. At one point, Kate Swift decides to leave her house in the storm, although almost the whole town is in bed: “It was past ten o’clock when Kate Swift set out and the walk was unpremeditated. It was as though the man and the boy, by thinking of her, had driven her forth into the wintry streets” (160). The feeling that permeates here is certainly uncanny, as if the man and the boy have certain powers. When Kate gives advice to George about becoming a writer, telling him that “the thing to learn is to know what people are thinking about, not what they say,” (163) the narrator’s aim becomes more transparent. As we are to see in Elmer’s questioning of Willard’s role in town, it is apparent that George learning what people think about could indeed position him as a figure of judgment in the society, having powers not unlike the man and the boy’s driving Kate into the streets.

Similarly, George Willard's location as the central figure that hovers in and around almost all the stories in the text begs for attention. Willard, the writer-to-be whose life in the town at the end becomes "but a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood," (247) is a reporter at first. Although we are given no information regarding whether he "reports" the stories of other people to others or not, the fact that George knows every important thing about characters is significant. In "Queer," Elmer Cowley feels that George Willard "belonged to the town, typified the town, represented in his person the spirit of the town" (194)⁶. Indeed, as we read along, we tend to sympathize with George, as he, in turn, sympathizes with the other characters in the text, deeming his way of judging adequate, conflating our point of view with his own. Within this perspective, Elmer certainly points out to a danger that is lurking on the borders of the text, as the town's judgment of Jesse Bentley warns us: "The neighbors were amused when they saw him, after the years away, and they were even more amused when they saw the woman he had married in the city" (67). O'Neill writes that here the town mocks Jesse, "its derision being a sign of resistance to change, the community's demand that the familiar be endlessly renewed, and the strange rejected" (O'Neill 72). This is significant, not only because Anderson describes his fictional town as busy "at terribly amusing itself," but also because the "rejection of the strange" is a recurring pattern in literature concerning the American small town and the grotesque. The unawareness Pinsky articulates, as I will trace in the following chapters, is deliberate, because the town wants to keep itself intact, untainted, like in the imagined past Wing Biddlebaum or Jesse Bentley longs for.

⁶ "Did he not represent public opinion and had not the public opinion of Winesburg condemned the Cowleys to queerness?" asks Elmer, "Might not one by striking his person strike also the greater enemy—the thing that smiled and went its own way—the judgment of Winesburg?" (194)

Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* is a modernist text that harbors the weird and the funny, the strange and the scary, the mundane and the horrific. In this sense, the collection of stories set in a fictional American small town bears in itself the many characteristics of the grotesque. Winesburg and its inhabitants exist on the aftermath of a social upheaval that is the Industrial Revolution, while the text that exhibits this tension itself was published in the aftermath of World War I. This signifies a longing for the American small-town as a peaceful site to be returned back to in times of social upheavals. However, Anderson shows us that is not the case. The effects of capitalization that is embodied in the city that looms as an absent presence in the text signals itself as a cause of what makes the characters full of incongruities, conflicting opposites, inconsistencies – in other words, grotesque. With the idea of progress, and a recurring longing for a pure past, the small town emerges as a site of a grotesque tension, whose source can be traced back to the Puritan past of the United States. The town itself behaves as if caught in a mental storm, its inhabitants vying for their individual nostalgias, in Jesse Bentley's case attempting via acts of sacrifice to resurrect the past. The failed sacrifice to recreate that golden past in *Winesburg, Ohio* will this time be fulfilled in David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* with the use of the grotesque taking on a style that can no longer be content with Anderson's plain one.

3. THE GROTESQUE GAZE: *TWIN PEAKS* AND THE MASCULINE CAPITALISM

“We all killed her,” says Bobby Briggs, the murdered Laura Palmer’s ex-boyfriend at her funeral, accusing the Twin Peaks community. “We all knew she needed help and none of us did nothing” (1:3). Thus the town of Twin Peaks mourns its murdered member, a young, popular high-school girl who used to be the beloved of the town, and whose murderer turns out to be her father Leland Palmer possessed by BOB, seemingly a supernatural, malicious being.

Twin Peaks (1990-1991) is a TV series created by David Lynch and Mike Frost, and broadcast on ABC. It was a national and worldwide phenomenon at the time and aftermath of its broadcast, with millions engaged in serious conversation on the interpretation of the show, attributing it a cult status. The setting of the series is a fictional town called Twin Peaks. Its plot is mainly concerned with the death of Laura Palmer.

Although there have been several critical studies on *Twin Peaks*, in particular from psychoanalytic and feministic point of views, there has not been a comprehensive approach that deals with the relationship between the series and its setting in the American small town, and the way the series employs the grotesque as a literary mode in its written and visual narrative. This relationship is the focus of this chapter, following my discussion of Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*.

I argue that *Twin Peaks* presents us with a grotesque narrative constructed with incompatible doubles, about a small-town that is unknowingly torn between the

encroachment of capitalism which operates as an absent presence, and a feeling of nostalgia that borders on delusion. These forces play themselves out in a grotesque vision. My contention is that the separation of inside/outside in the series is charged with a femininity on the part of the town, and masculinity on the part of uncontrolled capitalist endeavors. An overcharged, violent male gaze is deliberately constructed and simultaneously undermined in the series to show that the town as a feminine body is oppressed. Capitalism operates as a charged, masculine absent presence in *Twin Peaks*, and the town, against this presence, finds itself in a state of nostalgia. Within this perspective, I contextualize Laura Palmer's murder as a sacrifice aimed to keep that nostalgia intact. In this sense, I claim that the murder of Laura Palmer is an act of sacrifice that paradoxically works on two levels. One is a sacrifice that tries to bring back the days of imagined peace for the town as a collective social body. This act is also a sacrifice for capitalism, as Laura's death is necessary because she tries to disrupt the illusion of capitalism draped over the whole town like a curtain. The sacrifice takes place in order to keep the circular time that Twin Peaks "lives in." I contend that Jesse Bentley's failed act of sacrifice in *Winesburg, Ohio* is fulfilled in the death of *Twin Peaks*' Laura Palmer. However, just as Bentley's act is stillborn, so is Leland Palmer/BOB's, because the idea of the idyllic small town untouched by capitalism is a misleading source of nostalgia that is not sustainable anymore, neither by the town folk, nor by capitalism. In this reading, "Twin Peaks" is not only the name of the town, but several towering doubles and oppositions that affirm, aggravate, and undermine each other. In this regard, the way the series employ the grotesque is a visuality that is based on the juxtaposition of conflicting binaries.

Set in the then 1990s, *Twin Peaks* depicts a fictional small town when the population of Americans living in communities with populations of 10,000 or less was one of its lowest in history: 18 percent (Ehrenhalt). However, the ratings of the show, until after the revealing of the identity of the murderer were very high (ABC). This shows an interest in a story about a small town by the whole nation, not limited to a particular type of community. The concept of the small-town in the early 1990s, although losing to out-migration a lot, was still able to capture the imagination of the United States because of... what exactly?

This is where the paradox that *Twin Peaks* presents to its audience begins. Although the small town depicted in the series looked gorgeous and alluring with beautiful images of nature starting from its opening sequence, *Twin Peaks* immediately shatters this illusion as it leaves us with the dead body of a young woman wrapped in plastic. So, was it the idyllic setting of a fictional small town, or a horrible murder that took place in that town that allured an audience? The case could be that it is both, which I believe, is itself a grotesque occurrence.

Twin Peaks employs the grotesque as a mode that is visual, narrational, and one that is reflected on the characters. In the visual sense, the imagery of a serene, peaceful town is continuously juxtaposed with sudden, eerie scenes of horror that points out to what lurks underneath that façade. Narration-wise, the series use similar techniques. The driving plot point – the brutal rape, torture, and murder of a beautiful woman – is itself a grotesque bomb that is dropped in the middle of the town in the opening of the series. Bodily deformities are abundant, from Nadine's eye patch to Mike's armless body to the dwarf and the giant that make recurring appearances in the show. All these grotesques,

both in the visual and literary sense, help *Twin Peaks* emerge as a site of tension. This grotesquery, I will argue, results from capitalism and nostalgia it produces.

The significant aspect of *Twin Peaks* in terms of its use of the grotesque is that one can detect the mode's manifestations both in the Kayserian sense, and in the Bakhtinian sense. While the ridiculous and the absurd with their subversive qualities, which are the trademarks of the grotesque for Bakhtin, is abundant in the series in the depiction of the town and its characters, bringing a comic flavor to it, at the same time the horrific, the uncanny, and the demonic time and again make themselves apparent. In a sense, one can say, *Twin Peaks* presents the audience with a hybridized version of the grotesque. Here, Michael Steig's discussion of the grotesque is helpful for my purposes in that the way *Twin Peaks* uses the mode. Steig explains that the grotesque is "double-edged, it at once allays and intensifies the effect of the uncanny." For Steig, the grotesque can "diminish the threat through degradation or ridicule." But at the same time, Steig notes, the devices the grotesque employs "may also enhance anxiety through their aggressive implications and through the strangeness they lend to the threatening figure" (259). In accordance with Steig's articulation of the grotesque, *Twin Peaks* presents the audience with a visual narrative that is hard to interpret. The viewer senses that something is wrong, but is not sure exactly where that weirdness lies. The socio-political context *Twin Peaks* finds itself, then, is important to understand the version of the grotesque Lynch & Frost employ.

Commenting on the situation of the small-town during the 1980s, Emanuel Levy writes that with the election of Ronald Reagan there was a turn toward "more traditional roles, institutions, and ideologies." Levy goes on to say that

the pursuit of the good old days – that may have never existed – became another myth. The resurgence of a neoconservative and patriotic mood, epitomized by the Reagan administration, also resulted in the production of films that strongly reaffirmed traditional virtues associated with small towns, such as honesty, integrity, commitment to the land, and the centrality of the nuclear family. (Levy 213)

In *Twin Peaks*, Lynch and his co-creator Frost, similar to what Lynch does in *Blue Velvet* (1986), scrutinize and dislocate these suppositions that were attributed to the small-town during the 1980s, looking for the unfamiliar that lurks behind the familiar. Therefore, the grotesque as a visual-literary mode makes a perfect candidate to be employed by the creators, because, as O'Connor argues, the grotesque "confronts the antipoetic and the ugly and presents them, when viewed out of the side of the eye, as the closest we can come to the sublime. The grotesque affronts our sense of established order and satisfies, or partly satisfies, our need for at least a tentative, a more flexible ordering" (O'Connor 19). *Twin Peaks* looks at what lies beneath the peaceful façade of an idyllic town, and aims to extract what has been hidden under its nooks and crevices, wondering what its insides are like.

The common thread of criticism on the series, following a Jamesonian lead, is that its dependence on the supernatural and its postmodernist style renders any claim *Twin Peaks* can make irrelevant (Altman, Booker, Schmid). However, *Twin Peaks* makes it explicit that the results of the supernatural that takes place is real, so are its repercussions. As the co-creator Frost explains: "What we're trying to talk about in *Twin Peaks* is that violence is real and has real consequences and is awful and is pervasive and true about our lives and it is something we don't look at very often" (Schmid quoting from Frost 162). The last part of Frost's explanation is significant in the way he chooses the verb

“look” to describe the situation. *Twin Peaks* as a work of visual media certainly directs the audience’s gaze in a curious manner. Not only does it defamiliarize the familiar in order to make us see the alienation the town folk suffer individually and as a social body due to the effects of capitalism; it also dislocates the harsh division between reality and fantasy.

In the case of capitalism, the criticism on the series betrays a similar treatment. Keith Booker claims that “any critique in *Twin Peaks* of consumerism, or of capitalism in general, is decidedly weak,” (*Strange TV* 119)⁷ I argue to the contrary. Capitalism functions as a subtle absent presence in the series, seemingly not directly influencing the events that happen, but actually constituting a deeply immersed framework that juxtaposes a town that tries to ignore that very framework it is situated in, and the penetrative institutions that it conjures. Capitalism in the series work similarly to that of fire in a description by the Loglady – a member of the town who also provides the audience with mysterious introductions in each episode: “Fire is the devil, hiding like a coward in the smoke.” In the show, just like the fire hides in what it creates, capitalism uses its own machinations as a smokescreen. *Twin Peaks*, then, may seem enigmatic and obscure in its presentation of this capitalist framework, but when read closely, it reveals those mechanisms slowly but steadily.

Within this light, Booker’s comments on the show sound totalizing, rushing to conclusions while ignoring the series’ subtleties that demand a careful reading:

⁷ “Moreover,” Booker goes on to say, “any instances of unscrupulous capitalist practices in *Twin Peaks* are attributed either to individual corruption (capitalism isn’t bad – Ben is just a bad capitalist) or to metaphysical evil. The capitalist system, with its Reaganite fantasy world of smoothly efficient unregulated free markets, remains unscathed” (*Strange TV* 119).

The town of Twin Peaks potentially represents a utopian echo, however embattled, of a world that still made sense and in which reliable cognitive mapping was still possible. However, the inability of Lynch and the other creative forces behind the show to keep a straight face while attempting to represent Twin Peaks as a sort of rural utopia is especially significant. On the one hand, it suggests the weakness of the utopian imagination in late capitalist America; on the other hand, it suggests the continuing desire to think utopia, even if the result of this thought is a mangled, compromised, and thoroughly bogus one. Here, the context of the series in the midst of the first Bush administration is probably important. The show's placement of utopia in a small town with traditional values is pure Reagan-Bush. The suggestion that this utopia is surrounded and threatened by an empire of evil has obvious Reaganite sources as well, suggesting a nostalgic last-ditch attempt to revive the seemingly clear dualities of the peak years of the Cold War, even as the Soviet Union and its socialist allies were collapsing like a house of cards. (*Strange TV* 114)

Booker's claim that the series aims to present a utopia is a speech act that fails, as the show makes it explicit from the beginning with the murder of Laura Palmer that the town depicted is not that idyllic, perfect town at all. Moreover, this "utopia" is not surrounded by an "empire of evil," as we see throughout the show, by the very fact that (with several red herrings that point out to an outside agency) Laura's murderer is her own father, that the evil is not intrinsic to what is outside, but a result of agencies that are more complicated than it seems in a quick glance. Therefore, my contention is that the town of Twin Peaks is not threatened by an empire of evil, but *is part of* that empire. Rather than a desire "to think utopia," *Twin Peaks* repeatedly shows that a desire to think utopia itself is "mangled, compromised, and thoroughly bogus."

In fact, *Twin Peaks* places several signposts spread throughout to show some suggestions of approaches to be taken when regarding the show. What the Loglady says at the beginning of s2e3 is highly relevant, in this sense:

Letters are symbols. They are building blocks of words which form our languages. Languages help us communicate. Even by complicated

languages used by intelligent people, misunderstanding is a common occurrence. We write things down sometimes, letters, words; hoping they would serve us and those with whom we wish to communicate. Letters and words, calling out for understanding.

The Loglady here emphasizes the way meaning occurs, but that meaning can at times be elusive. Almost a simple paraphrasing of a Derridian approach, the Loglady's utterance advises us not to look for easily constructed binary oppositions in *Twin Peaks*, as "misunderstanding is a common occurrence." Certainly, at times *Twin Peaks* strikes the audience as impenetrable, because it does not follow the causality that is seen in most TV series. However, the series does leave clues that make sense when taken in a greater, deconstructive context instead of simple binaries. The name of the secret society in the show, formed to combat the "darkness surrounding the town," shows a parallel in this regard: "The Bookhouse Boys." In a way, it is not only the darkness surrounding the town, the series seems to say, but the one surrounding the series itself that needs to be combatted, and this combat takes shape in an act of reading. *Twin Peaks* demands a close reading from its audience that does not depend on binaries.

In order to understand how capitalism operates in the series as a source of alienation and delusional nostalgia, it is crucial to pick the threads of doubles that abound in the work. Booker explains that doubleness is "a fundamental characteristic of capitalism itself." And because of that, Marx recognizes "that only dialectical analysis could comprehend the complexities of the capitalist system" (*Monsters* 4). *Twin Peaks*, its own name a hint, is constructed with doubles and binary oppositions. BOB and MIKE, who turn out to be two supernatural characters that possess people to do their raping and killing, become oppositions once the character possessed by MIKE rips his arm off.

Similarly, the high school students, Bobby Briggs and Mike Mulls who engage in illegal and violent operations bear the same name with them. The series itself harbors another TV show, called *Invitation to Love*, which is about a suicidal father and his twin daughters. Laura's cousin Maddy who comes later to town looks exactly like Laura. The diner in the show is called the "Double R Diner," in which the scene in the pilot episode and the final episode of the show is almost a symmetric reflection of each other.

The reason of my emphasis on the doubles is because the grotesque as a mode depends heavily on these conceptions, and *Twin Peaks* utilizes the concept of doubleness to its limits. The doubleness of incongruities that is inherent in the grotesque manifests itself on a fundamental level in the series. The visual narrative of the show is, one could say, almost a spectacle of the tension that results from several doubles. "Looking for unity between center and margin," writes Harpham, "the interpreter must, whether he finds it or not, pass through the grotesque" (44). This is what the audience experiences in *Twin Peaks* as they behold the grotesque tension that results from capitalism and the nostalgia it induces. Therefore, Lynch's doubles do not work quite the same way as we expect them to be. Though they mirror each other in certain ways, these reflections may not correspond to what is on the other side in each case.

Twin Peaks' relation with industrial capitalism is made explicit from its opening credits sequence. The first shot is of a bewick's wren on a tree branch, a bird particular to the north-west where the fictional town supposedly is. The second shot is, though, of a huge lumber mill, followed by the interior shot of the mill, with cogs, gears, and log cutters working relentlessly. Only after this juxtaposition we are presented with the name of the series, with the welcome sign of the town seen in the corner of the frame,

completed by a background that shows two mountains of similar size. In this way, *Twin Peaks* makes its relationship with the doubles apparent. Apart from these juxtapositions, another point of interest here is that how the opening sequence hints at the violence that results from this juxtaposition it will deal with, and how this violence will be hard to interpret in the conventional ways. The sharpness and automatic movement of the log cutters are, in fact, very threatening. However, because of the soothing music that accompanies these shots, the viewer does not immediately comprehend this fact. Moreover, not only the music is present, the sound of the log cutters is absent. This is another strong clue on how *Twin Peaks* plays with the accustomed ways of visual narration based on simple binary oppositions, playing with different ways of mediation, recalling the mind the picture Wing Biddlebaum paints in *Winesburg, Ohio*.

Departing from this point of doubleness, I argue that in *Twin Peaks*, the murder of Laura Palmer acts as a metaphor for the slow death of the town has been suffering and is to suffer more in the future. The pun hidden in the name of the series also signifies for this different reading. It is “Twin Peaks,” but also “Twin Peeks,” which directs us at a way of seeing that works both ways. The audience as the subject looks at the objects they see in the frame, but in *Twin Peaks* our supposed objects in the series also look back at us. Lynch and Frost employ this trope in several instances throughout the series, most importantly in the way they construct Laura Palmer, and the supernatural, malicious force which turns out to be the possessor-killer BOB. Laura Palmer, also constructed as an absent presence in *Twin Peaks*, is first seen in the series as a naked, dead body wrapped in plastic, with a curious look, though. The hue of the body, the way the plastic is wrapped around the head, and most significantly, the way Laura Palmer’s hair is made

unmistakably brings to mind connotations of a statue, in particular, that of a Medusa⁸. “The look in the modern West is sexual,” writes Donald M. Lowe. “Specific to the modern West is the look constituted as the male gaze – visually subjugating and territorializing the female body. Underneath this look are all the binary oppositions in bourgeois culture which construct the power of male over female” (Lowe 132)⁹. Laura Palmer, who, as we learn throughout the series, used illegal drugs, engaged in promiscuous sex, had several boyfriends, worked as a hostess at a casino outside town was, we understand, not someone that shied away from her sexual force, her creative energy. In other words, Laura did not conform to the conventional roles tailored for her – and the small town – by the society. By turning into a Medusa head, then, Laura – even in her death – not only subverts but also redirects that male gaze. By this act of rejection, she also denies being a pool for a projection of meanings created by masculinity, and aims to be a maker of meanings.

What does this conception of male gaze say about Twin Peaks’ relationship with capitalism as a small town? The killing of a woman by an overcharged, masculine gaze finds a reflection on the way small town as a social body is constructed in the show. The dead, naked body symbolizes the way the town finds itself against the onslaught of capitalism and the alienation it has brought. Susan Griffin’s remarks on the nude female body, in this respect, is significant: “The nude body of woman recalls for us our mothers,

⁸ A creature of Greek mythology, Medusa was a Gorgon, a chthonic monster. If one looked on her directly, they would turn to stone. Medusa was beheaded by Perseus, who later used the head as a weapon, and then gave it to Athena to place on her shield.

⁹ “Twentieth-century visuality is very much as masculinist one,” writes Lowe. “Photography, cinematography, and television are the technologies of the look, working to enhance the visualization of sexuality. But technologies are not neutral. Their applications depend on the assumptions and purposes of the addressers. Photography, cinematography, and television do not simply extend the male gaze. With their different techniques of shots, montage, and narrativity, they repackage and transform the hegemony of the male gaze in late capitalism” (132).

our infancy, our vulnerability, the knowledge of our body, and the meaning of nature, recalls to us our mortality (Bowers quoting from Griffin 218). I argue that Griffin's formulation has particular resonances not only for the individuals – whether town folk, or the audience – but also for the town of Twin Peaks as a social body. The Log Lady hints at this formulation in her very first introduction: “It is a story of many, but begins with one — and I knew her. The one leading to the many is Laura Palmer. Laura is the one” (1:1). Laura Palmer's absent presence throughout the series, and the way almost each character in the show defines herself/himself to that absence confirms Log Lady's claim. Laura Palmer – young but dead, a thing of the past, but still looking at us from her picture with a face of a seventeen-year-old in a frame at the end of each episode – is a grotesque construction, embodying in herself the process Twin Peaks is unknowingly going through. Just like Laura Palmer, the idyllic town that looks like a postcard from the 1950s is fading. Laura Palmer, in this manner, emerges as a conduit/vortex that gathers in herself the situation the town finds itself against capitalism.

It is therefore interesting what Pete Martell says when he finds Laura's body: “She's dead. Wrapped in plastic” (1:1). The lack of a conjunctive in the utterance points out either to a separation of the two facts, or the lack of (an ability to make) a causal connection between them: the fact that Laura is dead, and the fact that she is wrapped in plastic. Certainly the first connotation that comes to mind regarding plastic, an industrial material, is that Laura looks like she has already been put in a body bag, which signals for a transformation into commodity. However, plastic is also used to preserve stuff, like certain kind of materials, food, etc so that they do not go bad. Mactaggart comments on this fact too, noting that “as an artificial substance plastic's use is as a container to keep

things fresh; as a means of encasing a dead body it, at the same time, seeks to deny that death” (Mactaggart 33)¹⁰. It is almost as if the murderer did not want the body to decompose long enough so that the town can not only see, but devour, digest what has taken place. Laura is dead, but in a way, she is still edible in the symbolic sense to be consumed by the town folk. Laura’s body, then, becomes a product that should be consumed before its expiration date. This points out to an incongruity on the part of the town to contextualize/deal with Laura’s death. What has she become now? Is she a human being, or a commodity? Hence, the disjunction in Pete’s utterance.

The production of Laura Palmer as a murdered naked body inevitably brings us to the site of that production: the woods that surround Twin Peaks. Throughout the series, the woods that constitute the wilderness around the town are referred as a source of darkness that must be kept at bay. When the sheriff, Henry S. Truman, first mentions this to the FBI Agent Dale Cooper, a dialogue that bears several hints takes place:

SHERIFF TRUMAN

Twin Peaks is different, a long way from the world. You've noticed that.

COOPER

Yes I have.

SHERIFF TRUMAN

That's exactly the way we like it but there's a ... back end to that that's kind of different too. Maybe that's the price we pay for all the good things.

COOPER

What would that be?

SHERIFF TRUMAN

There's a sort of evil out there. Something very, very strange in these old woods. Call it what you want. A darkness, a presence. It takes many forms but ... it's been out there for as long as anyone can remember and we've always been here to fight it.

¹⁰ Mactaggart further notes that “plastic’s use is to safeguard its contents, and, coupled with the dead, women’s bodies which are wrapped in this ubiquitous, prosaic substance; the text presents a poetics of plastic. Plastic encases and keeps at bay that which, paradoxically, it seeks to represent: death” (34).

In the show, the woods are without a doubt constructed as a source of evil. The debauchery of Laura Palmer and Ronette Pulaski with two other men takes place in the woods. The Black Lodge, the supernatural portal of evil where Agent Cooper sees Laura in his dream is also situated in the woods. The woods are almost a creative source, having a hand in the foundations of the town. Moreover, a wooden texture that is literally and figuratively derived from those woods invades every part of Twin Peaks – from the Great Northern Hotel to the Sheriff’s Headquarters – therefore, the show. It not only marks outside of the town, but also a way of passage to that outside. As the name of the “Log” Lady signals to the audience, the woods constitute a system of signs that has to be read carefully, as the woods are also the logs as “a written record of messages sent or received.” (OED) The woods, therefore, emerge as a rich pool of signification in the show. In this respect, it is important to look at the way the series reflect the conception of wilderness that is constituted by the woods in the American imagination.

The imagery of wilderness in American culture is deeply imbued with paradoxical feelings of fear, and at the same time a willingness to preserve that wilderness. Roderick Nash writes that the wilderness, over the years, “has been regarded both as an enemy to be conquered in the name of civilization, Christianity and progress and as something of value to be cherished and preserved” (Nash 3). Similarly, the woods in *Twin Peaks* are not only a creative source, but also a place to be feared. This fear, though, is not experienced directly in the series. It is hidden in the capitalistic framework that the town is immersed in. The woods are the source of income that makes Twin Peaks the prosperous town it is. With the advent of industrial revolution during the nineteenth century, Joshua Johns explains, “the desire to impose order on the land in order to build a

nation was leading to the destruction of our national wilderness” (Johns). One can argue, following the leads of Nash and Johns, that the capitalist framework Twin Peaks is immersed in finds its beginnings there. Twin Peaks is a lumber town, with its lumber mill having a central importance, as we see truck after truck loaded with lumber to the top. In every other episode, we see these loaded trucks leaving the town. They continuously take away something crucial in the foundations of the town. The process that turns trees, (“Douglas Firs” as the audience comes to know through the question of Agent Cooper) into nameless lumber, that strips them of their branches, that transforms them into identical figures, is a manifestation of this imposed order. In a way, the very fact that makes the town of Twin Peaks prosperous is also the source of its alienation. Therefore, what the sheriff Truman tells to Agent Cooper is no coincidence: “Maybe that's the price we pay for all the good things.” In Truman’s musing, there are three significant points: the conception of what *is* in economic terms; the sacrificial aspect of that economy; and the fact that this is not an instance, but an ongoing transaction. Truman articulates what he is not immediately aware of. He hints at what those trucks – not once commented on in the series by any of the characters – in actuality doing to the town. This, Truman implies, is an economic transaction. In a way, they are paying the price for their town’s idyllic, intact, timeless state. This sense of timelessness points us to a nostalgia that will be further elaborated on.

The commentary on Puritanism observed in the works of David Lynch also deserves a mention here in its relationship with wilderness. The Puritan elements in *Twin Peaks* constitute another signifier for nostalgia, the individual and the collective desire not only to go back to purer times, but also stay there. When the Puritans were settling in

America, Bradbury explains “in the struggles with landscape and climate, and above all in the battles with the Indians, the Puritans found themselves in direct encounter with America. In the providential plan, it was here they would confront Satan in the ‘howling wilderness’ where the Gospel had not yet reached” (Bradbury 27). However, in the world of *Twin Peaks*, it is 1990s, now. There is supposed to be no place that the Gospel has not yet reached. Nor there are any Indians. There is an Indian, Deputy Tommy “Hawk” Hill, but he is an American now, part of the very club that is founded to fight that darkness in the woods.

Another crucial occurrence of the tension between capitalism and nostalgia takes place in the way time is employed in the series. Linear time, symbolizing progress and capitalism, is pitted against cyclical time. “In contrast to cyclical time, societal linear time is less natural and rather human made,” writes Aharon Kollerman. “Regardless of the historical inception and origin of linear time, it is a result of human history, culture and technology” (62). In *Twin Peaks*, this man-made time is repeatedly juxtaposed with the natural cycles of life. On one hand, the town tries to stay in a circular loop, to keep the things as they have always been. Capitalism, on the other hand, which is symbolized by several characters in the show, always looks for a linear time where there is a progress. Benjamin Horne, the owner the Great Northern who wants to buy the Mill and the forest in the surrounding area with his Ghostwood project is a perfect example. Throughout the show, he is time and again shown walking urgently, making appointments for short term and long term, following them, with plans of making money that are always reliant on a linear progress of time. At one episode, he congratulates one of his assistants for managing so much in a limited amount of time. In a similar vein, the repeated shots of

trucks leaving the town underline a conception of linear time. They progressively load their trucks with lumber, and they repetitively leave the town.

Twin Peaks, however, seems to suggest that the answers to the mysteries that happen in the town are hard to find in a conception of linear time, directing the audience to an understanding of cyclical time. The series, in a way, implies that the town's mysteries exist somewhere in-between. The continuous emphasis on the moon's cycles spread in the show, the rotating ceiling fan and the ticking record player in the Palmer home are instances of this circularity. Moreover, the show itself, by limiting the narration time of each episode to a whole day, embodies a circularity/cyclicalness kept in a linear progression that follows one another. Not necessarily cyclical, the importance of the dream sequences and visions also point out to sites of meaning that occur out of the flow of the linear time of the show. "The change from a societal emphasis on cyclical temporality to a linear accent, mainly in production, accompanied the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism. Linear time may thus be interpreted as masculine time," writes Kellerman in a similar manner (62). In this sense, it is not surprising that when Agent Cooper sees Laura in his dream in the Red Room, what she says does not make sense because her words are reversed, putting an emphasis on the inescapable linearity of speech, and Laura's refusal to participate in this linearity in the dream. Similarly, Leland Palmer/BOB's murder of Laura's look-alike cousin Maddy takes place when the record player gets stuck, repeating a broken note again and again. In this regard, *Twin Peaks* presents another opposition, that of linear versus cyclical time with a grotesque style, in which one (cyclical) tries to contain another (linear).

This unusual conceptualization of time, which tries to imprison linear time in a cyclical cage, brings me to the way the town of Twin Peaks and its people locate themselves in it: in a constant state of nostalgia. Unsurprisingly, the vortex point of this sentiment is once again Laura Palmer. Whenever we see a character in the show, he or she compares the way he or she was before the murder of Laura. It is almost the series itself deliberately invokes this feeling by placing the murder at the beginning, so that the audience is forced to imagine and participate in this nostalgic state because they have never experienced it or seen the times before the murder by themselves. Moreover, the visual look of the show accompanies and confirms this. *Twin Peaks* presents its town with a visual aesthetics borrowed from the 50s, as Lynch tends to in his works (Alexander). In this way, while on one side we see the lumber mill and modern trucks leaving the town, on the other we are in a diner that is designed as a place out of the 50s.

While until recent times the scholarship on the decade that was the 50s treated it with an approach on its bleakness, I submit to Alan J. Levine's view in this matter: "Far from being the dismal prelude to a glorious period of progress, it was the postwar period of the late 1940s and 50s that was an era of unprecedented progress and prosperity, which was then derailed by catastrophic political and economic misjudgments and a drastic shift in the national ethos that contributed nothing, or less than nothing, to a better world" (*Bad Old Days 2*). Within this perspective, it is perfectly fitting that the town of Twin Peaks wants to temporally keep itself to the 50s, in a perpetual state of nostalgia which signifies for prosperity while the progress wants to take it away from there and bring it to the ever-rushing present. "Lynch's social orientation becomes much clearer with *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks*," writes Jonathan Rosenbaum. "it consists basically of an

infatuation with 1950s small town America and its dirty little secrets, coupled with a view of women that essentially regards them as either madonnas or whores. For Rosenbaum, this is “a nostalgic regression, in short, to the worst aspects of the Eisenhower era” (*Critical Approaches* 25). I agree with Rosenbaum to the point that it depicts a nostalgic regression into the 50s. Nonetheless, *Twin Peaks* also depicts this regression with an irony, showing its worst aspects. In this respect, Rosenbaum’s assertion of a treatment of women based on a simple duality (Madonna vs Whore), similar to that of Booker in his approach to the series’ relationship with capitalism, is also over-generalizing. This mistakenness could not be clearer in the case of Nadine, the woman with the eye-patch with an unhappy marriage. Nadine tries to commit suicide, and failing to do so, goes into a coma and wakes up later, thinking that she is seventeen, a high-school girl, seemingly having abundant strength. The reason Nadine tries to commit suicide is not exactly clear in the show. However, it is clear that the reason is not that because she is too good, or she is a “whore.” She is, simply, unhappy. Nadine’s coming back as a grotesque figure – seventeen in mind and bodily strength, probably thirty-seven in actuality – points out to the tension the town finds itself. Just like Nadine, *Twin Peaks* reaches back to a past that is not there anymore, while at the same time trying to deal with its present, and its future. This nostalgia, seemingly against capitalism, is paradoxically perpetuated by capitalism itself.

Nevertheless, a woman who does not conform to this illusion, Laura Palmer, becomes a commodified victim not so different than the lumber that is taken from the town. The agency of the murder should be elaborated on first. As I mentioned earlier in the paper, criticism against the series focus on the attribution of violence to supernatural

forces, deflating the agency of men. However, parallel to Frost's comments on how the violence that takes place is real, I argue that the significance of the possessor BOB as a monstrous figure takes a more sophisticated meaning when reevaluated in a framework that operates on a critique of capitalism in conjunction with the grotesque. "The capitalist culture industry hasn't simply generated happy fantasies of self-made men with good, clean work ethics," writes Annalee Newitz. "It is just as likely to spawn gore-soaked narratives of social destruction. The history of capitalism can be told as a monster story from beginning to end" (Newitz 12). Newitz's comments are helpful in terms of locating BOB as a capitalist monster figure. After the mystery of Laura's murder is revealed, Agent Cooper, Sheriff Truman, and Agent Albert have a conversation about who or what it is BOB. Albert says that BOB is "the evil that men do" (2:8). Generally dismissed by the critics as a simplistic philosophy, this declaration in fact describes not only a violence that is actually hidden in every human being, but also the masculine, violent capitalism's assault on the town. In other words, BOB acts as a culmination of unseen violence that the town has been subjected to, and subjected itself to. At this point, Judith Butler's notion of "subjection" can be helpful. We learn, in the series, that Leland Palmer has been tortured and probably raped by BOB before being possessed by it ("He came inside me," says Palmer somewhat ambiguously before he dies.) In a way, Leland becomes BOB's prisoner, and is subordinated to him. "The individual is formed or, rather, formulated through his discursively constituted 'identity' as prisoner," Butler writes, expanding her argument on the Foucauldian notion of imprisonment. Butler goes on to say that,

subjection is, literally, the *making* of a subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced. Such subjection is

a kind of power that not only unilaterally *acts on* a given individual as a form of domination, but also *activates* or forms the subject. Hence, subjection is neither simply the domination of a subject nor its production, but designates a certain kind of restriction *in* production, a restriction without which the production of the subject cannot take place, a restriction through which that production takes place. (Butler 84)

What do we mean when we cite the murderer of Laura Palmer as Leland Palmer/BOB as can be seen in so many critical essays written on *Twin Peaks*? Is the murderer Leland, or BOB? Is it both? Does the slash mean a separation or a conjoining? Should the referral be as Leland+BOB? I will try to answer these questions by pointing out to the performativity in Agent Albert's definition: "the evil that men *do*." BOB, by possessing Leland, not only subjects Leland to itself, but also constitutes (or highlights?) him as a subject. Moreover, in this possession, Leland's own doings add up to, feed, and grow this definition, expanding the network of domination BOB thrives on. In this sense, as its name signifies, BOB can be anyone and anything that performs the violence.

Laura Palmer's death is a murder. It is not by natural causes. She is murdered in the wilderness that surrounds the town, which is the very site of lumber production that the town thrives on. This is no coincidence, because, as I mentioned earlier, Laura, with her promiscuity and non-conformist attitude, is also metaphorically outside of the town, or what the town is constructed to represent as a preserver of traditional values. The violently charged male gaze that is BOB is the one that kills her. Laura is killed because she refuses to represent and be a part of the illusion of an idyllic town. She is the first one that realizes the paradoxical relationship between capitalism and nostalgia. She is the one with the awareness that the town of Twin Peaks is not an outpost against capitalism, but part of it as she discovers and works at the casino on the border of the town/US and

Canada, “One-Eyed Jacks.” Berstein, in his discussion of Adorno and Horkheimer, writes that “woman is dangerous both to progress and narrative, and to masculine pleasure. Women seem to challenge a specifically masculine ‘pleasure of the text’” (85) What the average Jack (or Joe) fails to see, Laura notices, and participates in it. By her experimentation on herself on the borders, she is trying to bring her own narrative to her surroundings. In other words, it is also Laura’s gaze, pitted against BOB’s, that is murdered. BOB (“the evil that men do”), by the murder, removes her from the definition of the idyllic American small town.

Accordingly, just like the lumber industry penetrating the town with its logcutters, long trucks, and towering factory chimneys, BOB’s possession of Leland Palmer – itself a penetrative act – and then raping and murdering his own daughter confirms capitalism’s non-stop obsession with progress and moving forward. Just like the gears and cutters that descend on the Douglas Firs, turning them into lumber, BOB descends on his victims with a possession of which the possessed is unaware. Just like the trees that are turned into lumber, Laura is wrapped and delivered in plastic. Certainly, BOB is not a natural creation, nor a creature of nature. BOB is indeed “super” natural. It is on “top” of nature, imposed on it by a violent, masculine capitalistic understanding of life. In a way, Leland Palmer’s possession is not only limited to acts of rape and murder, but also the way he provides Benjamin Horne with his lawyer duties and the way he gives advice on how to broker the deal of Ghostwood.

This way, Laura’s murder is paradoxically both a sacrifice so that the illusive nostalgia is kept intact for the overcharged, capitalistic narrative, and the very act that disrupts that nostalgia. The small town should not realize that it is part of the empire, but

be kept under the illusion that it is a refuge from that empire. The small town turns punitive, not because it is a preserver of traditional values, but it thinks that it is.

Twin Peaks, or Twin Peeks; Nadine's eye-patch that signifies blindness; just like the name of the illegal casino, One-Eyed Jacks. Laura Palmer's closed, Medusa eyes, and BOB's open ones. *Twin Peaks* time and again points out to a failure to see, to notice, to comprehend. In this way, the series demand for a different kind of seeing, and thereby, a different kind of reading, similar to Agent Cooper and the Bookhouse Boys execute. This reading does not depend on a reading of simple binaries, but an ability to grasp both the affirming and undermining attributes of those binaries. Instead of being a one-eyed Jack, the series seems to tell us, do a twin peek: see both things that are congruent or incongruent simultaneously. The grotesque, which the show adopts for this task, is a more than adequate fit.

Twin Peaks is a visual work that is constructed on seemingly identical or opposite binaries. However, a closer inspection that involves how the grotesque operates reveals that these binaries in actuality affirm and simultaneously undermine each other. The main thread of criticism on the series, lacking a perspective of the grotesque, misses these subtleties, regarding the fictional small town constituted as a utopia against the evils of the world, or defining this visual text by Frost and Lynch as a postmodernist failure. However, what *Twin Peaks* points out to is that evaluating the small town against some concept or a notion such as the evil is itself a mistake. These approaches treat the small town as an isolated, disconnected subject in the world, ignoring the reciprocal effects that occur between the small town and the world. In particular, capitalism, hiding in the smoke it creates, manifests itself as a false binary in the show. The violence and the horrific aspect of the town result not only from outside, nor inside. It is a culmination of both, which in fact results from a grotesque tension between capitalism and the nostalgia

that capitalism perpetuates. Laura Palmer's death, but her refusal to take shape according to the meanings projected on her also acts as a metaphor on the critical approaches to small-town America. The overcharged, all-defining male gaze that eventually murdered her is not so different from some of the views on the small town that depends on exclusive binaries. These binaries that are shaken in *Twin Peaks* find themselves in a much more intertwined shape in the HBO drama *Carnivale*, as the small town once more emerges as a site of grotesque tension.

4. THE GROTESQUE STRIKES BACK: *CARNIVALE* AND REMEDYING THE AMERICAN SMALL-TOWN

“We are in the same business,” tells Samson, the dwarf ex-strongman and de-facto manager of the carnival, as he extends his hand to Brother Justin, the fanatical preacher who has amassed a throng of followers before the final confrontation that will soon take place in the show, bringing it to an end.

They are both putting on a show, Samson seems to say. Brother Justin with his speech, dramatics, and promises, and Samson’s traveling troupe with its sword-eating, fire-blowing, limb-bending, snake-hypnotizing, cooch-dancing people – they are both putting on a show. They both compete for the attention of their audiences, the people in the small towns of the United States during the Great Depression.

Daniel Knauf’s *Carnivale* is a TV-drama that was broadcast on HBO between 2003 and 2005. It is a story of a confrontation between good and evil that plays itself out on the great dust bowl of United States during the 1930s. Ben Hawkins, a young man from a small town who joins a traveling carnival, slowly discovers that he is the avatar of good, while Brother Justin Crowe, a charismatic church man, little by little comes to the realization that he is the avatar of evil. Both have supernatural powers: while Justin has the ability to control the minds of people and show them their sins, Hawkins is a healer who can give life as long as he takes life from something or someone else. As the two avatars search for each other in America, the carnival ran by the mysterious Management helps Hawkins to find Brother Justin.

Although there have been some critical studies on *Carnivale* (Beckman, Folk), its relationship with the grotesque, and the way this grotesqueness functions in the context of small town America, have not been examined yet. In this last chapter, I argue that in *Carnivale*, the classic motif of the fight between good and evil in fact takes place between a grotesque vision that embraces life with its deformities both figuratively and literally, and a totalitarian, capitalistic doctrine which aims for a uniform small town with a uniform mindset that ignore these deformities. While Ben Hawkins attempts to understand the world around him, starting from the carnival, with its oppositions and incongruities, Brother Justin using the radio as a disseminator of his speech, exploits the small town people by falsely claiming an ownership on their individual nostalgias, figuratively selling those nostalgias (or converting those nostalgias to commodities) to the increasingly corporate America as represented by banks and politicians in exchange for a non-existent future. In this way, instead of a sacrifice for nostalgia, Brother Justin sacrifices the collective nostalgia of people to create his hygienic, sanitized, hypnotized version of America in fear of change, difference and mobility as symbolized by the carnival.

The fact that this fight between good and evil is played out on the American small town setting is significant. The carnival, which becomes a home to Ben Hawkins, is in fact a moving small town with its own families, economies, and tensions. The carnival defies Brother Justin's attempt by presenting the audiences of the small town America with their grotesque vision, pointing out to the necessity of acknowledging the existence of differences and deformities, offering a possibility of an alternate past, thereby an alternate future. *Carnivale*, in this sense, offers the grotesque as a remedying perspective

for the hard times the small town finds itself during social upheavals, approaches towards the small town in literary-visual criticism, and for the United States in its new mood since 9/11. In a sense, *Carnivale* is a show about two shows which rival for an audience, which is small town America during the depression era.

Why would a TV drama opt for a Great Depression era setting flavored with the grotesque to comment on the present state of the United States? “The experience of rapid conversion to a technological world, coupled with the devastation of the economy and the growing threat of a new world war produced a sensitivity (...)” writes Fearnow (8). His comments are, perhaps not surprisingly, not on our present day, but on the Depression era. *Carnivale*’s going back to almost seventy years earlier than its present (the production dates are 2002-2004, IMDB) signifies a sense of being at a loss on the part of Americans about what is happening in their country. Produced during the years where the United States was still experiencing the aftermath of the destruction of the World Trade Center Towers, and getting ready for the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, *Carnivale* at once signifies a longing for the past, and also an appeal to that past which harbors the grotesque to find answers for the present. Because the past that *Carnivale* looks at is not a time of prosperity, but a time of despair and misery – it is the Depression Era. The fact that this occurrence takes place in the context of the American small town is telling. In *Carnivale*, there is an implication the United States looks to her heartland for answers in times of uncertainty, as Richard Lingeman notes that “history suggests that renewed interest in the small town comes in times of social upheaval.” *Carnivale*, produced and broadcast at a time when the country was still reeling from the 9/11 disaster, goes back to another era of social upheaval to find answers.

The Great Depression's appeal, then, is no coincidence. The era's relationship with the grotesque, therefore, should be elaborated on. Fearnow aptly states that the grotesque is the "hallmark" of depression America. Fearnow goes on to say that the grotesque is

the one critical idea that can take in the absurd contrasts of a country in a time when it is both broken down with misery and despair, and brimming over with a perky native boosterism; resplendent and self-aware of its status as the first technological age, and cringing with fear at the changes that technology had wrought; looking forward with a utopian eye to "The World of Tomorrow," and hearkening back with a quaint nostalgia to a horse-drawn and gaslit age that lay only a couple of decades in the past.

(6)

The small town America ravaged by the present during the Great Depression era with an imagined, far-away blissful past, and a bleak future provides a fertile playground for the grotesque. In a similar vein, Levine writes that the Great Depression presented the Americans with a "complex world of conflicting urges," and "a world that look to the past even as it began to assume the contours of the future" (L. Levine 229). These conflicting urges that came after the Roaring 20s brought a shock to Americans who, filled with a sense of continuous progress, believed that things were getting better. However, the crash of the stock market not only left millions of Americans poorer, but also gave them a dreadful feeling that the future that they were progressing into may not have been what they thought it to be.

The impact of the Great Depression on the small town was no different. Mostly depending on the income that came from their harvests, small town communities were left considerably deprived and poor as the stock market also had a huge impact on the prices of corn and other products. These towns, nearly all in very similar predicaments,

were left stranded on the continent with no future prospects for them. In this sense, Robert Wiebe's description of the small towns as "island communities" could not be more on the spot (Wiebe xiii). Within this perspective, *Carnivale's* depiction of these small towns is similar. As we follow the traveling troupe from one town to another, not only is there a complete lack of interaction between the small towns, but they are also strangely identical. With stretches of desolate land lying in between them, we indeed see island communities that look almost the same. As the loaded trucks of the traveling troupe enter into each town, *Carnivale* also becomes a double surrogate for the audience, letting them in to see the conditions they are in, meanwhile showing them and us their grotesqueness. It would be not too wide off the mark, then, to claim that while *Carnivale's* use of the grotesque is mainly visual and narrational, it also uses the concept in its literal sense. The show literally shows us the bodies that are deformed, mismatched, uneven.

At this point, the social construction of the carnival in the series should be commented on. The love affairs that take place, the rivalries that surface, the secrets that abound in the community, and the general sense of unity in times of danger, help us locate the carnival as a small community on the move, a small town of grotesques with wheels – not unlike the procession of the grotesques Sherwood Anderson's narrator sees. This time, however, the grotesqueries of the characters are much more palpable. The runner of the show, who acts as a second boss under the Management, is Samson, the dwarf with a shorter leg. His right hand is Jonesy, an ex-baseball player who is maimed on one leg. The Bearded Lady of Brussels is Lila, a plump woman who features a grown beard. Gabriel is the "world's strongest man" physically, but mentally retarded.

Apollonia can read tarot cards through her daughter, but cannot speak. A lizard man features a skin scaled like that of a crocodile. The carnival in *Carnivale* is full of grotesques, filled with people either with mental or physical deviations from the normal. Many films during the Depression era, notes Fearnow, “involve the shrinking or miniaturization of people,” or others feature people “transformed.” The carnival, in a way, acts as a contrasting site in which it shelters all these grotesqueries in their amplified versions. Keeping in mind these anxieties in the culture at the time that result from science, one could say that the carnival in the series, with its gathering of grotesques in one place, strikes the audience as a culmination of these fears.

An interesting part of the carnival that seems to contradict this statement is the Dreyfus family, consisting of a husband, wife, and two daughters, in which the women of the family do the older form of striptease. The Dreyfus family does not have any physical deficiencies, or real or fake psychic powers. In that sense, they are perfectly normal. However, as *Carnivale* makes it explicit, they are one of the most grotesque depictions in the show in the way they live their sexuality, the tensions they go through because of the harsh economic times, and the way they are unable to grasp the world around themselves. The Dreyfus family, in its construction, functions on two levels. One level is that they act as a foil of normalcy to the apparent grotesques of the troupe. The other one is that, *Carnival* seems to tell us, that the grotesque, the incongruity that comes with the mutual existence of the banal and the scary, can be found anywhere, as long as the tension is there. The other “normal” members of the troupe, roustabouts that help to set up the tents, unload the trucks, etc. are not in a continuous interaction with the others, but at times, they do interact. Moreover, with sheltering both normalcies and anomalies in itself,

Carnivale acts as a mirror to show the small towns not only entertainment, but their unacknowledged incongruities.

Moe Folk's take on *Carnivale* in terms of visual representation is interesting and relevant to my discussion. "While the show does allow for voice [for freaks], it also perpetuates stereotypes that have been in place since about 1840, the year humans took on larger roles in the circus, and P.T. Barnum opened his first museum in New York City," writes Folk. "Though the show uses visual stereotypes to establish characterization, these stereotypes escape most viewers because the characters stand out as 'different' from common peers—paradoxically because of the same effects these stereotypes strove for when they were first encountered" (Folk 3). Nevertheless, there is one crucial factor Folk misses in making his point. It is *Carnivale*'s very intention that the paradoxical status is preserved. This is evidenced in the unobserved fact that Hawkins, although having the ability, does not heal the grotesque deformities of any of the members of the carnival throughout the show. Only Jonesy's knee is healed, not because Hawkins wanted to heal that limp, but because he was healing the recent, lethal scars of Jonesy as a result of tar & feathering. Even when what Hawkins is capable of revealed to the members of the troupe, no one asks to be healed by him, nor does Hawkins offer it. In this manner, *Carnivale* shows that our business should not be taking care of the grotesques, but finding a way to live with the grotesqueness instead of trying to eliminate it. It is a way of life that should be respected, and lived with. This, as I show in the chapter, is in stark contrast to what Brother Justin offers.

The grotesqueries in *Carnivale* are not limited to the deformities and unusual feats other members enact in the show, though. Goodwin writes that "in modern literary and

graphic modes alike, the grotesque is predominantly visual and descriptive rather than ideational or narrative. Not confined to expository or explanatory functions, the modern grotesque stands at a threshold to alluring, intimidating obscurity” (Goodwin 26).

Although I agree with Goodwin that the grotesque is predominantly visual, I argue that *Carnivale*, taking its cue from *Twin Peaks*, shows that the grotesque can manifest itself in the narrative aspect of a visual work, too. The series not only avoids following a fixed length for each episode. It does not prioritize any master narrative like most TV productions do. In the show, the very ordinary Depression story of the Dreyfus family, the family of cooch-dancers, is just as important as the struggle between Ben Hawkins and Justin Crowe. In this way, by combining the mundane and the unusual, the banal and the fantastic in an equalitarian manner, the series’ use of the grotesque shows itself in multiple levels. In this aspect, *Carnivale* with its form and style defies any kind of totalizing, fixed narratives, implying that is what it is going to do with its content, too.

These attributes make *Carnivale*’s depiction of a fight between good and evil complicated. In the show, this ages-old binary is slightly modified, and this modification has certain significant connotations for the happenings in the show, and our interpretation of them. While the evil, represented by Brother Justin, is concentrated in creating a unified, totalitarian world spearheaded by a nostalgic understanding of religion, the good, represented by Ben Hawkins, does not come across as an absolute value. It signifies a defiance of the absolutism of evil on the other side of the binary. The good in the show implies that differences matter; the incongruities of life are to be embraced, not shunned. Therefore, in *Carnivale*, the good is the grotesque. On the other hand, while the evil at first seems to be capitalism represented through banks and the institutions in society,

Brother Justin's growing in power and emergence as an influential figure overlaps with those institutions. A religion-based totalitarianism emerges as the evil, then, against a good that wants to preserve being different.

Brother Justin slowly but steadily turns into a totalitarian capitalist figure, who seeks to eliminate the differences in society, so that the new hygienic society can work for his ends. It is not surprising, therefore, that while Brother Justin attacks the politicians and the banks for sucking the blood of the society, he has no qualms at all, as the series progresses, when he joins powers with a Democrat senatorial candidate. Moreover, in the show, the radio station, being the most crucial element for Justin to spread his influence, belongs to the Hearst conglomerate – a fact that is emphasized in one episode.

“Capitalism's development to its totality,” writes Marx, “consists precisely in subordinating all elements of society to itself, or in creating out of it organs which it still lacks. This is historically how it becomes totality” (Marx 278). The beehive-like depiction of Justin's conglomeration running around in the camp that gets bigger and bigger, the way they set up their own police force in this shantytown, Justin's remark that “they are no longer gonna keep Christians from running their own country” all confirm the relevance of Marx's statement in the construction of Brother Justin as a character.

What exactly is Brother Justin promising, though? From his speeches, we understand that he wants to bring his conglomerate to his camp in New Canaan, and then spread out all over the country from there, perhaps. While Justin promises a new beginning, his rhetoric is mostly apocalyptic, scaring people into joining him by telling his followers that the world is ending, “brothers and sisters,” the religious address being his staple words in his speeches. Justin, by promoting a non-existent nostalgia on one

hand, and prophesying about an impending doom on the other, rewrites a new past and a present for his followers. In this manner, linear time that is closing down insidiously is a huge weapon in Justin's hands.

The way the concept of time used in the series is therefore crucial, which indicates *Carnivale's* criticism of capitalism and its totalizing understanding of time. *Carnivale* opens with a sudden, searing flashback that disorients the audience both spatially and temporally. We have no idea what is happening, but as we watch the show we learn that the man running in a corn field is Hank Scudder, father of Ben Hawkins, who had refused to be an avatar of evil, followed by a scary figure with a tree tattoo on his chest, who will turn out to be Brother Justin at the end of the show, chasing Ben Hawkins. With this opening, *Carnivale* not only declares its independence from the usual temporal rules that govern the TV dramas, but also aims a shot, like *Twin Peaks*, at a linear understanding of time that is always promoted by capitalism. This narrative of progress was particularly being pursued during the Great Depression, as the economic crisis was something that will eventually pass away, sooner or later. "This rhetoric of progress sounded as appealing to the American ear in the thirties as it does today. Images of growth and discovery are basic building blocks in the country's idea of itself," explains Fearnow. However, what actually happening was while some parts of the society were progressing, some of them were falling even further behind. In this perspective, Brother Justin's declaration in realizing his designs is telling: "My only enemy is time" (2:5). Indeed, for Justin, time is not some concept to be lived in, or co-exist at the same time, but something to be consumed to its furthest end. Moreover, Justin not only wants

to consume time, but fulfill that act with the ones who will follow him to the end, forcing that linear time to apply to everyone.

On the other hand, the carnival, with its emphasis on presenting a version of life different from what the people of the small towns daily suffer always seeks to escape and offer an escape from this insistently progressive linearity. In the first episode of the show, as the carnival moves along the highway, Samson tells Jonesy to turn off the radio which is doing a broadcast on the banks, and starts telling a story. Through this act of Samson, the carnival veers away from the flow of daily life. More importantly, the huge Ferris wheel is the biggest confirmation of this attitude that is inherent in the construction of the carnival. With its circularity that implies a cyclical notion of time, the Ferris wheel is the embodiment of the way the carnival symbolizes time. Once you are in the Ferris wheel, you are disconnected from the time that rules in the reality that surrounds you. You are, albeit for a limited amount of time, saved from the imposed progress. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Samson's plan to defeat Brother Justin relies on getting him to ride the Ferris wheel. Once he steps in, they increase the speed, and then break the break-pedal that controls the wheel. In this way, Brother Justin is plucked away from its quest on progress, and trapped in the carnival time, a time that is grotesque in its very circularity, as it stops and goes back to heal the ones left behind by the progress – the small towns of the United States.

It is fitting, then, to hear the fortuneteller Sophie telling Ben once at the beginning, "These people, in these towns, they are asleep," Sophie says. "We wake them up" (1:1). Ben, in the final episode of the season recalls this exact phrase, and repeats it to himself before going to kill Justin Crowe. The carnival offers another conception of time

to be woken up to, one that is not infatuated with progress. It is interesting, in this respect, the way Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, in *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts*, map the phases a town, Muncie, Indiana goes through during the early twentieth century. During the depression era, they write that “one suspects that for the first time in their lives many Middletown people have awakened, in the depression, from the sense of being at home in a familiar world to the shock of living as an atom in a universe dangerously too big and blindly out of hand” (491). Looking at *Carnivale* from this perspective, one can say that the identically poor towns spread throughout the country during the Great Depression are actually not living, or not able to interpret what is happening to them. The very first scenes of the show confirm this statement. A scene reminiscent of Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*, Ben Hawkins is confronted by a bulldozer operator who has license to destroy Hawkins’s house. After the operator warns Hawkins to get out of the way, and telling him “Law says I can do it,” we see the bulldozer progressing towards us unrelentingly. As the driver takes his cue to progress forward in his destruction from the ruling order, the house is destroyed; Hawkins collapses to the ground because of hunger. The carnival, by the order of Samson, takes Hawkins to its arms. By presenting them with an alternative, cyclical time that is independent of the capitalist progression, then, the carnival not only wakes the people up, but also gives them a temporary relief from their immediate realities, starting with Hawkins.

One cannot be woken up unless one is asleep, though. This brings me to the effect of the narrative Brother Justin presents induces in his audience: nostalgia. A charismatic orator, Brother Justin affects his audience – which grows exponentially throughout the

series through the radio – to a great degree. One listens to him, and one is converted for the cause forever. The people listening to Justin in the show have raptured expressions, but they also have a glazed look to them. They look controlled by someone else, almost in a perpetual state of hypnotization. What Brother Justin uses to lure his audience to his cause is, on the surface, a religious appeal to a return to (of?) a golden past. Yet, Justin merges this appeal to nostalgia with an impending apocalyptic future that awaits the people if they do not submit to his views. Echoing his definition of time as his enemy, “the clock is ticking, brothers and sisters, counting down to Armageddon,” intones

Brother Justin:

The worm reveals himself in many guises across this once great land; from the intellectual elite cruelly indoctrinating our children with the savage blasphemy of Darwin, to the craven Hollywood pagans, corrupting them in the darkness of the local bijou, from the false prophets cowering behind our nation's pulpits to the vile parasites in our banks and boardrooms and the godless politicians, growing fat on the misery of their constituents. The signs of the end times are all around us, etched in blood and fire by the left hand of god. (1:12)

Justin attacks almost every institution in the society, claiming that they feed off of American people; at the same time, however, what he is doing is no different in terms of action. What Brother Justin doing here is that by deliberately melting the different aspects of society's institutions, he is creating a false front against which he can unite his followers. Therefore, it is not surprising to see Brother Justin tell Sophie, the runaway from the carnival who will turn out to be his daughter resulting from an act of rape, that “You have to choose. It is us, or them.” Justin makes it clear that he locates himself and his followers in a binary, and what he represents must be the prioritized one in that binary.

In these acts of brain-washing and construction of a powerful binary, Brother Justin is at once striking the audience as a figure of nostalgia, and a nostalgic figure, as his character inescapably resembles the mind-controlling mad scientists of the movies produced during the Depression era with a twist. “The theme of malevolent manipulation of people,” “hordes of workers who slave as zombies,” that were dominant themes in the movies of the era (Fearnow) appear in a different palette in Brother Justin’s case. Instead of science which was, by definition, the weapon of the mad scientist figure that was prevalent at the time, Brother Justin comes to the fore with a religious fervor. By luring people with his super-powered religious zeal, Justin promises a recreation of the past of their forefathers who first came to the New World. *Carnivale*, then, deliberately contrasts the idea of progress as encased in nostalgia to such an extent that it comes full circle. Brother Justin’s hypnotization of the hordes of people with his speech forms a stark contrast with the waking-up act of the carnival.

What does Ben Hawkins promise, then? For one thing, if Ben succeeds, he will have changed history, because one of the prophecies he has to stop from being fulfilled is the “explosion of the false sun,” in other words, the detonation of the first tested atom bomb. Therefore, Ben Hawkins, against Brother Justin who promises to bring the past of the Puritan forefathers, promises an alternate past and future to interpret the present. Against Brother Justin, Ben Hawkins, with his healing ability, strikes one as a different kind of hero. Constituting a complete opposite of Justin’s eloquence with words, Ben is a poor, uneducated farm boy from Milfay. However, with the strange flashbacks and forwards, Ben is part of a history which he directly does not seem a part of. Frida Beckman writes that that in the series, “Ben has memories and flash-forwards of pasts

and futures that are not his own. His history is built on repetitions that echo through generations in the shape of individual incarnations of a particular position in a type of avataric inheritance” (Beckman 9). This avataric inheritance that Beckman locates Hawkins in has certain significant connotations for the small town, as a simple individual comes to a realization of the way he is connected in the world. In this way, *Carnivale* signifies that the small town – both in the level of the individual and social – has something to say about the world. The small town is not the end of a one-way flow of meanings from the totalizing, grand narratives that attempt to define it. Within this perspective, Beckman’s views should once more be consulted:

There is a sense in which Brother Justin’s repetition of seminal American history can be related to the inevitability of historical chronology, while Ben’s capacity to change the course of events is linked to a nonlinear history. Against chronological history is posited the possibility of finding cracks in history that enable alternative actualizations of events to come. This possibility, however, can only become reality by gaining the courage to abandon the repetition of a master narrative and to believe in the power of the virtual. (Beckman 13)

This act of finding cracks applies not only for Ben Hawkins, but also for the small town America that has been subjected to two rivaling spectacles. Therefore, the power of the virtual – that is the power of the individual coming from the small town – is virtual only because it is deemed so by that grand narrative. Hawkins, by realizing his own healing power, forces a crack in that grand narrative, and then widens it. And if we are to remember Harpham’s articulation of the grotesque, and the way the mode works its way through the cracks, it is adequately fitting that Ben Hawkins comes to the fore as a protector of the grotesqueries in life, as that is the way he himself operates between the cracks of history.

Following this set-up, a particular episode, “Babylon” is significant in that it brings together the small town, capitalism, and the way their signifiers are amplified through Ben Hawkins and Justin Crowe. “Babylon” and the following “Pick a Number” see the carnival losing one of their own, Dora Mae Dreyfus, the cooch-dancer who is raped, tortured, and hanged by the mining folk of the town. “Babylon” depicts a small town that is punishing because it has been caught between a dead past and a non-existent future, left behind to die by the economics of the Great Depression.

The episode opens with Brother Justin standing amidst the burnt ruins of his church. He starts quoting a passage from the Bible, Revelations 18, about the corrupt city of Babylon:

Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.

And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’ (New American Standard Bible)

As we hear the recital of Justin, the frame changes and the carnival arrives at Babylon in search of Hawkins’s father, Henry Scudder, the avatar of evil who had shied away from his destiny. Scudder, we learn, had worked as a miner in Babylon, but then left after an explosion which left hundreds of miners dead. Right before the carnival arrives at Babylon to find a dead town with no one in sight, they see a man walking away from the town. When Samson asks the man whether he is leaving the town, the man answers, somewhat ambiguously, that he never manages to do so. As they leave the man on his way and find a spot to set up their tents, the silence of the town bothers them. At night

time, though, the members of the town appear in front of the carnival area. They have no expression on their faces. In a parallel narrative, Hawkins, who gets lost in the town while drunk, finds himself in the mines, learning that the miners were killed by an explosion. The miners in the carnival are dead, and Babylon is a dead town.

In this sense, Babylon's depiction is in fact not so different than many towns in the US during the depression era. The dust storms and banks closing down on them swallowed several small towns agriculturally and financially, following the economic boom – in other words, explosion – during the 1920s. It is not a coincidence, therefore, that Babylon in Revelations 18 is mourned in particular by merchants, as “the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.” The lament for Babylon is as follows:

And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more— cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, (...) “The fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and *men* will no longer find them. “The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!’ (Revelations 18)

Babylon, its “great wealth has been laid waste” is not a part of the economic system anymore. This is the reason it is the merchants, the main actors of capital who “became rich from her,” are her lamenters. Taking its cue from Babylon in the Bible, Babylon in *Carnivale* emerges as a town filled with resentment towards the outer world that has left it for dead. Its undead inhabitants are looking to express themselves – not in words, though. Therefore, it is no coincidence that when the miners encounter the carnival,

violence occurs. After a short while they see Dora Mae dancing the cooch naked, they rape, torture and hang her to a tree, writing “Harlot” on her face. The carnival, a mobilized world of earthly, grotesque delights, it turns out, is too much for them to handle.

It is hard not to see the parallel between my reading of Laura Palmer’s death in terms of the violent assault on the small town in *Twin Peaks*, and the way Dora Mae is punished. A different kind of sacrifice is encountered here. Just as Laura Palmer is murdered because she steps outside the boundaries that are designated for the small town with the traditional values, Dora Mae is punished because she is a part of a troupe of grotesques whose very existence is a transgression of those values. While Laura Palmer’s death was a warning, a prophecy for the small town with feminine attributions, Dora Mae’s is a reaffirmation of the same condition and its vain retribution. Just as the way Babylon is punished by the capitalist economy, Babylon itself punishes the carnival by killing a woman member of theirs, because it reminds the dead miners their loss. This time, their aim is not to keep themselves intact – they will be intact for the rest of their lives – but just to seek retribution. Within this perspective, the function of Justin’s quotation from the Revelations, and the way that quotation itself quotes the episode of Babylon becomes more significant. Babylon becomes a stand-in for all those small towns that has been left for dead during the depression era. While the economy of the US was being geared for the impending for the World War II, it had no use for those towns. It is therefore no surprising that Hawkins, wandering by himself in the mines, stumbles upon a vision right before he finds his way out: on a war trench with bullets flying and bombs exploding everywhere. As we watch this sudden juxtaposition, we feel that unless the

ordinary individual whose supernatural powers consist of healing comes to take responsibility, the grand narrative will end in war, just like it did in World War I – to end differences.

Brother Justin's grand/totalizing narrative is based on the rejection of the grotesque that is inherent in American history. His fear of the carnival as the carnival gets closer by each passing day is palpable. He sees it in his nightmares, with the giant Ferris wheel looming in the sky. His kindly degrading attitude towards Samson when they meet, and his obvious unease towards Samson's companions, are other evidences which show that Justin does not feel home when with deformities, or grotesqueries. A vision he suffers as he looks at his reflection on a mirror is another significant example. Justin notices a little scar on his forehead. He picks the scab, and blood comes out, leading to more scabs. He tries once more, and he inadvertently rips part of his hair. He tries again, this time ripping out some skin too. Justin, in an increasing intensity, rips his entire face off, revealing Hawkins looking at him. He wakes up from the vision at that moment, utterly distraught.

Moreover, Justin's denial of the existence of others both in mind and body in and around himself is once more clearly evidenced when an old Reverend – whom Ben Hawkins visits to ask about his father – drugs Hawkins, makes a mask of his face, and sends that mask to Justin. Justin dons the mask, and the moment he does, he starts seeing the world in Hawkins's eyes in real-time. The camera work at that moment operates from Hawkins's point of view. As Justin slowly looks around in and at the world through the eyes of his nemesis, he is shocked. He sees the "freaks" of the carnival, the trucks, and various gadgetries as the carnival is packing up. At the end of this sequence, Hawkins

picks up a mirror that has been lying on the ground. Justin, seeing Hawkins for the first time, and once more in the place where he is ought to be, is shocked. He throws the mask, breaking it. These two encounters of Justin with the other in himself, and his violent reactions to these encounters, indicate his inability to deal with or his direct rejection of a possibility of a grotesque existence in him, which is also reflected in his attitude towards his followers – a sameness. Recalling Bakhtin’s formulations of “two bodies in one” referred in my first chapter, one could say that, not unlike Jesse Bentley in *Winesburg, Ohio*, Justin is itself a grotesque figure but not aware of it. His rejection of the grotesque provides a stark contrast against the carnival’s (and Hawkins’s) embracement of it.

Carnivale, with its employment of the grotesque mode, consciously and simultaneously affirms and dislocates several binaries of good and evil, presence and absence, man and woman, etc. In other words, *Carnivale* follows an intermittent deconstructionist attitude in its treatment of the great confrontation between Ben Hawkins and Justin Crowe. Although the show slowly unravels the preconceived notions about good and evil by respectively attributing them to an ignorant farm boy with prison shackles, and Justin, a preacher, a man of god, it also favors a sense of presence in favor of absence. The healing ability of Ben Hawkins manifests itself by touching. Hawkins puts his hands on a person, and he heals, at the same time draining life from something or someone else nearby. And although Brother Justin’s power of showing people their sins is manifested by his touch at the beginning of the first season of the show, Justin moves away from presence as he uses radio to disseminate his speech to the masses. Moreover, Samson’s speech (“the fate of the mankind rested on the trembling shoulders of the most reluctant of saviors”) at the beginning of the second season makes the preference of

presence explicit. Instead of politicians, preachers, or other figures of power who wield that power through mediation derived from the people, Ben Hawkins with his touch heals the ills the nation is going through.

On the other hand, as I mentioned, the show also plays with these dualities as seen in the construction of good and evil. *Carnivale* time and again refers to the uneasy borders between these dualities, most explicitly in the case of Ruthie the snake-charmer and her forced relationship with Lila, the bearded-woman. Near the end of the first season, Lodz, a male mind-reader who has been coercing Hawkins to embrace his powers knowingly kills Ruthie so that Hawkins would have to heal her. After some complex narrative unraveling, Hawkins kills Lodz, and therefore resurrects Ruthie. However, during the second season, Ruthie at first start seeing strange visions in which Lodz comes to her, and then she starts sleep-walking during which she acts and talks like Lodz. In many ways, she is Lodz. In one of these sleep-walking sequences, Ruthie goes into the trailer of Lila, the ex-lover of Lodz, and performs oral sex on her. The way we see them after the sexual act is telling: the diminutive Ruthie lying upright in a manly posture in bed, talking in Lodz's tones, and the heavily-built Lila by her side with her beard. The absence of phallus is of no consequence as the rest of the binaries that gives meaning to the necessity of phallus are dissolved.

This sequence becomes more significant when compared to the sexualities of Brother Justin and Ben Hawkins. The sexuality of Brother Justin, who has a very close relationship with her sister bordering on incest, becomes increasingly uncontrolled as he mind-forces one maid after another to perform oral sex on him as he grows in power. Jonathan Gil Harris writes that

phallogocentrism marks women and their bodies under the sign of lack or absence. But by having no singular centre (whether phallus or *logos*), the woman of the patriarchal text stands in a different relation to otherness. Whereas the patriarchal man must defend his corporeal and linguistic integrity by violently opposing the otherness of femininity, apprehended as castration and/or madness, the woman's body and speech – like Bakhtin's conceptions of the grotesque and the dialogic – are open to, and reveal the trace of, otherness. As written in and by phallogocentrism, then, the female body is more than just lacking; it is plural, resisting the singular logic of the 'Self-Same.' (Harris 130)

With these attributions, Brother Justin also turns out to be a phallogocentric figure, one who not only disregards the presence of women, though, but also the presence of any others. If we remember his favorite way of address ("brothers and sisters"), and the way he sexually regards his sister, this situation becomes more apparent. Justin, in his phallogocentrism, at once penetratingly sexualizes and homogenizes everything with his ideology. This (dis)regard becomes much more obvious when evaluated with the experience Ruthie and Lila go through, and the way they conduct themselves in a non-violent manner afterwards, accepting the multi-dimensional existence of each other. Their grotesque look – the small woman with the attitude and sound of a man, the huge woman with the beard lying side by side – after their sexual relationship that insistently looks for understanding is contrasted to Brother Justin's "singular logic of the Self-same," in Harris's words, obsessed with eradicating the other.

On the other hand, Hawkins' tentative sexuality looks for consent and mutual correspondence. In his very first morning in the carnival, Hawkins, his clothes taken away to be washed, has to put on a woman's gown. He goes out of the trailer looking for his clothes, but not noticing a rope, falls on a puddle of mud, and falls again as he tries to get up. Hawkins is at a loss in this carnival(istic) world, and this shows immediately.

However, slowly relinquishing his own totalizing attitude (at first calling the members of the carnival “half-wits, whores, and two-bit freaks,”) at the beginning, Hawkins engages in two sexual relationships in the traveling troupe, one with Ruthie, and the other with Sophie. These consensual relationships have a healing effect on both sides, unlike the one-sided destructive effect in the case of Brother Justin. Hawkins finds out that his conceptualization of what he experiences around himself is mistaken. In this sense, *Carnivale*’s first juxtaposing and then mixing of binary opposites could not be clearer. While the evil comes across as a devourer of differences with a violent heterosexuality, the good is constructed as a way of recognizing the heterogeneities in the individual and in society in the shape of the small town.

On one hand, Brother Justin’s dissemination of a nostalgia of a past that is no longer viable paradoxically unified with a relentless progress to the end of time; on the other, the carnival’s way of co-existing with differences, and its stopping to heal what the Depression has wrecked. The killing of the miners in the aftermath of the economic explosion of the twenties; Dora Mae’s violent murder. These bring me to the final part of my chapter: the way sacrifice is contextualized in *Carnivale*. “Only through redemption comes sacrifice,” tells Brother Justin to his sister Iris, (2:6) when he learns that Iris herself burned his church down while children were sleeping in it, as a sacrifice so that they would get nationwide attention. Iris is unrepentant, as she feels that what was done was necessary. While Justin seems to turn Iris to the authorities at first, and scaring Iris in this way, in a sleight of hand he turns in someone else at the very last moment. Just as the way Iris sacrifices someone else, Justin does the same to save his sister. “Systemic market forces, military operations, national identity, and political rhetorics produced

hybrid religions which have borrowed from Christianity (and other traditions) to prop up their fragile power,” writes Jon Pahl. “In this manifestation of America, citizens have sacrificed both their own and enemy others while simultaneously imagining that they were innocent in doing so” (Pahl 4). The actions of Justin, and that of Iris as redeemed by Justin have a striking resonance in Pahl’s comments. This way, Brother Justin’s understanding of sacrifice strikes one as teleologic, one that also sacrifices its consequences with no responsibility. Borrowing again from Pahl, Justin’s conglomeration which steadily turns into a community is one that is “built on blessed brutalities.”

Brother Justin’s sacrifice does not end there, though. He not only endorses acts of physical sacrifice for his ends, but also, with his rhetoric, manipulates his followers’ viewpoints of the world in their desperation. Justin constantly refers in his speeches to the Puritan forefathers who fought with wilderness against pagans and founded their blessed nation. He defines his new temple to be built in New Canaan as a “city upon a hill,” very words used by John Winthrop during the foundation of the Boston settlement. “The nostos of a nation is not merely a lost Eden but a place of sacrifice and glory, of past suffering...” writes Svetlana Boyd. “In the national ideology, individual longing is transformed in to a collective belonging that relies on past sufferings that transcend individual memories” (Boyd 120). By combining their collective misery, and promising a solution in the times long past, Justin is sacrificing his followers’ nostalgias in the process.

The notion of sacrifice associated with Ben Hawkins, on the other hand, is drastically different compared to that of Brother Justin. He can heal, but in order to give

life, he has to take life. Hawkins's ability, therefore, is not without consequences. "There are rules," the sick woman who knew Hawkins's father tells Ben. "In order to give life, you have to take life." After these initial forays into the depths of his ability where he can compensate the act of giving life with deaths of natural entities, Hawkins comes at a turning point where he realizes that he always has to make this conscious decision. Similarly, when Hawkins comes to full power, accepting his responsibility, he defines what he does as "All I do is move life!" In this way, what the carnival does in the series is not unlike what Hawkins does. A mobile small town of grotesques, the carnival brings life to all those small towns. It is the mobility the carnival emphasizes on. Hawkins's first act of healing in the carnival is interesting, therefore: he heals a crippled girl so that she can walk again, while the crops surrounding the girl wither and die. Ben Hawkins's heavy responsibility, originating from a small town setting and coming to its own in a mobile small town of grotesques, signifies a demand for change in the American attitude towards her surroundings and towards the world.

Brother Justin and the discourse he represents culminate sacrifice without recognizing the consequences. This discourse sacrifices four children in a church for a supposed greater good, while the ability of Hawkins makes it explicit that there is another side which is not recognized in these acts. The necessity of the healing ability that forces Hawkins to take life in order to give life brings forward a strong sense of responsibility. The end of the series – even though it is not the full story due to HBO's cancellation – underlines this fact, too: Ben Hawkins kills Justin Crowe in the heartland of America, in a corn field. However, the madness caused by Brother Justin does not immediately end. As Sophie – who turns out to be his daughter – walks into the corn field, we see from a

wide shot a familiar scene: corns wither and die around the point where Brother Justin has died.

All these events that I have been writing about, taking place in a small town setting point out to significant effort *Carnivale* is making: the series seems to say that the American small town is a crucial place for signification. This signification is not one-way, deriving from an urban-centric source, but both ways. The way Ben Hawkins finds clues in the small towns the carnival visits in search of his father to realize his potential confirms this. It is not just a clever trick when Hawkins sees the initials of his father, HS, on the façade of a hotel as he looks through two sliding doors of a barn left ajar. Hawkins finds the clues he is looking for, because he wants to know how to read those clues. The small town, as long as it is alive, leaves clues for a reading that is multi-faceted. It is not just a place that is supposed to preserve traditional values, nor is it a dead settlement where everyone wants to leave it behind. As all things in life, it is more complicated than that. That is what *Carnivale*, through a reading with a grotesque lens, shows us.

Carnivale is a grotesque show of grotesques that takes the small town America as its setting during a period of great social upheaval. The main plot of the show, the fight between good and evil does not take a familiar shape as the evil does not make itself immediately known as a destroyer of the world, while the good is not a conceptualization of good we are used to see on TV-dramas. While the evil side of the binary comes along as a totalitarian, absolutist discourse that aims to create a hygienic, homogenous society that is capitalistic in essence, obsessed with progress, the good is a discourse that calls for the recognizance of the grotesque strains in our lives. The avatar of the good coming from the small town, Ben Hawkins, is not the typical hero in that he beats the devil and saves everyone from destruction of the world, but an individual that comes to the

realization of his responsibilities, and the immediate or long-term ramifications of his abilities. The carnival, the site of incongruities that disseminates those incongruities as a way of life, and against a progressive understanding of life that obliterates differences, provides a nurturing space for Ben Hawkins as he himself comes to understand to live with incongruities. The small towns during the Depression era prove to be perfect stages to juxtapose these disparities that result from a bleak future and a nostalgic past as island communities torn between these strong tensions. This has particular significance for the US in its present, confused state towards the world. At the end of the day, this is what the grotesque as a literary mode is all about.

5. CONCLUSION

[T]he grotesque implies discovery, and disorder is the price one always pays for the enlargement of the mind. Art, perhaps, is measured by its ability to enrich our understanding, but it is also measured by its capacity to provide evidence for the falsification of whatever theories we arrive at. It is this capacity that insures a text's continued life by guaranteeing that there is something left to discover. One sign of this "something left" is contradiction, or dissonance. (Geoffrey Galt Harpham 231)

Indeed, the three texts I dealt with in my thesis, written and visual, all leave us with a strong sense of incompleteness. *Twin Peaks* is cancelled after its two seasons, as the revealed mystery of Laura Palmer's murder killed the show's ratings. We are left with Agent Cooper's possession by BOB, but we do not know what happens next. Similarly, *Carnivale* is cancelled after its two seasons due to heavy budget costs, HBO in a telling manner claiming that the story reached "its natural conclusion." We are left with a long shot of a corn field hiding Brother Justin's body, with the corns slowly starting to wither. And although *Winesburg, Ohio* is a completed work on its own, its ending signifies for an incompleteness, as George Willard leaves the town and the small town of Winesburg becomes "a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood." We do not know whether what we are reading are the stories by George Willard, or he is writing his own versions.

What is clear is that in each case, following the nature of the grotesque, a dissonance resulting from the incomplete nature of the works reveals itself. In this sense, this might mean that the small town's story is not over. It needs to be told, retold, and reevaluated and re-critiqued again and again. It is, as Harpham notes, this sense of discovery that the grotesque harbors.

The roar of the trains the inhabitants of *Winesburg, Ohio* hear in dread turns to the groan of the trucks that leave *Twin Peaks*, which in turn are echoed in the radio waves that mingle the preachings of Brother Justin with the news of the banks in *Carnivale*. In these three works, my attempt was to trace the depictions of the small-town America during social upheavals. In all three, the grotesque as a literary mode is the connecting thread, which lays bare the tension the small town finds itself, caught between the encroaching capitalism and the nostalgia it perpetuates.

While in *Winesburg, Ohio* the nature of this tension is clear-cut, with the small town on one side, and the industrial capitalism on the other, we find the town depicted in *Twin Peaks* immersed in that capitalism, made part of its framework without an awareness. *Twin Peaks*, therefore, signifies for a reevaluation of a binary look on our look at the small town. And in *Carnivale*, the demand for a dissolving of binaries is once more emphasized, this time in an act of going back to the Depression Era. A masculine, totalizing gaze that overlaps with the capitalist frameworks in all these three texts is juxtaposed with a feminine construction of small towns. Capitalism's penetrative obsession with a linear understanding of time and progress is countered with a circularity and cyclicalness that attempts to undermine this linearity. Finally, all three texts deal with the notion of sacrifice. In all three works, the acts of sacrifice are aimed at resurrecting a

past that does not exist anymore, or at keeping a false sense of nostalgia that the small town finds itself.

What do these findings imply on our own critical gaze on the American small town? It seems that these texts implicitly demand a more nuanced, complicated reading. The small town that is regarded either as a preserver of traditional values, or a dying human settlement that is no longer relevant defies this simplistic binary. After all, it is the critic's task to not to be satisfied with a conclusive reading. An open ended, but implicative reading that is in parallel with the grotesqueness of the small town that culminates during social upheavals could therefore be necessary.

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