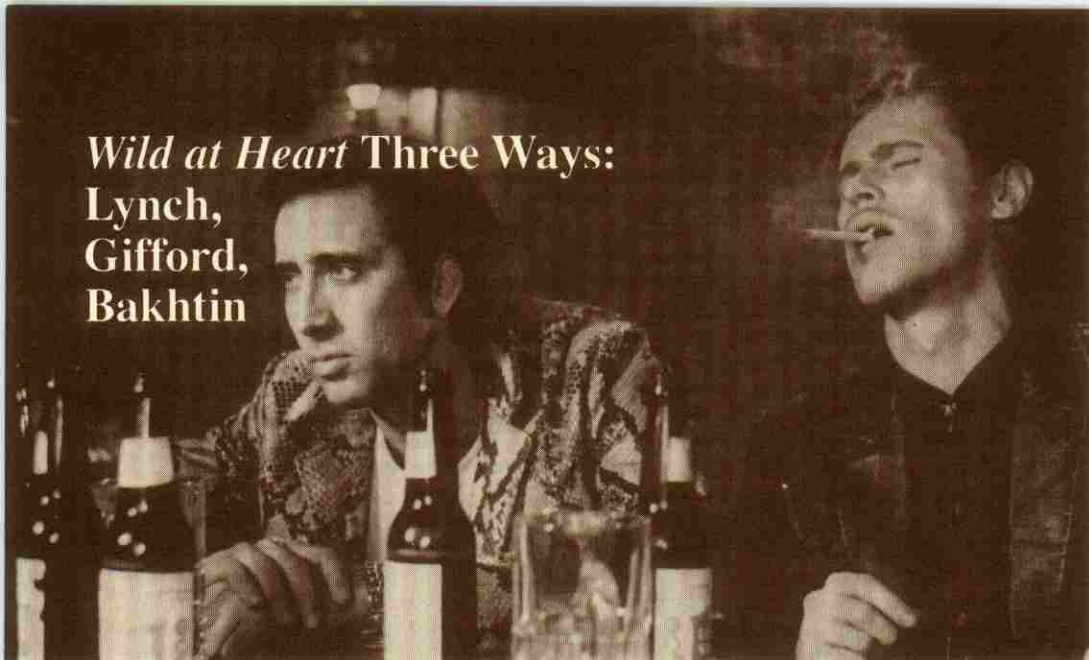


Wild at Heart Three Ways: Lynch, Gifford, Bakhtin



The theories of Mikhail Bakhtin have, for the last two decades, increasingly influenced critical discussions of prose narrative in languages as varied as Japanese, English, and Finnish. However, with the rare exception of works like Robert Stam's very challenging book *Subversive Pleasures*, little attention has been paid to the ways in which Bakhtin's ideas apply to film narratives. From a semiotic perspective, however, soundtrack music, styles of acting, verbal intonations and accents, echoes of film conventions, and allusions to other films are just as much forms of language as words on a page. Thus film and prose fiction should be equally available to examination in Bakhtin's terms—especially as these are enunciated in the essays collected in *The Dialogic Imagination*. One particularly rich opportunity to test this thesis is David Lynch's 1990 film *Wild at Heart* and the novel on which the film is based.

Barry Gifford's *Wild at Heart*, also published in 1990, attracted Lynch's attention while still in galleys. One probable reason is that the novel features the sorts of weird characters and settings that *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet* have taught us to associate with David Lynch. I would propose another reason to be Lynch's recognition that Gifford—like Lynch himself—is committed to the stylistic strategy that Bakhtin calls dialogism: the assumption that all utterances inescapably engage in dialogue with other utterances, present and absent, and that, furthermore, all of these possible utterances carry traces of their former social contexts. As Bakhtin writes, "The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around a given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue" (276). By exhaustively analyzing the work of writers such as Rabelais and Dostoevsky, Bakhtin champions narratives that reject what he calls monologism—that is, a single, authoritative narrative voice intended to convey a completed thematic message—in favor of contending, unharmonized voices intended to communicate openness and process—even some measure of confusion.

Lynch's and Gifford's shared commitment to a dialogic strategy may be inferred from critical responses to their versions of *Wild at Heart*. Although it won the Palm d'Or at the 1990 Cannes Film Festival, David Lynch's film received very mixed reviews from American film critics. In his August 20 review for *Time*, Richard Corliss wrote, "This handsome, volcanically violent road movie is Lynch's first flat-out comedy; he and his ensemble . . . work at a high pitch and have a swell time at it" (63). David Denby was less pleased, writing in *New York Magazine* that the film is "a malignant work . . . full of self-mocking trash as well as perfervid excitement." Sadly, according to Denby, "the trash is not redeemed by the joke" (60). Jonathan Rosenbaum argued more censoriously in *Sight and Sound* that the film is merely "an anthology of shocks and conceits that is tied to a plot only in the sense that a boat

is moored to a dock" (277). Most displeased of all, perhaps, was Terrence Rafferty, who complained in *The New Yorker* that the film's "shocks have so little resonance; the weirdness here is inexpressive and trivial, even silly." Rafferty agreed with Corliss in classifying Lynch's film as a "road movie" but disagreed in observing that this is "an exhausted genre" (90). I find it significant that both an approving Corliss and a disapproving Rafferty judge Lynch's film in terms of its conformity to some preexistent form of organic narrative. Corliss finds the parts of the film monologically adjusted to one another; Rafferty and Rosenbaum find them inharmonious.

Although most reviewers were better disposed toward Gifford's novel, they approached it from the same organicist critical angle. John Domini correctly observed about the novel in *The New York Times Book Review*, "Barry Gifford's fourth novel (which David Lynch, the director of 'Blue Velvet,' is bringing to the screen) is made up mostly of conversations in cars, Southern variety" (22). An unsigned review in *The New Yorker* agreed that "most of what happens is dialogue between quirky noir characters who are preternaturally adept at down-home epigrams and figures of speech" (103). In other words, Gifford's style is dialogic. An unnamed but sympathetic reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* called Gifford's novel "the visual equivalent of sound bites" (48). Clearly, critics of both the book and the film are struck by the absence of some monologic authority responsible for ranking narrative elements hierarchically in relation to the controlling theme.

These two artists' dialogic strategy is most evident, as readers of Bakhtin might assume, in their use of what Bakhtin calls heteroglossia, the co-presence of highly varied voices representing highly varied historical and social agencies. As Bakhtin explains, "Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters" are all means by which "heteroglossia can enter the novel." He adds that an author's use of such "compositional unities . . . permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships . . ." (263). Especially insofar as these multiple voices resist absorption into conventional organic unity, they resist the ideological tyranny of monologism.

In Gifford's novel, heteroglossia takes many forms. Sometimes the narrative alludes passingly to popular culture phenomena so familiar that most readers can fill in the actual words for themselves: "The Locomotion" by Little Eva," "I've Got a Tiger by the Tail" by Buck Owens, "Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White" by Perez Prado, Susan Hayward in *I Want to Live*, John Wayne in *The Alamo*, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *The Dating Game*, *The Twilight Zone*. At another point, the central female character, Lula Pace Fortune, reads a magazine article about Evel Knievel and thinks about the death of Patsy Cline. Her lover, Sailor Ripley, tells her about a radio program on the medical uses of leeches, and Lula herself hears reports on all-news station about a Vietnamese child prostitution ring and about a proposal by the Indian government to release crocodiles into the Ganges to help dispose of floating corpses.

Other forms of heteroglossia are more elaborate. Sailor (64-75) and Lula (74-75) both recount disturbing nightmares. Gifford also introduces letters into his novel, merely referring to the ones that Lula's embezzler grandfather sent daily to his wife, who never answered them, but fully representing in the text Lula's letter to Sailor in prison (149-51) and Sailor's answer (152-53). Other directly verbal forms of heteroglossia include a discussion of the adventure novel *Death Chopper*, by the fictional novelist Eddie Guidry (116-17), and an elaborate allusion to Thomas Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, including a quotation (41-42). This canonical literary work is a favorite of Gifford's character Johnnie Farragut, a private detective on the trail of Lula and Sailor. Since Farragut is an aspiring author, we also encounter his proposal for a boxing script to be titled *Don't Die for Me* (102) and two of his compositions: a fantastic story titled "A Good Connection" (55-59) and an autobiographical piece called "My Early Years" (129-30). A dogged enough adherent of monologism might be able to thematize all these fictional voices in relation to Gifford's characterizations, but most readers of Bakhtin would identify them as forms of heteroglossia.

Probably the most characteristic of Gifford's devices is the recitation of personal narratives by major and minor characters. In the course of two early chapters, for example, Sailor tells

Lula about his early sexual encounters (23-24; 29-30), incidents that might easily be thematized monologically as part of Sailor's character. Between these two accounts, however, Sailor tells Lula about Buddy Favre, who used to lie in a tub filled with Twenty Mule Team Borax, smoking marijuana and soaking off the grease from his job as a truck mechanic, while Sailor's father sat on a chair sipping I.W. Harper (27-28). Since this character never reappears in the novel, Sailor's account cannot be easily thematized.

The same may be said of Reader O'Day, who appears in the chapter titled "Readers Story" (119-22) when Lula asks Sailor to "Tell me a story while we're waitin'" for her toenails to dry. Sailor responds by reporting in amazement that Reader has spent most of the seventeen-year sentence he received "for doin' in his common-law wife . . . readin' books by a dead French guy." Reader told Sailor that all of these books are part of a series titled *Rememberin' Things Past*. He also told Sailor that his wife was "jus Alabama trash" whom he married "at a time when he wasn't feelin' none too high on himself" and later shot "five or six times" when she attacked him with a rifle. Like Favre, Reader has no further influence on Gifford's plot but, like Favre, he has entered into the dialogism of Gifford's narrative even so.

In this indirect manner, the voice of Marcel Proust can also enter the narrative, joining the voices of Thomas Burton and William Faulkner. Faulkner enters Gifford's novel indirectly when Lula tells Sailor about the Armisteads, her mother's friends from Mississippi. According to Lula, Mr. Armistead, who looks like an anteater, "[r]uns a drugstore in Oxford, where he was born and raised." Lula continues:

The anteater did all the talkin'. He said stuff like when he was a boy Mister Bill—that's what he called William Faulkner?—would scold him for runnin' through the tulip beds of his plantation. Rowan Oak, I think it's named. "You must run around the flowers, Eddie," the anteater said William Faulkner told him. "Yes, sir, Mister Bill," the anteater said he'd say, before runnin' off over William Faulkner's tulip beds again. For some reason my mama thought this was someway humorous. (21-22)

Faulkner surely carries more resonance for most readers than Buddy Favre or Reader O'Day, and yet his relation to Gifford's novel is still heteroglossic, rather than thematic, a point demonstrated by Lula's convoluted syntax of attribution: "The anteater said William Faulkner told him." Thus, while it is probably true that all Southern writers labor in Faulkner's shadow, as Eudora Welty lamented, it would be unwise to try to account for his presence in this episode monologically—as the source of Gifford's literary tradition, for example. Faulkner merely contributes another cultural voice to this novel's heteroglossia—like John Wayne or Little Eva.

Minor characters also tell heteroglossic stories in the novel. After Johnnie Farragut has trailed Sailor and Lula to New Orleans, he meets Reginald San Pedro Sula in the Acme Oyster Bar. Reggie then tells Johnnie about his life in Honduras (39-41), a narrative unrelated to its immediate context, to any previous event in the novel, or to any subsequent event except one. Reggie does reappear eleven chapters later (77-78), but his presence then is no more thematically relevant. Perhaps for that reason, Reggie's character does not appear in Lynch's film.

George Kovich does appear however. Kovich is a minor character whom Sailor and Lula encounter in Ronnie's Nothin' Fancy Cafe, also in New Orleans. In the novel, Kovich tells the two about Rats With Wings, his pigeon exterminating business back in Buffalo (48-50). As one might expect by this point, Kovich and pigeons have no simple relation to the surrounding fictional context beyond their general relevance to Lula's judgment that "The world is really *Wild at Heart* and weird on top" (6).

One striking difference between Gifford's and Lynch's uses of heteroglossia can be seen in their approaches to Kovich. In the novel, Kovich is presented as "A man on the stool next to Sailor . . . who extend[ed] a gnarled, liver-spotted hand, the knuckles of which looked as if they'd been broken more than once (48)." This man's story might be a trifle weird, in other words, but there is nothing physically freakish about him. He might almost be a character in a Saul Bellow novel. In Lynch's film, Kovich addresses a single line to Sailor during this episode: "Pigeons spread diseases and mess up the place. You've seen that." Although he

doesn't mention Rats With Wings, Kovich still introduces heteroglossia into the scene because he delivers this line in a voice that makes him sound like the coroner of Munchkin Land.

While reformulating many—but not all—of Gifford's forms of heteroglossia, Lynch introduces several of his own. As the example of George Kovich suggests, the source for many of these voices is the 1939 classic film *The Wizard of Oz*, and their resonance may be inferred from critical responses to Lynch's film. Richard Corliss's review in *Time* is titled "Wizard of Odd," and Caryn James's in the *The New York Times* is titled "Today's Yellow Brick Road Leads Straight to Hell."

References to Oz abound in Lynch's film, as James M. Welsh attests in his review article in *Magill's Cinema Annual* (399-400). Lula and Sailor are hounded by a maniacal Margaret Hamilton-like laugh, probably emanating from Lula's mother, Marietta, who is variously depicted rubbing a crystal ball with her long, red fingernails, riding through the air on a broom, wearing slippers that turn up in the front, and disappearing in a puff of smoke. Lula says, "Sometimes, Sail, when we're making love, you just about take me right over that rainbow." Sailor says it's a shame that Lula's deeply disturbed cousin Dell couldn't just "visit that old wizard of Oz and get some good advice." Sailor also admits that Big Tuna, Texas, is "not exactly Emerald City." Even so, OO Spool, a character added to the population of Big Tuna by Lynch, elaborates on an epistemological rap about dogs by saying, "Perhaps you might even picture Toto from the Wizard of Oz."

It is also in Big Tuna that Lula desperately clicks the heels of her red slippers together in an effort to escape the sexual assault of the loathsome Bobby Peru. Although Bobby functions significantly in Gifford's novel, he does not commit this sexual assault on Lula, nor does he have a USMC tattoo or preternaturally repulsive teeth. These are Lynch's contributions. Mixing the loathsome and the romantic in this way epitomizes Lynch's kind of dialogism. Reviewers of Gifford's novel suggested parallels to the work of hard-boiled writers like Jim Thompson and Charles Willeford. Sailor's savage murder of Bob Ray Lemon, Bobby Peru's assault on Lula, and the botched robbery that leads to Bobby's bloody death clearly suggest that Lynch followed Gifford's lead. At the same time, allusions to Oz introduce other, apparently dissonant, voices into the film.

Lynch also uses Elvis Presley, as he uses references to Oz, to make his film more dialogic throughout. Nicholas Cage's Sailor is clearly intended to recall Elvis's inwardly sensitive movie hoods of the fifties, not only in his shiny black hairdo but also in his costuming: turned-up collar, black shirts, jeans, and boots. These echoes are especially clear in a scene set in a roadside night club. In the chapter of Gifford's novel titled "Night Life" (82-86), Lula and Sailor visit a small black club called the Zanzibar to drink and dance. Aside from a fit of jealousy, little happens. In Lynch's film, the club becomes an integrated MTV-like disco in which an obscene young punk insults Sailor's snakeskin jacket. Sailor explains to the punk that "this here jacket represents a symbol of my individuality and my belief in personal freedom." When the punk responds by calling Sailor "asshole," Sailor beats him senseless. This fight is represented realistically, and yet its absurd verbal cause signals to viewers that the events on the screen are purely fictional.

Sailor is free to follow up the beating with a very good impression of Elvis Presley, singing "Love Me Tender" to Lula. The tonal contrast with the preceding fight probably destroys any illusion of realism, but Lynch seals the matter by filming Sailor's performance of the song as if it were concert footage, with screams in the background and shots of enamored female fans, even though the restricted dimensions of the roadhouse setting were established before and during the fight. While organic critics such as Rosenbaum might categorize this sequence as merely "an anthology of shocks," a Bakhtinian reading would focus on the presence of heteroglossia.

Sailor's speech to the punk also illustrates the dialogic element that Bakhtin calls "inserted genres." About this kind of "utterance," Bakhtin observes: "Such incorporated genres usually preserve within the novel their own structural integrity and independence, as well as their own linguistic and stylistic peculiarities" (321). In other words, passages of this sort

resist monologic assimilation in a novel or in a film. In this case, the "linguistic and stylistic peculiarity" of Sailor's speech is established earlier in the film. When Lula comes to meet Sailor at the Pee Dee Correctional Institution after he has served a two-year sentence for his incredibly violent killing of Bob Ray Lemon, Lula and Sailor engage in the sort of conversation which we might expect from two young lovers—real or fictional—after such a separation. However, when Lula says that she has brought along Sailor's beloved snakeskin jacket, Sailor's response is inappropriate: "Thanks baby. Did I ever tell you that this here jacket represents a symbol of my individuality and my belief in personal freedom?" When Lula replies, "About fifty thousand times," her answer probably brings the scene back within the realm of representational realism, but for the duration of Sailor's speech viewers encounter pure language rather than representation. This is the realm to which viewers are returned by Sailor's later word-for-word repetition of the speech in the roadhouse.

Another inserted verbal formula has much the same effect. Shortly after the fight with the punk, Sailor and Lula are riding along in Lula's convertible exchanging pointless remarks about smoking. When Sailor says that his mother died of lung cancer when he was still a child, Lula asks, "What brand did she smoke?" Sailor answers, "Marlboro, same as me." Perhaps some dimensions are added to the two characterizations by means of this dialogue, something about their superficiality or their indifference to suffering and death. Perhaps some reinforcement of the symbolism of fire and heat takes place through the mention of smoking. The principal effect, however, seems to be still another reminder that these are artistic creations who exist in the realm of words and images, not real people who exist in the realm of flesh and blood.

In the environment of such language, Sailor can immediately add, "I didn't have much parental guidance." Some demands of realistic representation are served when Sailor explains that this is what the public defender said at his parole hearing, but organic realism is not the ultimate goal. Therefore, the same phrase can be repeated word for word toward the end of the film when the Good Witch is trying to persuade Sailor to return to Lula. On this occasion, a badly beaten Sailor protests his unworthiness by saying, through barely moving lips, "But I'm a robber and a manslayer and I haven't had any parental guidance." Even if the original source was the public defender, the insertion of this utterance, unchanged, unadapted to Sailor's usual mode of speech, serves to signal its nature as language more than as an element of character.

Lynch introduces another sort of heteroglossia through his use of obscene language. Given Sailor's history of violence, given the presence in the film of characters designated as soldiers, gangsters, and paid assassins, given the world in which Lynch's viewers actually live—a certain amount of obscene language might be monologically justified. Bobby Peru, for example, is an ex-marine who was involved in the Cao Ben massacre in Vietnam and is now a hired killer in the employ of Mr. Reindeer. When another Vietnam vet, who had served in the Navy, tells Lula that many women and children were massacred at Cao Ben, Bobby says defensively, "Pretty hard to make contact with the people when you're out floating in the fucking Gulf of Tonkin." Most viewers probably would accept Bobby's speech here as accurate marine dialogue. Probably less appropriate in the ears of most viewers is Bobby's promise in a later scene that robbing a feed store will be "Like taking candy from a fucking baby." In this case, the obscenity is so clearly excessive that the speech cannot be monologically absorbed into the narrative as a stroke of characterization—even of the loathsome Bobby. Rather, the discord between language and meaning demonstrates how Lynch uses heteroglossia to signal "literariness."

An apologist doggedly committed to narrative organicism might try to argue some sort of accretive obscenity in legitimation of these Bobby Peru scenes late in the film, but the most striking illustration of Lynch's use of obscene language occurs right at the beginning of the film. In the opening scene, Bob Ray Lemon walks down some hotel steps and shouts, "Hey Sailor, wait up!" As he brushes past Lula, Lemon says, "You're mine, baby!" Then, as he approaches Sailor, intent on stabbing him to death, the following dialogue ensues: "I got something for you. Marietta tells you been trying to fuck her in the toilet for the last ten

minutes." After Sailor responds, "Oh Man!" Lemon continues: "You crazy fucking bad boy. Trying to fuck your girl's mama. . . ." That is to say, in the first forty-two words of dialogue—two of which are Sailor's remark "Oh Man"—the worst obscenity known to most viewers is used three times.

Even though several stylistic clues might already have alerted viewers to the fact that Lynch does not intend this scene to be conventionally realistic, this language cannot fail to shock. Because of our usual expectations about the semantic decorum of film, we may identify still another level of dialogism at work here, that is, between what we consider conventionally appropriate and what Lynch is giving us right this minute. Bakhtin maintains that any utterance is "understood against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view, and value judgments." Of significance in regard to Lynch's obscenity, Bakhtin adds that "this contradictory environment of alien words is present to the speaker not in the object, but rather in the consciousness of the listener, as his apperceptive background, pregnant with responses and objections" (281). The filmic speaker Lynch, in other words, must be aware that this language will throw viewers into a state of disorientation that will block their familiar slide into a willing suspension of disbelief. Another mode of audience response is demanded by what Lynch is doing with words here.

Bakhtin's ideas about language might easily be expanded to account for other semantic elements of filmic discourse also. We could choose almost at random from Lynch's film, but one episode seems to me especially revealing. In this scene, Lula's mother, Marietta, and her lover, Johnny Farragut, sit romantically in their favorite French restaurant in New Orleans. Johnny, played by Harry Dean Stanton, moons over Marietta, played by Diane Ladd. Marietta, who has been pitting Johnny romantically against the gangster Marcello Santos, seems to be succumbing to Johnny's more legitimate passion. She tells him that as soon as they catch up with Lula and Sailor, she and Johnny can plan their own future together. The clearly smitten Johnny sincerely asks, "Do you mean it?" and Marietta replies, "You bet your sweet ass I do!" Johnny naively answers: "Gosh!" The scene plays as if Andy Hardy were courting Mae West.

This scene—in fact, most scenes involving only Ladd and Stanton—reveals how easily Bakhtin's ideas might be extended to cinematic language. Throughout the film Stanton acts in the style viewers might expect from his earlier performances in films as varied as *Paris*, *Texas*, *Christine*, and *Pretty in Pink*. On the other hand, Ladd acts throughout in a style mixing overlush film melodrama and TV soap opera. The unresolved dialogism of these two styles is further enhanced by the costuming and makeup of the two actors. Stanton is costumed and made up as if he were a character in a *film noir* nightmare; Ladd's outrageous blonde wig, garish make-up, and shoulder pads make her look like a demented drag queen. Especially as the film cuts between full-screen shots of Ladd and Stanton in the restaurant scene, they almost seem to be acting in different films.

An ingenious critic might see in the splicing of these shots some sort of post-modern pastiche. However ingenious, a critic could neither harmonize the performances monologically nor explain away the conflict as inadvertence on Lynch's part. In Bakhtin's terms, Lynch's deliberate juxtaposing of these two cinematic strains can be seen not as self-contradiction but as "double-voiced discourse." As Bakhtin explains, "[A]ll the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated, they—as it were—know about each other (just as two exchanges in a dialogue know of each other) and are structured in this mutual knowledge of each other; it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other" (324). If we add the clarification that this conversation takes place primarily in the consciousness of the viewer, we can better understand Lynch's technique.

Other instances of double-voiced dialogism grow out of what Bakhtin would call the chronotope of the film, that is—in the worlds of Bakhtin's English translators and editors—"the ratio and nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented" (425). Spatially, it is significant that the original site of action in the film, Cape Fear, is designated as existing "Somewhere near the border between North Carolina and South Carolina." The liminality of this location surely signifies that it is purely imaginary, as remote from the space inhabited by

viewers as Oz—or as Big Tuna, Texas, in which much of the film's later action occurs. Between Cape Fear and Big Tuna, however, Sailor and Lula travel through realistically represented space, especially in and around New Orleans. On the basis of these dialogic conflicts, viewers can only wonder where *Wild at Heart* is taking place.

Temporal signification is equally dialogic. In the opening scenes, the dance band at the Cape Fear Hotel is playing "In the Mood," apparently a sign that the film is set in the 1940s. Throughout the rest of the film, Elvis Presley, who died in 1977, is an assumed part of everyone's past experience, apparently a sign that the present time of the film is the 1980s. This confusion is exacerbated because the motels in which Sailor and Lula stay on the road have radios but not TV sets, even though Johnny Farragut watches a TV documentary about natural predators in his hotel room in New Orleans. If we ask, when is the film taking place? Lynch's probable answer would be that it is happening "once upon a time," rather than in the spatio-temporal categories of real-life experience.

Another of Bakhtin's views on verbal utterance may easily be extended to account for Lynch's technique in this film. Bakhtin argues that, because all speakers and hearers are essentially immersed in the languages of their own society, every utterance "cannot fail to be oriented toward the 'already uttered,' the 'already known,' the 'common opinion' and so forth" (279). In *Wild at Heart*, we may see that this property of language holds true for other semantic elements, such as styles of acting. We have already noted how Nicholas Cage's rendering of Sailor echoes Elvis Presley, as—for example—Christian Slater's acting in *Heathers* echoed Jack Nicholson, and Marlon Brando's performance in *The Freshman* echoed his own acting in *The Godfather*. This semantic extension of the "already uttered" may be applied also to other elements of Lynch's techniques.

Sailor's term in the Pee Dee Correctional Institution, for example, is signified by a full-screen establishing card that says "22 months, 18 days, later"; his second imprisonment is signalled in the same way: "5 years, 10 months, 21 days later." This highly conventional device is inseparable from the many occasions on which it has been "already uttered" in earlier films. In a sense, the echoes in both scenes are thus parodic of outmoded film conventions and so are mildly comic. In both cases, however, this joke has been preceded by a scene of extreme violence. Before the first card, Sailor has beaten Bob Ray Lemon to a bloody death. Shortly before the second card appears, Bobby Peru has shot his own head off with a shotgun. These conflicting styles of representation cannot be easily harmonized, even by postulating some form of ironic juxtapositioning. In this sense, these scenes resist absorption into any sort of filmic monologism by stressing a misappropriation of what has been "already uttered." In the second case, furthermore, Bobby is shot six times in slow motion just before his decapitation, providing viewers still another instance of the "already uttered," whether they connect the incident specifically to *Bonnie and Clyde* or more generally to violent films like Sam Peckinpah's.

Although instances of the "already uttered" appear throughout Lynch's film, one more must suffice to suggest the many semiotic directions in which Bakhtin's ideas may be extended. When Sailor returns from his second term in prison, he and Lula reenact a scene familiar to most film-goers. Especially when Lynch films the two lovers in full-screen shots recognizing each other at the train station, he conjures up "already uttered" shots from film musicals. This style controls the film through the next several shots until Sailor walks away, leaving Lula and their son, Pace, in the middle of the street, just as he does in the last paragraph of Gifford's novel. As the screen fills first with Lula's agonized eyes and then with Sailor's diminishing back, the echoes are all familiar. Surely we have seen Elvis do this in an atmosphere as hermetically unrealistic as the one enclosing Sailor and Lula.

All at once, the tone changes. The street Sailor is walking down suddenly takes on an air of realistic representation. The music on the soundtrack changes. A Chicano gang appears; they are not musical-comedy Jets or Sharks, but realistic street gangsters who beat up Sailor and break his nose. Echoes of earlier films are powerful here, but—as in the earlier contrast of acting styles between Ladd and Stanton—so is the rhetorical conflict between film styles.

Once again, a critic overly eager to thematize the film might try to argue that the realistic

gang is intended to criticize the unreality of film comedy. Lynch refuses to authorize this sort of aesthetic monologism and offers instead another "already filmed" sign. The good witch from *The Wizard of Oz* soon convinces Sailor of his need for Lula by saying, "If you're truly *Wild at Heart*, you'll fight for your dreams." Re-entering the world of musical comedy, Sailor returns to his wife and son so that the film, unlike Gifford's novel, can end happily. Standing with Lula on the hood of a Thunderbird convertible, caught in a musical-comedy traffic jam, Sailor begins to sing another Elvis song, "Love Me Tender," despite his badly swollen nose.

This scene concludes the plot in a sense. We know, at least in terms of the film's premises, what will happen to the two principal characters. However, the ending is even more interesting from a dialogical viewpoint, since Lynch films the end of the song in a style to suggest the cramping of focus required when wide-screen films of the sixties were squeezed onto screens too small to contain them. The distortion of Sailor and Lula in these closing shots is perhaps the clearest evidence of how Lynch uses the "already filmed" to insist that film should be apprehended not as a completed and organic representation of life, but dynamically, as Bakhtinian discourse. In the process, Sailor can enter into dialogue with Elvis, the movie musical can engage in dialogue with realistic film style, Lynch can dialogue with Gifford, and viewers with Lynch.

The result is an extremely complex dialogue, composed of a great variety of cinematic voices. Bakhtin has observed:

Thus at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. These "languages" of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying "languages." (291)

In his own work, Bakhtin demonstrates the validity of this principle through illustrations drawn from the writing of canonical European authors such as Francois Rabelais and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Barry Gifford's novel suggests the compatibility of Bakhtin's theories with the contemporary American novel. An examination of David Lynch's *Wild at Heart* in the light of Bakhtin's ideas opens up truly exciting possibilities for future Bakhtinian film studies.

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