

Blue Velvet - The Light and Dark of the American Dream

Blue Velvet is a dark tale looking into sexual violence, voyeurism and the ideal self. The themes explored in this film all have a centre point though, looking at Western ideals and the American Dream. The American Dream is the ideological belief that the USA has a set of ideals, which allows any and all to prosper and become successful. In essence, if you come to the USA then you can gain, no matter who you are, the pastoral-Esque suburban home with a traditional family. This idea has been contested, however, *Blue Velvet* tackles these points using both light and dark motifs.

Jeffery represents the audience, the average American. There is nothing that remarkable about him - which is intentional. He acts as both voyeur and innocent bystander, informative and ignorant. He is both a conformist to the American Dream - and other traditional values - and also uses it for his own gain. He both wants to have an innocent girlfriend and to be sexually violent with a "mistress". Furthermore, he gives in to his voyeuristic urges and spies on Dorothy from a closet, representing the underlying flaws within the American ideal - that no one wants to act upon anything but rather watch. Jeffery begins as passive, not active. Yet when he does become active we see that he is just like Frank - who is painted as villainous. Still, by the end of the film, he is back in the suburban pastoral, with a nice house, a nice family and a nice young girlfriend. No one knows about his dark violent side, where he enjoys hitting women during sex or his voyeuristic actions. Jeffery represents a more extreme version of the suburban role. He sees something horrible and does nothing about it, then partakes in it, then goes back to pretending like it doesn't exist. Whilst, most don't take an active role in it, a passive role can be just as damaging. Jeffery is the eyes from which the audience views the film, therefore making the audience complicit with the actions taken.

The light side of the American Ideal is represented by Sandy. She is the girl next door, blonde and angelic looking. She is barely out of high school and ignorant in many ways. Jeffery dates her and even confesses his love for her, whilst also being in a sadistic sexual relationship with Dorothy. Sandy, a victim of the system, is upset by these events as her whole life she has been told she would find "the one" and settle down. Clearly, she thought she had found that but then she finds out he is not what he seems. However, she quickly goes back to being ignorant and stays with Jeffery in order to keep up this idealistic fantasy. This shows how easily people will ignore and be willfully ignorant of the truth in order to have what is seemingly a "perfect life". Sandy describes a dream she has, which encapsulates what she represents, in it she is in darkness but then robins come and flood the world with light, which then she describes as love. It seems out of pocket in the film yet shows how she sees the world, as darkness and light. Again, this shows her ignorance, rarely anything is black and white, and the things that are generally have nothing to do with love. But this cannot be blamed on her, again,

she is a victim of the ideal, forcing herself to be with someone to achieve it. Yet, she does represent the lighter side of this, yes, she is a victim, however, seems relatively happy, and out of danger. Furthermore, fitting this ideal gives her more social mobility and freedom, in comparison to Dorothy.

Dorothy represents the dark side of the American Ideal. The outlier in the system. She has to be sexually assaulted due to a Frank taking her husband and son. She is left unprotected and is even used by Jeffrey. You could say that she wants to have sex with Jeffrey, however, she is clearly threatened by him, and even so, he does engage in a sadomasochistic relationship with her. Regardless of if she wanted it or not, she has the least power among them. Furthermore, she is kept secret, Jeffrey clearly knows she is not the ideal woman to settle with but works as a quick release for him. This is the dark underbelly of the American Dream, the side which is not part of the outward appearance but integral to the ideal. To appear perfect, you must hide everything imperfect.

The narrative also shows this ideal, in which you hide everything imperfect. Initially, the narrative begins as a mystery, whose ear is that and why was it cut off? Jeffrey acts as a detective until he becomes infatuated with what he finds. He finds out whose ear it is and why it was cut off but instead of reporting it chooses to enter a sadomasochistic relationship with Dorothy, whilst continuing to see Sandy. Even towards the end, when all is revealed, Jeffrey still wins. He gets Sandy, the girl next door, and Dorothy is out of his life, so he can keep his sadomasochism a secret. He and Sandy both act ignorant of the whole situation, forgetting the fact that Jeffrey committed the same acts as Frank, maybe not to the same extent but still abused and used Dorothy for unconventional sex.

Overall, *Blue Velvet* is showing the ignorance that comes with the American Dream. Jeffrey - as the eyes we see the story from - is a voyeuristic hypocrite and ultimately shows how the American dream is corrupt, as it favours the more powerful people. Sandy and Dorothy acting as binary oppositions show how people can gain or lose from the American system. However, as long as, they act ignorant of this fact, they will get their happily ever after.