

David Lynch and the Dulcineated World

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ONE OF THE MORE RECENT trends in Cervantes scholarship has been the exploration of the relationship between Cervantes's works, particularly *Don Quixote*, and those of contemporary culture. These explorations often follow a number of interrelated paths. The most common of these approaches are those that apply contemporary literary and cultural theory to Cervantes's works.¹ Another common approach explores the structural impact of Cervantine narrativity (and meta-narrativity) on later works.² Still others trace the conceptual intertextualities that exist between Cervantes and various later writers.³ Finally, a more expansive approach explores those instances where contemporary culture—whether deliberately or not, whether self-consciously or not—rediscovers, reexamines, and/or reworks ideas and issues explored by Cervantes and his own contemporaries more than 400 years ago.⁴ David Lynch's 2001 film *Mulholland Drive* is a cinematic narrative that lends itself extremely well to this last type of Cervantine analysis (and not just because this film—like *Don Quixote*, which is routinely said to be a literary work about literature—has been called a film about cinema [Lopate 47; Restuccia 71; and Shostak 6]).

Born in Missoula, Montana, David Lynch is a member of a relatively small group of cutting-edge *auteur* filmmakers that includes Pedro Almodóvar, Wes Anderson, Tim Burton, the Coen Brothers, David

1 See John Beusterien; Anne J. Cruz and Carroll B. Johnson; and Álvaro Ramírez.

2 See Robert Stam; Barbara Simerka and Christopher B. Weimer; and Ulla Musarra-Schroeder.

3 See Theo D'haen; Will McMorran; María Stoopan; and Kristine Vanden Bergh.

4 See Bruce R. Burningham, *Tilting Cervantes*; and William Childers (particularly Childers's chapters on "Remembering the Future: Cervantes and the New Moroccan Immigration to Spain" and "Chicanoizing Don Quixote.")

Fincher, Terry Gilliam, and Quentin Tarantino (among others). His first film, *Eraserhead* (1977), launched his meteoric career and has become something of a cult classic. His 1986 film *Blue Velvet* established what is the now widely recognized “Lynchian” theme of exposing the unsettling subterranean unease that exists just below the banal surface of contemporary suburban US culture, a theme he further explored in his 1990-1991 television series *Twin Peaks*. And while the commercial success of his Academy Award winning film *The Elephant Man* (1980) might suggest otherwise, Lynch is best known for making difficult and highly surrealistic films like *Mulholland Drive*.

For readers unfamiliar with *Mulholland Drive*, a brief description of Lynch’s highly complex cinematic narrative is in order. One possible interpretation (among several proffered by critics) posits this film as the story of Diane Selwyn (Naomi Watts) who arrives in Hollywood with the hopes of becoming a movie star, but who ultimately becomes disillusioned by her lack of success and thus commits suicide. Lynch structures this narrative in two parts. The first (and by far the longest) part—which most critics read as a dream sequence—narrates Diane’s Hollywood fantasy in the person of “Betty Elms.” The film opens with a kind of abstract and surrealistic montage of jitterbug dancing in which images of a bright and smiling Betty are juxtaposed against a series of shifting images of the real (and occasionally silhouetted) dancers. Later, we see Betty arrive at Los Angeles International Airport—winner precisely of a jitterbug contest held in her hometown of Deep River, Ontario, Canada—in the company of an unrealistically cheerful and “grandparently” older couple who affectionately welcome Betty to Los Angeles and then wish her the best of luck as she sets out on her grand adventure. Betty then takes a taxi to an elegant Hollywood courtyard apartment (which her aunt, who is also an actress, has supposedly let her use while she is out of town). Upon arrival at this apartment, Betty is instantly befriended by the quirky manager of the building (Ann Miller), who provides as warm a welcome to Hollywood as anyone could hope to receive. Shortly thereafter, Betty is surprised to discover that a troubled amnesiac who calls herself “Rita” is unexpectedly showering in her aunt’s apartment. Rita (Laura Elena Harring) has stumbled into the apartment, bleeding from a severe head wound, after

surviving a head-on collision in the back of a limousine not far away on Mulholland Drive.⁵ Betty and Rita embark on a quest to discover Rita's true identity, crossing paths along the way with a dishwater blond waitress named "Diane Selwyn" and a platinum blonde actress named "Camilla Rhodes." Betty and Rita eventually fall in love with each other, and part one culminates with a love scene between the two women. Throughout the course of part one, however, this main "suspense" plot is counterbalanced by a subplot within which Betty achieves an implausibly immediate success in Hollywood. Within the space of just a few days of her arrival in LA she "wows" the most important casting agent in town; leaves a roomful of studio executives, producers, directors, and actors speechless after a tour de force audition; and looks very much like she might be the next Hollywood "it girl" by the end of the week.

The second (and much shorter) part of the film—which most critics read as a representation of reality (however abstract)—suggests that "Betty" is really Diane (still played by Naomi Watts); that "Rita" is really Camilla (still played by Laura Elena Harring); and that Diane's life has spiraled so far out of control that she goes mad and shoots herself; this, after she has hired a hit man to kill Camilla because she thinks (or at least feels) that Camilla has jilted her. In an early scene within part two, a drugged-out, haggard Diane hires this hit man, who then tells her that once the fatal deed has been accomplished, he will leave a blue house key in her apartment as evidence of the job's completion. Thus, part two culminates with Diane's discovery of this guilty blue key on her coffee table; upon which she starts to hallucinate a Lilliputian version of the "grandparently" couple who initially welcomed Betty to LA at the very beginning of the film. These miniature figures (who suddenly transform into their life-size selves after having crawled underneath the door to enter the room) chase Diane around the apartment, laughing hysterically;

5 For readers unacquainted with the social geographies of Los Angeles, Mulholland Drive is the famous road that winds East to West along the crest of the Santa Monica Mountains. It serves as the line of demarcation separating the prestigious neighborhoods of the northern Los Angeles Basin from the traditionally working class neighborhoods of the San Fernando Valley (although in recent years even these traditionally working class neighborhoods have become more and more gentrified). As such, Mulholland Drive connects Malibu, the Pacific Palisades, Brentwood, Bel Air, Beverly Hills, and the Hollywood Hills to each other.

whereupon Diane runs screaming into her bedroom, pulls a pistol from the nightstand, and shoots herself in the mouth.⁶

What connects the two parts of this bifurcated narrative to each other is a highly surrealistic scene (typical of Lynch's aesthetic) in which the Betty and Rita characters of part one watch a nightclub performance at a venue called Club Silencio. After this nightclub scene, the two return to the courtyard apartment, and using a mysterious blue key, Rita unlocks an enigmatic blue box that Betty had suddenly discovered in her purse while at the club; upon which the entire first part of the film seems to collapse into the box itself. Part one abruptly ends with a point-of-view shot of the camera entering into the darkness of the box; part two begins immediately thereafter with an exterior shot of the box itself dropping onto the floor of the apartment; after which it then disappears entirely, as the narrative essentially "resets" itself for the second part of the film.

Although there is certainly a great deal of critical overlap among scholars who have analyzed *Mulholland Drive*, these scholars tend to divide themselves into three groups. Given *Mulholland Drive's* intricate and deliberately obscure narrative structure, the first group tends to focus primarily on questions of diegesis in order to tease out of the film some kind of comprehensible interpretation (or at least provide an argument for why such a totalizing comprehensibility is either unwelcome or impossible).⁷ Indeed, while Debra Shostak calls part one of *Mulholland Drive* a "Nancy Drew fantasy" (12), and while David Roche notes that films like Lynch's *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* "are mysteries, not because of their genre, but as *films*, and are held together by the spectator-detective's desire to make sense of them" (43; original emphasis), a number of diegetic critics argue that the film's indecipherability is exactly

6 This brief and incomplete synopsis of *Mulholland Drive* does not include any mention of various interrelated and interspersed subplots that may or may not have a direct bearing on the main plotline. One such subplot involves a director (Justin Theroux) whose Hollywood lifestyle is ominously and inexplicably turned upside down when he refuses to hire "Camilla Rhodes" for the lead in the film he is currently directing. This subplot is only resolved when the director agrees to meet with a "Cowboy" (Lafayette Montgomery) in a corral at a ranch in Beechwood Canyon high above Los Angeles, where this Cowboy instructs the director on exactly what to say the next time he is offered the opportunity to cast Camilla Rhodes.

7 See Maximilian Le Cain; Kirsten Ostherr and Arash Abizadeh; David Roche; Anna Katharina Schaffner; and Robert Sinnerbrink.

the point: “We are [...] not meant to decode the film. If the viewer looks closely or a second time, the film will not whisper its revelations. This is not a puzzle in which all the varied pieces will eventually fall into place” (Coffeen). The second group, interested in the prominence of dreams and dream sequences in *Mulholland Drive*, tends to focus on questions related to psychoanalysis (whether Freudian, Jungian, Lacanian, or Žižekian).⁸ For these critics, *Mulholland Drive* alternatively functions as either “a master class in Freudian dream theory” (Lentzner and Ross 120) or “is structured around the incessant dissatisfaction of desire” (McGowan 195). The third group, which is closely related to the second in terms of its preference for Lacanian theory, focuses on female sexuality and lesbian desire, with some attention being given to the construction of a male gaze within the film itself. For this group, Betty and Rita’s attraction, desire, and eventual coupling provide the nucleus around which the entire film revolves. As Heather Love argues, “*Mulholland Drive* takes up several of the most powerful and persistent images of the lesbian” (121) in order to offer up what Kelly McDowell calls “a space for female subjectivity within the terms of the oedipus complex” (1038).

Cervantes scholars, however, will likely see a somewhat different set of issues at play in *Mulholland Drive*. At the heart of Lynch’s juxtaposition of fantasy and reality is the baroque and subsequently postmodern preoccupation with being and seeming; a preoccupation famously explored, of course, in *Don Quixote*. Now, in comparing *Mulholland Drive* to *Don Quixote*, we might be tempted to read the Diane/Betty character as a kind of Alonso Quijano/Don Quixote figure in which Diane imagines herself to be Betty after perhaps watching too many versions of *A Star is Born*. Such a reading, however, breaks down when we consider that—as far as we can tell from Lynch’s film—Diane does not “perform” the Betty persona (as does Alonso Quijano with regard to “Don Quixote”). Instead, Diane moves to Hollywood, as so many thousands of people have done before her, in the hopes of *becoming* Betty. But this does not mean that she walks around Los Angeles *as* Betty. In this regard, “Betty” represents for Diane’s psyche her *ideal* identity. In other words,

8 See N. Katherine Hayles and Nicholas Gessler; Jay R. Lentzner and Donald R. Ross; Philip Lopate; Todd McGowan; Richard K. Sherwin; Amy Taubin; and Calvin Thomas.

“Betty” is actually better read as a “Dulcinea” of Diane’s own making rather than as a Don Quixote: Betty is Diane’s impossible dream.

In saying this, however, I do not mean to suggest that Diane creates Betty out of whole cloth. Instead, like Dulcinea herself, Betty is the product of a particular discourse already available to Diane thanks in large measure to more than a century of Hollywood mythmaking, both on screen and off. Betty is really the product—and, indeed, a function—of the various manifestations of *Sunset Boulevard* (from which Lynch ultimately borrows his own title) that have been endlessly remade since the invention of the movie industry. (And this is not to mention the discourse of the Hollywood gossip press that permeates so much of contemporary culture, from the E! Network to *TMZ*.) Indeed, Betty is such a powerful and absolute Dulcinea that she needs no Don Quixote to call her into existence; she is a Dulcinea completely unto herself. (Of course, Don Quixote is not entirely absent from the film; he is the inscribed “male gaze” analyzed by critics like Anna Katharina Schaffner [270-71]). Within Lynch’s film, Betty is the embodiment of what Arthur Efron might call Hollywood’s own “Dulcineated World” (1).

I borrow this term, of course, from Efron’s book *Don Quixote and the Dulcineated World* in which he succinctly defines “Dulcineism” (the noun form of his coined adjective) as “*the belief that human life is satisfactorily conducted only if it is lived out in close accord with prescribed ideals of the received culture*” (11; original emphasis). It is Efron’s notion of an “acculturated” Dulcineism that interests me most, particularly in so far as this overlaps with Antonio Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony” (271), because it is this definition of Dulcineism as the social operation of a culturally received—and politically caustic—idealism that allows Efron (writing at the height of the Vietnam War) to suggest that *Don Quixote* is more than just a protest against the ideologies of Counter-Reformation Spain. The novel’s protest, he says, “is indeed tremendous, both in spread and in depth. It can only be called radical. The context of what it is against, moreover, is much wider in scope than what can be conveyed by designating a single nation at a single period in history. In important ways, it is against our own epoch” (v). In short, it is this expansive notion of Dulcineism that helps illuminate much of Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive*.

Indeed, my own use of Efron's term to describe a postmodern culture in which the ideals of medieval chivalry—while still alive and well, as Leo Braudy clearly demonstrates—have largely given way to the ideals of Hollywood's "dream factory" depends less on the operation of this Dulcineism in blockbuster movies like *Superman*, *Spiderman*, and *Batman* (our contemporary analogues to *Amadis de Gaula* and *El libro del caballero Zifar*) and more on its presence in reality television shows like *The Girls Next Door* and *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* (the current cultural *loci* of our feminine "ideal"). It is this postmodern Dulcineism that inspires thousands of young women and young men every day to pay obscene sums of money to a small army of plastic surgeons and then to descend upon Southern California in the hopes of becoming Angelina Jolie or Tom Cruise. Far more often than not, however, their story turns out not to be *A Star is Born*, but rather *The Black Dahlia* or *Star 80* or *Mulholland Drive*.

Yet, if we are going to read Lynch's Betty as Diane's own self-conceived Dulcinea, we must admit that in Lynch's postmodern version of this Cervantine trope his Dulcinea is a highly fragmented object of desire. Throughout the first part of *Mulholland Drive*, Betty crosses paths with a number of uncannily similar blondes. These blondes include the waitress Diane Selwyn, the actress Camilla Rhodes, and even Rita herself once she cuts her brown hair and dons a platinum blonde wig in order to avoid recognition by the LAPD detectives who are searching for her as part of their investigation of the limousine accident. In this regard, the surrealistic logic of Lynch's film suggests that these various blondes are but different facets of Diane Selwyn's Dulcineated psyche. Indeed, when the film's narrative resets itself for the second part, one of the major elements of this resetting is the "musical chairs-like" quality of the shift in blond personas: Betty becomes Diane, Rita becomes Camilla, and Camilla becomes just another unidentified blonde Hollywood wannabe.⁹ In short, Betty consists of the *shards* of desire itself; she is the yearning that we see in so many of Lynch's close ups. As Todd McGowan rightly

9 Compare this shift in identities to the ongoing slippage of identity that occurs over the course of *Don Quixote* (i.e., Quijada, Quesada, Quejana, and Quijano; Juana Gutiérrez, Juana Panza, and Teresa Panza; etc).

notes in his Lacanian reading of *Mulholland Drive*: “Diane feels desire’s perpetual lack: she longs for Camilla Rhodes but cannot have her; she wants a career as an actress but struggles with bit parts; and she sees the opulent lifestyle of Hollywood’s elites but lives in relative squalor” (203).

Ironically, however, and despite what I have just said about Diane not being a Don Quixote figure, there is a kind of “Quixote” aspect to the radical fungibility of identity in Lynch’s film. When Rita’s accident at the beginning of part one leaves her with severe amnesia, one of her most crucial lines is “I don’t know who I am.” Compare—or contrast—this to Don Quixote’s own “Yo sé quién soy” (1.5:106). Ultimately, like Cervantes’s novel itself, Lynch’s film centers on questions of identity. Thus, throughout the first part of the film, Rita’s existential dilemma is patched over by her adoption of the name Rita (a name she has purloined from an old Rita Hayworth movie poster that hangs on the wall of the Hollywood apartment). But, of course, Rita Hayworth is a kind of Hollywood Don Quixote in her own right. She is the invented—and, more importantly, *performed*—persona of one Margarita Carmen Cansino who, like Betty, was “discovered” after her arrival in Hollywood, and who went on to live a charmed movie star life. Likewise, “Marilyn Monroe,” “John Wayne,” and “Cary Grant” are all Don Quixote personas performed by Norma Jean Baker, Marion Robert Morrison, and Archibald Leach, respectively, once they too have been absorbed into Hollywood’s impossible dream factory. Thus, when Rita becomes Camilla in the resetting that occurs at the beginning of part two, we are left to wonder if “Camilla” is—finally—her “true” identity, or whether this too is just another temporary placeholder, just another free-floating Cervantine signifier.

But this brings us back to *Mulholland Drive*’s famous blue box, which Shostak calls “a portal into a realm of suppressed knowledge” (3). As I noted earlier, Betty and Rita discover this box at the very end of their visit to the Club Silencio. But while this blue box is—by itself—extremely important, it is only the final component of a larger, more complex segment of the film. Consider how this crucial Club Silencio/blue box segment plays itself out from start to finish. This segment begins immediately after Betty and Rita have made love. Its initial scene opens with an important shot of the faces of the two women lying in bed asleep. Rita’s

face is shown in profile in the foreground, while Betty's face is shown in the background facing the camera. The shot is set up so that the facial features of the two women line up to create a kind of cubist representation of a single face seen from two perspectives simultaneously, thus suggesting that if Betty and Rita are not somehow the same person, then they at least inhabit what N. Katherine Hayles and Nicholas Gessler call "the slipstream of mixed realities" (483). Suddenly, Rita starts to whisper the Spanish word "silencio" in her sleep. Following this, she then utters the Spanish phrases, "no hay banda" and "no hay orquesta." As she repeats these words and phrases over and over again, she slowly awakens to the almost disembodied sound of her own voice. When Betty also wakes up and asks what's wrong, Rita apprehensively begs Betty to go "somewhere" with her "right now."

Although it is two o'clock in the morning, the two women take a taxi from the Hollywood Hills to Downtown LA where they enter the Club Silencio nightclub. The interior space of the Club Silencio, which is bathed in a kind of otherworldly blue light that shimmers as if reflected off a pool of water, turns out to be a surprisingly elegant turn-of-the-century grand theater. Once inside, Betty and Rita find seats, while an emcee announces (explicitly and in multiple languages: Spanish, French, and English) that *there is no band*, that *it is all an illusion*, that *it is all recorded*, that *it is all a tape*. This announcer then introduces a trumpet player who walks on stage and appears to be playing the music we hear, but who then removes the trumpet from his mouth in order to demonstrate that this music does not emanate from his instrument. Following on the heels of this display, the emcee then points out (literally) various melodies that seem to emerge from nowhere. Following this, he himself disappears in a cloud of fog and blue light, thus demonstrating that he too is nothing more than an illusion.

At this point, the nightclub performance *seems* to shift gears—like the film itself—as a new announcer enters and introduces "Rebekah del Río, La Llorona de Los Angeles."¹⁰ He then exits the stage, at which point Rebekah del Río enters and, standing center stage in front of a single

10 While *Mulholland Drive* does not explicitly invoke Cervantes (as do other contemporary postmodern narratives), Lynch's inclusion of La Llorona appropriately foregrounds Hispanic

microphone, proceeds to sing an a cappella rendition (in Spanish) of Roy Orbison's song "Crying."¹¹ During the next three minutes of footage, while Rebekah del Río delivers one of the film's most powerful performances, Lynch offers the viewer a series of extreme close ups of the singer's face (on which a single teardrop has been painted) juxtaposed against a number of shots of Betty and Rita weeping uncontrollably. Toward the end of this show-stopping performance, however, Rebekah del Río suddenly collapses as if dead. Nevertheless, her voice and song still carry on even as her limp body is dragged from the stage. It is at this point, with the final strains of Rebekah del Río's performance still echoing in the theater, that Betty and Rita suddenly discover the blue box in Betty's purse.

Lynch immediately cuts to a shot of the two women reentering the apartment, whereupon they move quickly into the bedroom to explore this strange blue box. Suddenly, Betty moves out of frame as the camera pans away from Betty in order to follow Rita, and with this simple panning shot, Betty disappears from the film entirely, not to be seen again until the final minute of footage. Finding herself unexpectedly alone, Rita calls Betty's name a couple of times and then asks worriedly, "¿Dónde estás?" She then discovers a triangular blue key inside her own purse. She inserts this key into the blue box and opens it; at which point, as I have already said, the camera seems to be sucked into the box's dark interior. Lynch's very next shot is of the box itself dropping onto the floor of the apartment with a thud; at which point the owner of the apartment (who we were initially introduced to at the start of the film as Betty's absent aunt) walks into the room to investigate the source of the mysterious thud she seems to have heard from the other room. But, by then, even the blue box has disappeared (along with any other props connected to the Betty/Rita storyline). This woman then shrugs her shoulders and walks back into the other room, after which she is never seen again either.

Most critics read this Club Silencio/blue box segment as the place in the film where fantasy and reality collide; as the point at which, in the words of Hayles and Gessler, the "idealized double of Diane can

culture, as Domino Renee Perez points out, within a film set in Los Angeles and starring a Latina actor (Laura Elena Harring) who was actually born in Sinaloa, Mexico (161).

¹¹ Rebekah del Río is the real name of this singer.

no longer be sustained" (496). For most critics, this segment functions as the key to unlocking the Freudian and Lacanian psychology at play within the text. For these critics, the importance of the "no hay banda" leitmotif that Lynch takes such great pains to emphasize is its function as a commentary on the "artificiality" of the Betty narrative; an artificiality that then assumes that the Diane narrative that follows represents a real-world scenario, one that ends with Diane's suicide, with her ultimate "silencio." While I do not necessarily dispute such interpretations (how can one dispute any reading of a film so ambiguous, so surreal, and so complex?), I do think a parallel reading can be teased out of this transition from part one to part two, a reading that centers on Rebekah del Río's stellar performance.

What exactly is the function of this performance? Steven Dillon calls the entire Club Silencio segment "an idealized performance of cinephilia" (93), while Robert Miklitsch argues that it is Rebekah del Río's song itself that brings the blue box into existence, that the performance actually causes the box to "materialize" (243). Most critics read her torch song as a commentary on Betty and Rita's (or alternatively, Diane and Camilla's) lesbian desire. Again, I do not necessarily dispute such interpretations, but I do think that there is something else going on here, something that relates specifically to the time Lynch dedicates to this song and to the extreme close-ups he offers us of the singer's face and mouth. The point of this performance, I would argue, is to lull the viewer into a false sense of interpretive security. As we become enthralled with the performance—as we hear the words of this song apparently coming out of the mouth of this particular singer (and therein lies the importance of the extreme close ups)—we forget what Lynch has just told us: that *there is no band*. Thus, when Rebekah de Río suddenly collapses and is carried offstage—even while her song and her voice persist—we are forced remember one more time that it is all an illusion; that the "owls are not what they seem" (to quote a similar leitmotif from Lynch's television series *Twin Peaks*).

This scene represents, I think, a kind of *ars poetica* of the entire film, similar to the kind of *ars poetica* Cervantes provides in part one, chapter 47 of *Don Quixote* in which the Canon describes the ideal chivalric novel in terms that can be read to describe Cervantes's novel itself (1.47: 567).

But in Lynch's case this *ars poetica* is specifically designed to "dis-illusion" us. Thus, the blue box need not be read (solely) as a symbol of Diane's shattered psyche; nor the blue key that unlocks this box (solely) as a symbol of Diane's sense of guilt for having hired a hit man to murder Camilla. The blue box can also be read as a symbol of *Mulholland Drive* itself. And the key to unlocking this box is precisely the leitmotif Lynch has created in this 15-minute Club Silencio segment (which is also why the color blue, I think, is so prominent in this scene): the entire film is *all* an illusion.

In many ways, the Club Silencio/blue box segment functions as a postmodern analogue to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's baroque contemplation on the "artifice" of her own portrait in her well-known sonnet "Este que ves, engaño colorido," a sonnet whose final line—"es cadáver, es polvo, es sombra, es nada" (134)—anticipates Lynch's repeated use of the word "silencio," even while it deliberately echoes the final line of Luis de Góngora's own poetic contemplation on death. But the "cadavers" at the heart of these texts are not Sor Juana's and Diane Selwyn's dead bodies;¹² rather, the cadavers—in both instances—are the texts themselves: the painted canvas and the nightclub performance (and beyond them, Sor Juana's sonnet and Lynch's film). More importantly, these texts are "cadavers" not because something that was at one time alive is now dead; they are cadavers because they were never "live" to begin with. They are always already "tape recordings;" they are always already Memorex (to quote from a now-outdated television ad for audio cassette tapes). Again, as Schaffner argues, "Ultimately [...], Lynch seems to state, nothing in film is real; no level can ever definitively assume authoritative status, for all is artifice and representation" (282).

Thus, if we take Lynch at his word when he insists that *there is no band* what emerges is a radically different perspective on the film. What this leitmotif tells us (in no uncertain terms) is that there is simply no connection—or at least *causality*—between the music we hear and the musicians we see. Any assumed causality between the performers and the performance is merely an illusion. It is a misreading. For, just as it is a mistake to assume that a change of emcee and performer on the

12 I say this despite Love's assertion that "[Diane's] rotting corpse is at the center of the film, the 'content,' if there is any, of the blue box" (129).

Club Silencio stage means that Rebekah del Río's performance is no longer just an illusion, so too is it a mistake to assume that the resetting of *Mulholland Drive* that occurs at the end of the Club Silencio/blue box segment means that part two of the film is somehow less "oneiric." Part two is just as much an "engaño colorido" as part one (more so, in many ways).

Most critics, I think, have generally overlooked this point for one significant reason. By assigning semantic value to Naomi Watt's function as an actor, critics insist on connecting the Betty of part one to the Diane of part two simply because Watts plays both characters. But if there is no band—the cinematic analogue of which is, "if there is no cast"—such an *apparent* "doubling" is as much an illusion as the false "doubling" between sound and image in Rebekah del Río's nightclub performance. The fact that Watts plays both Betty and Diane may be just as accidental as the fact that Dulcinea is "played" (unknowingly and/or unwillingly) by Aldonza Lorenzo in part one of Cervantes's novel and by the unnamed peasant girl on the road to El Toboso in part two. Indeed, as Don Quixote himself eventually admits in a very well-known passage of the novel, there is no material reality behind Dulcinea to begin with:

Así que, Sancho, por lo que yo quiero a Dulcinea del Toboso, tanto vale como la más alta princesa de la tierra. Sí, que no todos los poetas que alaban damas, debajo de un nombre que ellos a su albedrío les ponen, es verdad que las tienen. ¿Piensas tú que las Amariles, las Filis, las Silvias, las Dianas, las Galateas, las Alidas y otras tales de que los libros, los romances, las tiendas de los barberos, los teatros de las comedias, están llenos, fueron verdaderamente damas de carne y hueso, y de aquellos que las celebran y celebraron? No, por cierto, sino que las más se las fingen, por dar sujeto a sus versos, y porque los tengan por enamorados y por hombres que tienen valor para serlo. Y así, bástame a mí pensar y creer que la buena de Aldonza Lorenzo es hermosa y honesta[...]. Y para concluir con todo, yo imagino que todo lo que digo es así, sin que sobre ni falte nada, y píntola en mi imaginación como la deseo[.] (1.25: 313-14)

Álvaro Ramírez correctly reads this passage of *Don Quixote* as an example of a Baudrillardian simulacrum in which Dulcinea functions as an “unbound sign, a sign without a referent in the ‘real world’” (85). But this is why *Mulholland Drive* can be read as Lynch’s own articulation of Efron’s “Dulcineated World.” Neither Betty nor Diane actually exists. Both are nothing more (or less) than pure idealizations, each functioning as the antithesis of the other.

Of course, viewers of *Mulholland Drive* may find this very “literal” reading of Lynch’s film (i.e., that it is *all* an illusion from start to finish) to be somewhat untenable simply because Betty’s fairytale seems far too contrived, while Diane’s tragedy seems far too genuine; in which case, let me offer a slightly more ambiguous (and therefore more Cervantine) reading of the film. In her Freudian contextualization of *Mulholland Drive*, Amy Taubin argues that “there is no conclusive evidence that the dreamer [i.e., Diane] ever awakes” (54). I would argue—as I have essentially just done—that there is no conclusive evidence that the dreamer ever *exists*; at least not as an individual, at least not within the diegesis of the film itself. But just because Lynch has told us that there is no *band*, does not mean that there is no *music*; which is to say, even as Rebekah del Río’s limp body is being dragged from the stage, we still hear her torch song. The implications of this logic, I think, are clear: there is no dreamer; there is *only* the dream. Thus, I would ultimately argue that there is no *causality* between Betty and Diane (one is not the product of the other); there is only *contiguity*. Betty and Diane are two sides of the same “True Hollywood Story.”¹³ Betty exists as Diane’s wildest dreams; Diane exists as Betty’s worst nightmare. And if we must insist on assigning “agency” to these dreams (even an unconscious agency) then we would have to say that Betty and Diane dream each other in the kind of postmodern narrative circularity characteristic of Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, or M. C. Escher.¹⁴ Thus, I would argue that these two narratives essentially

13 *True Hollywood Story* is the name of a biographical documentary series that has been running on the E! Entertainment cable network since 1996.

14 Indeed, Coffeen offers an unwittingly Borgesian reading of *Mulholland Drive* when he argues that the film itself is the “agent” of these dreams: “This is film telling its own tale, in its own language.” Likewise, he further argues that “cinema” itself is the film’s intended audience: “Cinema is watching”

mirror each other, with the Club Silencio/blue box segment operating as the reflective space that exists in between.

But this brings me to my final point. If Betty can be said to be Diane's idealized Dulcinea, then Diane herself—the strung-out failed actress, part-time prostitute, part-time waitress, and guilt-ridden murderer—would have to be seen as this Dulcinea “enchanted.” Again, I do not mean to suggest by this that she is some version of Aldonza Lorenzo or of Sancho's anonymous peasant girl, because to do so would be to suggest that there is a “dreamer” (that there is an external, accessible reality) existing somewhere within Lynch's cinematic text. Instead, what I mean by this is that Diane is the Enchanted Dulcinea of the Cave of Montesinos. And there are any number of reasons to read the second part of *Mulholland Drive* (rather than the first part) as occurring *inside* the blue box. These reasons include the fact that the point-of-view shot Lynch offers us of his camera entering into the box can also be read not as the subsumption and enclosure of the Betty narrative (as I previously suggested), but rather as the viewer's entrance into the Diane narrative (comparable to Alice's entrance into Wonderland through the looking glass); as well as the fact that Diane's suicide (which concludes this second narrative) incorporates the same fog and blue light that Lynch initially used as the backdrop for the first emcee's “it-is-all-an-illusion” disappearance in the Club Silencio.

Several elements connect the Cave of Montesinos and the Club Silencio.¹⁵ First, both spaces are “set off” from those of the rest of the text. Second, as various critics have pointed out, both episodes are pivotal within the flow of their larger narratives.¹⁶ Following his drowsy descent into the Cave of Montesinos, Don Quixote's singular mission becomes (regardless of any other activities he might engage in along the way) the disenchantment of Dulcinea; following their own somnambulant visit

15 A great many scholars have commented on the Cave of Montesinos. I will not take the time to gloss their work here because such scholarship is very well known. Having said that, there are several critics—particularly psychoanalytic critics like Carroll Johnson and Diana de Armas Wilson—whose work illuminates this present discussion.

16 Gethin Hughes even uses the word “pivotal” in discussing the Cave of Montesinos (112), while both Jennifer Barker and Heather Love characterize Lynch's blue box as a “hinge” (Barker 241; Love 122).

to the Club Silencio, Betty and Rita metamorphose and/or disappear entirely. Third, both episodes are highly ambiguous. Cide Hamete goes out of his way at the start of the next chapter to declare this episode of *Don Quixote* to be “apochryphal,” and then even goes so far as to note that Don Quixote himself disavowed this episode on his deathbed; likewise, Lynch’s cinematic frame (through both the camera’s point of view and its final edited montage) ultimately refuses to supply the viewer with any perspective from which to definitively interpret these scenes. Fourth, both episodes involve uncontrollable weeping and the symbolic inclusion of water imagery. In *Don Quixote*, Montesinos notes that, after having taken compassion on Ruidera and her daughters and nieces when he heard them weeping, Merlin seems to have transformed them into the Lakes of Ruidera. This is followed by the arrival of Belerma and her weeping retinue. In *Mulholland Drive*, the blue light that infuses the interior of the Club Silencio shimmers as if it were reflected off a pool of water. This is followed by Rebekah del Río’s tearful rendition of “Crying,” which also causes both Betty and Rita to sob mournfully. Fifth, both episodes involve the doubling of their female characters. Belerma and Dulcinea both appear inside the Cave of Montesinos in their degraded states of enchantment. (Indeed, Don Quixote’s description of Belerma’s face uncannily mirrors Lynch’s shot of a haggard Diane with extremely dark circles under her eyes.)¹⁷ For their part, Betty and Rita—the latter of whom, as I mentioned, has donned a blonde wig—look something like twins as they watch the Club Silencio performance. And, finally, what is at stake in both episodes—at least according to psychoanalytic critics—is desire, impotence, repression, and psychosexual frustration.

Still, what interests me most about the Cave of Montesinos (at least in terms of how it sheds interpretive light on *Mulholland Drive*) is the way in which the characters inside the cave seem to exist simultaneously on two separate planes of reality (or, better yet, “irreality” [doCarmo 657]). In describing for Don Quixote how he (and everyone else) came to be inside the cave, Montesinos offers no explanation for how he went from cutting out Durandarte’s heart in Roncesvalles (where he presumably left

17 See Johnson regarding Belerma’s “sallow complexion” and her relationship to the Enchanted Dulcinea [160-65]).

Durandarte's corpse on the battlefield before setting off on his journey to deliver this heart to Belerma) to finding himself standing there alongside both Belerma and Durandarte's talking corpse inside the cave (a space he readily acknowledges as such). Thus, unless his presence in the cave is the product of some kind of amnesia-ridden, Orphic descent into the underworld—much like Rita's own arrival in Betty's apartment with no memory of how she got there—Montesinos must continue to exist somewhere outside the cave as well, still functioning within another, alternative narrative. For, when Don Quixote suddenly sees Dulcinea and her two ladies-in-waiting frolicking in the field and then asks Montesinos if he knows them, Montesinos replies that these women simply appeared there a few days earlier like so many other women from the past and present centuries (“que pocos días había que en aquellos prados habían parecido” (2.23: 220)).¹⁸ What this suggests, of course, is that everyone trapped inside the cave is simply a spectral projection of some enchanted person still living in the “real world.”¹⁹ Still, given that the country wench who Sancho first presents as Dulcinea on the road to El Toboso denies even knowing what Don Quixote is talking about when he bows down before her, whereas the enchanted Dulcinea of the Cave of Montesinos not only identifies herself as Dulcinea, but actually sends one of her ladies-in-waiting to make a request of Don Quixote in her name, we might ask ourselves which of these two Dulcineas has “amnesia,” or better yet, which

18 I am taken by the way in which the verb ‘parecer’ (rather than ‘aparecer’) subtly implies not just that the women physically appeared in the meadow, but also that their “appearance” might somehow be little more than a “seeming.” In this regard, John Beusterien astutely argues that “the simulation of reality in the Cave of Montesinos is not imitation but a semblance of a nonexistent reality” (430). Likewise, Mercedes Juliá notes that the whole episode demonstrates the very relativity of reality (276); while María Gracia Núñez characterizes the image within the cave as that of a totalizing cosmic consciousness. For his part, Bruce Tracy argues that “the implication is supposedly that reality itself—or the vision of it—is apocryphal, and that Don Quixote, while in a mental state which transcends reality, continues to contain the reality within the transcendency” (6).

19 Of course, these kinds of questions simply evaporate if one assumes (as do so many critics) that the events Don Quixote recounts are nothing more than the product of his unconscious imagination as he sleeps inside the cave. If we examine these events from his perspective at the moment when he actually recounts them as having “truly” happened, however, these questions become germane to an understanding of the relationship that exists between the alternative realities created by Don Quixote's own diegesis.

of these two Dulcineas is “real.” I would argue that, on a profound level, the Enchanted Dulcinea of the Cave of Montesinos is the “most real” of all the Dulcineas we encounter over the course of the novel. She is the only Dulcinea who is not simply a pure object (however virtual); she is the only Dulcinea who acknowledges herself as such; and in the end, she is precisely the Dulcinea whom Sansón Carrasco ultimately pronounces “desencantada” (2.74: 588).

But this brings us back to *Mulholland Drive*. In trying to separate dream from reality, most critics categorically declare Diane to be the real thing, with Betty existing as some kind of pathetically naïve fantasy. But since Lynch provides no definitive vantage point from which to choose one storyline over the other, we are left with characters who essentially function as mirror images of each other while living inside spectrally alternative realities. In this regard, Diane is simply “Betty Encantada” (or, if you prefer, “Ugly Betty”). She is a tragically compromised Dulcinea whose only hope for disenchantment (absent a movie director knight-errant who might come to her rescue) is suicide. For, just as Rebekah del Río’s song continues even after her apparently dead body has been removed from the stage, so too does the Betty storyline continue even after it is no longer the focus of Lynch’s film (and it is no mere coincidence that Betty disappears by simply stepping out of frame; which is to say, she is not gone, she is just off camera).²⁰ In other words, Betty’s idyllic storyline does not “conclude” (in an Aristotelian sense) just because the viewer passes from one reality into another via the blue box. Betty’s idyllic storyline merely becomes (in a Baudrillardian sense) a permanently “virtual” hyperreality, one that continues to coexist alongside that of Diane. Indeed, during a particularly important scene of part one, Betty and Rita actually discover Diane’s rotting corpse inside the same seedy bedroom where we later see her kill herself in part two. And it is worth remembering that part two of the film actually commences with Diane’s rotting corpse being “awakened” by the Cowboy, thus making her storyline an infinitely circular text. In this regard, then, Diane’s suicide is no more conclusive than Betty’s disappearance, since her storyline always

²⁰ And here I disagree with Barker who argues that “to be off screen is to cease to exist” (247).

begins and ends with her dead body lying on the bed. But if this is true, where does this ultimately leave her?

In an essay entitled “Suicide and the Ethics of Refusal,” I argue that Marcela’s abrupt departure from part one of *Don Quixote* amounts to a kind of “discursive suicide” through which she simply refuses to participate any further in the novel within which she unhappily finds herself (51). In this same essay, I also note that Florinda in Lope de Vega’s *El último godo* justifies her own suicide by claiming that one of the reasons she has decided to kill herself is because she cannot bear the thought of forever being remembered (in literary texts just like Lope’s *comedia*) as the cause of the loss of Visigothic Spain to the Moors (50). In both cases, these characters prefer a kind of deathly exit to an unhappy life embedded within their respective texts. My reading of Diane’s suicide in *Mulholland Drive* is of a similar vein, although, I readily acknowledge that Lynch’s narrative structure makes it virtually impossible for Diane to ever escape the film. Like Durandarte, Montesinos, and Belerma in *Don Quixote*, Diane is permanently stranded between life and death inside Lynch’s blue box.

That said, I certainly do not mean to suggest that she does not kill herself. Disenchanting Dulcinea requires sacrifice; which is precisely why Diane cannot survive. Recall that in *Don Quixote* this sacrifice was initially supposed to consist of the 3300 lashes that Sancho was assigned to self-inflict on his own bare buttocks, a painful sacrifice he ultimately fails to render. Recall, too, then, that what ultimately releases Dulcinea from her enchanted state is Don Quixote’s own death. On a strictly technical level, of course, what I mean by this is that, without Alonso Quijano’s imminent demise, Sansón Carrasco would never have announced her “disenchantment.” But on a symbolic level, it is Don Quixote’s death that actually releases Dulcinea from her torment, just as it is Don Quixote’s defeat of the wineskin in part one that saves Princess Micomicona from Pandafilando de la Fosca Vista (and beyond her, Dorotea from Don Fernando). Ultimately, then, Lynch’s Diane is haunted not by her supposed murder of Camilla (which may or may not actually have happened), but by Betty’s alternative narrative. For, what actually drives Diane to shoot herself in the mouth is not really the blue key she finds on the cof-

fee table, but the specter of the elderly couple who first welcomed Betty to Hollywood at the start of the film, and who literally chase Diane onto her deathbed. And in “disenchanted” herself (by attempting to end the nightmarish storyline in which she, like Florinda, also unhappily finds herself), Diane actually liberates Betty, whose own idealistic storyline is no longer tethered to Diane’s in the infinite interplay of reflections that exist inside the box that constitutes Lynch’s film. This is also why Lynch’s penultimate shot of the film consists of an ebullient image of Betty and Rita (in her blonde wig) superimposed on a shot of the Hollywood skyline, and why the final shot of *Mulholland Drive* is of the blue-haired woman in the Club Silencio softly repeating the word “silencio.” For, just as the final line of Sor Juana’s sonnet brings the poem itself to a close, while leaving timelessly intact the portrait it contemplates; so too does Lynch’s final line bring his film to a close, while leaving Betty cheerfully on her way to certain stardom inside her own Dulcineated “True Hollywood Story.”

In this last regard, however, Lynch’s postmodern film is perhaps a far less convincing indictment of contemporary culture than it may initially appear.²¹ If Efron is right when he argues that *Don Quixote* is a wholesale critique of Western culture’s Dulcineated idealism, *Mulholland Drive*’s final shots make Lynch’s film decidedly less so. In the end, what *Mulholland Drive* really calls into question is only the “failed” side of the American dream. In other words, while Lynch’s film can certainly be read as a cautionary tale about the risks involved in trying to chase down an elusive dream that always seems to be just out of reach, *Mulholland Drive* ultimately leaves this dream utterly intact. Thus, one could argue that *Mulholland Drive* is no more or less Dulcineated than any other Hollywood film. To be a truly radical critique of Western idealism, *Mulholland Drive* would have to have called into question Betty’s “success story” itself, rather than merely calling into question Diane’s failure to live up to the acculturated notions of “success” around which Betty’s storyline revolves.²² And this, in itself, would require a film that “disillu-

21 This is essentially Stephen doCarmo’s thesis.

22 In this regard, Fernando Colomo’s 1984 film *La línea del cielo*—in which the lead character, whose dream is to become a staff photographer for *Life* magazine, simply allows the long-

sions” Betty instead of Diane. It would require a film that truly “disenchants” Dulcinea in ways that Cervantes does not. It would require a film that lets us see that simply being Aldonza Lorenzo is more than sufficient.

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awaited phone call offering him the job to go unanswered as he heads out the door of his New York apartment in order to move back to Spain—is a much more radical critique of the American dream than *Mulholland Drive*.

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