

## “GO WITH ME SOMEWHERE”:

### DAVID LYNCH’S *MULHOLLAND DRIVE*

Copyright © 2010 by James Clark

Within a scenario crowned by countless dazzling moments, the performance of Roy Orbison’s “Crying” (“*Llorando*”), at *Club Silencio*, by Rebekah Del Rio, to an audience including the protagonist detectives, Betty and Rita, musters a level of detonation setting it apart and constituting the key to what could be an impenetrable evening out. An M.C. goes to bemusing lengths of histrionics insisting that at the *Hôtel de la Silence* there is no band and all the singing is taped. “Everything is illusion!” Then a plump, rather dowdy figure emerges from the curtains, her suddenly riveting face fills the screen and she lip-syncs a tidal wave of despair. The two investigators, who earlier that night had consummated their love for each other in a culmination brimming with beauty and forward momentum, begin to tremble and cry, tears streaming down their cheeks. For Rita it was tears alone; for Betty it was tears following from convulsive shaking. The performer collapses. The tape blazes on. She is carried from the stage, and Betty reaches into her glowing purse for a closed *blue box* (a Pandora’s Box), the blue key to which figures as ever more specifically crucial for their resolve to overcome the car-crash induced dilemma of Rita (and that of Betty, with no car-crash to blame), namely, “I don’t know who I am.”

Though a wide swathe of French New Wave cinema enacted again and again (none of the components of which more ardently, wittily, gracefully and pervasively than Jacques Demy)—as did Michelangelo Antonioni in *Blow-Up* (1966) and Wong Kar-Wai in *In the Mood for Love* (2000)—a secret tribute to the American film noir, *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) and its serious business with Pandora’s Box, no American filmmaker would see the point in sustaining such a puzzling congress until David Lynch, a born exponent of horror and noir, manufactured his astounding vehicle, *Mulholland Drive* (2001). Among myriad instances of sureness of touch for such an endeavor about Pandora’s Box, was his assimilation of Demy’s epigraph to his first feature, *Lola* (1961), namely, “Cry who can/Laugh who will” (“*Pleure qui peut/Rit qui veut*”), attaining to the stature of an axiom of dynamical integrity. To maintain sufficient buoyancy (and its glee) upon the strike (kiss) of eventuation, calls for courageous and loving maintenance of that deadly opening. To settle into personal leadenness is to become lost in a zone of self-dramatizing and self-tormenting despair, notwithstanding adept compensatory manoeuvres (like the sensual coherence bursting through the performance of lostness by Rebekah Del Rio). Therefore, the giving in to tears and its implication in resentment undermines all the promise of their concerted dedication to casting light on Rita’s history—her past, of course, but also on powers more immediately pertaining to the present and future. With the onset of the tempting show of decadence in the club, a precipitous shift occurs. They return to Betty’s aunt’s townhouse, Rita recovers the blue key to the blue box having strangely materialized in Betty’s purse in face of the plunge that was the delivery of “Crying,” confronts an abyss, and finds that Betty is no longer there. Where she has gone is into the matrix of “Diane,” Rita’s homicidally possessive, betrayed and resentfully blue (crying) former lover. Demy had no interest in his players’ actually fitting into the personae of A.I. Bezzerides’ noir about Pandora’s Box, choosing instead to flick out echoes of the high risk action in such a way as to diminish those players in their historically honorable positions. Lynch, on the other hand, was attentive to the twists of quantum energies deposited by Bezzerides in the configuration of the credits to *Kiss Me Deadly*, coming about from the top of the screen but reading *backwards* from bottom to top. On making a move, one has been already visited by an electrodynamic double, moving downward at speeds superior to those of the straightforward output. In this way one’s unfurling of intent includes an outset of challenge to proceed aright. This structure of action encourages Lynch to oversee shifts from one incarnation (Betty’s wholeheartedness) to another (Diane’s half-heartedness). The pre-credit vignette of swing dancers of the era of *Kiss Me Deadly*, i.e., 1955, shows some of the jivers occasionally losing themselves in delving into large silhouettes of dancers

(black holes). That motif constitutes the grounds for a panoply of startling and puzzling narrative twists. (A second vignette of heavy breathing under a bed sheet—redolent of Christina on the highway about to encounter Mike’s car—would be Betty, now Diane, having plunged from *Club Silencio* and the blue box suddenly palpable in her purse.)

Demy’s assimilation of the priority of “laugh” as against “cry” brought him to the gold mine that is Bezzetides’ (and nominal director of the project, the less than compelling Robert Aldridge’s) deadly entertainment. Its protagonist, a loose-cannon L.A. dick with a fondness for expensive designs (ranging from sports cars to chicks), for all his obvious deficiencies, puts out a passion and genius for a very strange order of wildness, a *drive* that Demy had already known and come to love in the Surrealist dramas of Jean Cocteau, particularly the 1946 film, *La Belle et la Bête* (*Beauty and the Beast*). Lynch’s noir about a deadly drive, suffused with an order of menace and succulence ringing down *Silencio*, gathers up the risk-taking precedent of Mike and his main chick, Velda, in the course of spotlighting risk-averse pretenders and their haplessness. That is, of course, a methodology he could and would have spotted in the less daunting but no less complex films of Demy. (One inspired factor of this hidden transaction is the name, “Rita,” plucked by the amnesia victim from a *Gilda* [Rita Hayworth] poster in the vicinity of the first brush with Betty, but really about “*Rit*” [“*qui veur*”]. Rita and Betty constitute together one of a dual instalment, in *Mulholland Drive*, of the ways of Mike *Hammer*, surely the strangest such candidacy in a long, subterranean mockery [prominently including the novels of sometime filmmaker, Paul Auster]). To get the ball rolling in this regard, let’s savor his magic in enlisting the very special musical comedy star, *Ann Miller*, no longer able to dance (now sweet old “Coco” to everyone)—in fact in her last appearance—in a weird and final partnership with Gene Kelly, as appearing with sputtering sheen in the role of *Andy Miller* in Demy’s *The Young Girls of Rochefort* (1967). That link signals Lynch’s huge investment here in that film. Betty has arrived from the boondocks of Deep River, Ontario, and like the deep-port *demoiselles* of Demy’s musical, she’s intent on becoming a (movie) star and putting behind her for good those dreary shallows. But there is yet another deluxe accessory to this wild ride, namely, *La Belle et la Bête*. Betty, like Cocteau’s *Belle*, (but also sliding into a species of *bête*) a sanguine, affectionate, spunky (bet-conversant) blonde, rural *naïf*, has made arrangements through a relative to come to live at a verdant and murky residence where she encounters the surprise of her little life, a bashed up Rita, cowering nude in the shower. She is dark, most unusually quiet and endowed with physical powers both hauntingly beautiful and transcendently terrifying. The actress, Laura Elena Harring, functions here for Lynch in a way very similar to the Demy standby, Catherine Deneuve. Both women emit a level of carnal dynamite—vastly sexual and vastly poised—whereby they rejig every frame they occupy. Thus they trip open the regular proceedings of the narrative—being there, but, most importantly, also somewhere else. In Lynch’s film the sensual density of Rita (having no past to play with, being singularly concentrated on the present and future)—who, among other things, bears a resemblance to the Ann Miller who steals the show, *On the Town* (1949), from the likes of Gene Kelly and Frank Sinatra—counterpoints the loquacious smarts of Betty to weave a theatrically incisive, ongoing display of the rich and deadly range of intent. A measure of the writer-director’s not leaving matters at the stage of blue-chip seductiveness is his junkyard dog motif of a gorilla-like, black befurred vagrant tediously but perhaps not maliciously harassing patrons of a bland cafe, called Winkie’s, perhaps in tribute to Jean Marais’ astigmatic *Bête*. One of those in disarray confides to a friend that he must do something “to get rid of this god-awful feeling.” That would recall the theme song of *Kiss Me Deadly*, “Rather Have the Blues” (than what I’ve got).

We should pick up that latter thread of perversity in coverage of the *Kiss Me Deadly* payload of *Mulholland Drive*, as accessorized by clunker phones. Intrinsic to Bezzetides’ vision was a sense of the blightedness of the full extent of the terrain through which Mike had to pass. The noir was not about an exceptional evil in his immediate adversaries in making contact with Pandora’s Box in the form of a case full of nuclear explosives, but was concerned with a presumptuous (intimidation-obsessed) malice across the whole public and private range (with glimmers of counterbalance here and there). Every member of the civil bureaucracy, especially the police force, was depicted as a slimy prick; humanitarian activists were seen as perverse poseurs; the art world was shown as merely shoring up effete escapists. The gang in the employ of Doctor Soberin, a homicidal ascetic, were brutes, no doubt, but springing up from a gene

pool leaving them more ridiculous than sickening. It is that historical bankruptcy which comprises the real dilemmatic bite of Pandora's Box and the true darkness of the noir adventure. A very similar survey of criminal and respectable initiatives lends to the investigative partnership of Betty and Rita its apocalyptic intensity. There are a couple of disquieting (moreso for being goofy) vignettes echoing the goings-on of Soberin's hit-men (supplemented by a coke-quivering hooker rendition of Mike's friend, Friday), but updated to cover the going rate of excuse-my-rock-and-roll-charm and social-worked self-esteem and entitlement. One such operative, casually joking about precipitating a deadly accident the night before, murders an acquaintance and others in the surround in order to procure a phone/address book—"The history of the world in phone numbers"—pertaining, we eventually realize, to Rita's whereabouts. In retrospect we learn that he is the lynchpin for Rita's mishap, she being contracted with payment in lots of cash and lots of coke, the latter contained in a chic lacquered *blue box*, the blue key to which the hog left behind, with the cash for the killers, in Rita's purse which she carried out of the driving-under-the-influence horror scene. There is also a couple of seemingly benign grandparents whom we first meet as Betty's flight acquaintances saying their goodbyes in the cab zone at LAX. They deliver with predictable cuteness their best wishes for her movie ambitions and caringly advise her to watch her step in the big bad City of Angels. Then we see them pulling away in their cab, doing low-fives and challenging their diapers on recalling that level of dreaminess in her they had made sure no one in *their* family would dare pursue. Near the story's end, they crawl, like Lindy Hopping insects (having crawled out of the Blue Box in the possession of the Beast of Winkie's) under the door of a depressively tailspinning Betty/Diane, and, resuming their full size, chase her like leering and shrieking, coke-stuffed jackals, prompting her to reach for a gun in her drawer and blow her face apart.

For the full brunt of lethal socioeconomic crudity here, we have Lynch's portrayal of Hollywood. And who should be in the thick of things but the novel's other Mike in the form of a cool, young (dare we say scrawny?) film director. On his plate this week (as if we were back in the L.A. of 1955), is a not-so-gentle-request that he play ball with the powers-that-be. This time he's up against a consortium of Italian financiers—one lets the locals know how dangerous he could be for their horse collections if not respected, by spitting out his American-made espresso—who will settle for only their choice as starlet of a musical he's preparing with their money. Losing his temper, as he is prone to do, Mike leaves the conference table, smashes their limo with the golf club he seems to be inseparable from, roars off in his grey Porsche only to find his wife in bed with a body builder who beats him up and throws him out, in a contretemps whereby Mike ("Adam," in horn-rimmed glasses) looks a lot like ancient film comedian, Harold Lloyd. The love of his life condemns him in the sternest tone for coming home early. (Later, a messenger sent to fetch him at home gives us a taste of the real Mike, when after being assaulted by the impetuous lovers, he promptly hammers them both. The boyfriend's truck is labelled "Gene [Swimming Pool] Clean," and thereby another Mike in this race, Gene Kelly, in from his stint with Pandora's Box in Rochefort, flares by.) The Europeans are on his case, he hides out in a flea bag hotel and is summoned by "the Cowboy," at whose spread he is strongly advised to say to the nice men with the money, "This girl is the one." "The Cowboy" is Mike's canny alter-ego (though this Mike doesn't impress us as in danger of scorching his jets), namely, white-stetsoned "Michel," beamed in from Demy's *Lola*. He speaks with a curious sonic and syntactical warpage reminiscent of the "American" sailor he nearly runs down with his big white Cadillac, "Hiey curboy, wirr did yr larn to dlive?" Here the contradictory patter runs from the Marlborough Man's facetious apology for tearing Adam away from a beautiful evening in that nice hotel downtown (in a flash his line of credit has disappeared in the course of getting clear who's in charge), through the disingenuous surmise, "You must not care about the good life," to the health-conscious aphorism, "'Man's attitude goes some way for the way his life might be" (punched back and forth with Adam like some hillbilly evensong and harboring the trope, "Cry who can/Laugh who will"). It winds up by Michel's not exactly compelling hypothesis, "If you fix your attitude you can ride with me." (The Cowboy also drops in on routed investigator, Betty/Diane near the end, offering equally sensible advice: "Hey, pretty girl, time to wake up." Mike, reinstalled on the set, observes the charade of a competitive audition, whereby, in a candy-colored setting reminiscent of Rochefort, marginally musical cuties (like the *Demoiselles*) in sequins and pink feathers do Valley-girl covers for "Sixteen Reasons Why I Love

You” and “I Told Every Little Star,” with hooks and breakaways along lines of Michel Legrand’s addictive pop repertoire, and content recalling the virtual romance and diarist rhetoric of Delphine and Maxence. We never learn what Mike has in mind for this oeuvre, but we know full well it will avoid controversy. Being a lucrative patsy in an industry attracting a wide range of motives, he brings out the worst in a lost-to-crying Rita before the concussion brought her back to *rit*. The melodrama of ditching Diane (into whose grief Betty obtrudes) casts “Rita”/ “Camilla” as his fittingly vile rendition of consort, his Velda. The Camilla who would become Rita (a true star, but not on the silver screen) had come to the point of using her formidable physicality to extract from Adam a starring role (obviated by the Italians, perhaps being only an agency for a dynamically nil, wheelchair-ridden kingpin) and a marriage proposal (blurred by a spate of simpering and giggling toasts “to love,” reminiscent of those questionable lovers, Maxence and Delphine in *The Young Girls of Rochefort*). We see her on the set, before the U-turn insert of “This is the girl,” (also named Camilla Rhodes), being coached for a sports car convertible (*Kiss Me Deadly*-like) scene (which finds her crying), by her detective-authority boyfriend. This package of downdraft entails Adam at the engagement-party bragging about his divorce—“I got the pool, she got the pool man”—when you might have thought that could only have happened after Rita’s accident. But the Black Hole dispensation as to the problematicness of intent allows of a luxuriance of disastrous absurdities. *Mulholland Drive* does tell a coherent story; but it is a story hollowed out and scrambled on behalf of a display of almost universal self-betrayal. In succumbing to that gravity one retraces horrors going on forever. Thus the movie comes at us like a lava-storm from a volcanic explosiveness (a Pandora’s Box), whereby straightforward personal and public action defers to a more complex sequential power. At the engagement party, “This is the girl” gives a long and wet congratulatory kiss to Camilla/Rita, much to the chagrin of Diane/Betty; but on reflection this is a Mafioso kiss of death. The girl walks away with a smirk on her face and as she does so the Cowboy wanders by, never resting a moment from his function of confirming the irresistibility of cheapness. Diane’s resentment comes to the point of putting a contract on Camilla’s head, and so the opening sequence of a black limo crawling along a canyon road on a dark night—redolent of Soberin’s killing machine—though it results in a Mike and Christina mishap, is substantially Diane’s set-up (augmented by the kindred manoeuvres of the Italian executives) whereby Camilla would be executed. Just as the car stops and the gun comes out, and she begins to step out of the back seat, two carloads of chemically happy junkyard dogs, having used Diane’s modest contribution to buy a blue box full of stimulants and looked to a big closer from the big boys to be unwittingly carried by Camilla in her purse (putatively enroute to Adam’s place with a delivery for him), slam into the high-ticket carriage killing her executioners and leaving her so jolted as to be a new person who absently picks up the loot bag and staggers off the road into the forest incline. As having made her way down to Betty’s destination, she magnetizes the points of departure for Mike and Velda, the *Demoiselles* (the brunette of which pair being Solange, played by Catherine Deneuve’s sister, Françoise Dorléac, who died in a car crash soon after filming) and *La Bête*.

The light presence of *Young Girls* enriches the loving moments of the first days for both of them. They have some fun with a reading of a dreadful screen test script. (At the actual run-through, with a soap-opera-keyed leading man, Betty’s full-immersion fluency with bathetic interplay—“You’re playing a dangerous game here”—comes to light with some shock value, in view of the reading with Rita, and some schoolgirlish gaucherie with Coco. Also taking us by surprise, there is her erotic versatility as emanating from a baseline of Doris Day wattage. The bump-on-a-log director describes her performance as “forced, but still humanistic.”) Betty cues Rita as to directions possibly leading her to her past. She also deflects attacks upon Rita by her absent aunt (Betty having blundered into divulging news of the intruder), by Ann Miller who runs the townhouse complex (and, in retrospect, seems to be Mike’s not very impressed mother [“Mrs. Lenoix”---*noix* meaning “nut,” but sounding like *noir*]) and by a mystic neighbour who declares Rita to be big trouble. As she assists with sisterly feeling a now-fearing-for-her-life Rita in cutting her hair to accommodate a blonde wig, there comes into view, by the sink, a blue-covered book, titled, *Tout Paris*. There is just enough aura of the solicitude of Solange and Delphine for each other, as they prepare to make their shot in the dark, to set in relief their heartfelt riskiness hemmed in by cuts to pronounced stupidity and distemper in the environs. In a remarkable reversal, however, it is the

Californians who come across as far more daring and mature (and talented) than the studiously chic French provincials, dreaming at long range about triumphs in Paris. Even more thought-provoking is comparison of the emergence of love in each case. Delphine is conjured, like some medieval princess, in a painting by a sailor who idealizes sensual symmetry; and she imagines being loved by a man in the mold of a democratic saint. They meet in a truck headed for Paris, in the final moment, after both have run out of steam and hope. Solange has settled for Andy Miller, a famous concert pianist who knows he has fallen short of greatness as a person. Their mother has been reconciled to an old flame, whose name, "Monsieur Dame," once embarrassed her. In contrast to those squibs, Betty and Rita come together in a course of serious self-testing and self-sharing, touched by uncanny beauties cinematically captured as flaring out of a deadly physical and historical groundswell. In following them into their passion for each other, Lynch offers a rejoinder to Demy's preoccupation with misfiring sensuality, here particularly what would be an incestuous sisterhood.

The master stroke here is in framing that massively compromised leeway for love, well discerned by *Kiss Me Deadly*, in terms of the surrealist penetration of *La Belle et la Bête*. More than anything else, Cocteau's whimsical laser is about embracing uncanniness and remarking its inexhaustible scope for discovery. As with Rita and Betty, disaster prevails; but the specific catastrophe lends itself to productive reflection. Before it all unravelled for them, the dreamers had brought onstream an eerie and sustaining aural radiance to their nocturnal haven just as *Belle* and *Bête* had. (That pulse would be augmented by the piercing, requiem-like melancholy of the theme music.) *Bête*, having concluded that only a dinnertime rendezvous would be tolerable for *Belle*, so consumed was he with his savage weirdness, she was released to a solitude, a *Silencio*, she had never known, and thereby she found within herself the nerve to be at full strength. When Betty, at the outset of the lovemaking with Rita, whispers, "I'm in love with you," she retraces the same astonishment that *Belle* undergoes in face of hitherto unimaginable love. When Rita beholds Betty's kindness, she retraces the discovery of that same transcending gentleness that *Bête* had never imagined attaining. The sustained femininity of the Hollywood lovers—set in relief by the reprises exposing butch/junkie-features of Diane's hapless mounting and then masturbation, in the face of Camilla's Gilda-like macho taunting while seducing Mike, the movie god—reaches across more than half a century to the grace of those alien caresses in *Bête's* Hollywood palace. Rita awakens from that golden moment, driven to build upon its powers by way of a disturbing recollection in her sleep of a show concerning *silence*. The fireworks of Rebekah Del Rio's unforgettable performance there harbor a downdraft of self-indulgence, manageable, but only by sensual virtuosos. It is this punishing art that leads her to reply to Betty's, "It's OK," with, "No, it's not OK." After Betty's meltdown, echoing *Bête's* dying of a broken heart, it is Rita, who, like *Belle*, having gained a saving wit, to complement instinctive powers of concentration by which to quell fear (a will to laughter), survives. (Having traversed, as Camilla, an avenue—a drive, a road—of opportunistic angling in the movie business, she had joined the slipstream of "Camilla Rhodes," a.k.a., "This is the girl." The opportunity to redeem herself, to be more than an occupant of one of many roads to starletdom, involved being Rita in spades. It also involved the loving attentions of Betty in her better days.) An archly swept heavenward *Belle* humors a fatuous boy-toy in preparing for a largely ludicrous happiness ever after. Rita stations herself in a theater box, up by the gods (anticipated, during the night at that theater with a now defunct Betty, by a middle-aged woman wearing a blue wig, overlooking the stage), at the *Club Silencio*, intoning the topspin that had wakened her from the unforgettable night with Betty, and brought their love down in flames. The Soberin-like M.C., under whose auspices the Lily-like suicide (crying) thrill would unfurl forever, would now face a subtle demurrer, akin to Mike's persistence, calling out, forever, *Silencio. Silencio.*

Rita had asked Betty, "Go with me somewhere." Specifically she had in view the all-night *Club Silencio*, its blue neon sign playing out on a scruffy back street. But what she was reaching for, bolstered by her sudden windfall of Betty's loyal affection, was making a life the sensual cogency of which would place them on a perpetual collision course with all of world history. At the audition, Betty surprised the room, and all of us, with her talent for clawing visceral urgency (primordial love) out of a bathetic script. That was exactly the art to which the bathos-denied Rita had been consigned, ironically by way of being violently fired from a pseudo-art which, till that point, had been her comfort zone. At the end of the

audition, the well-meaning deadwood that was the over-aged production team flared, momentarily no doubt, to life, on being touched by such integrity of intent. The know-it-all agent and her robotic assistant (regarding the geezers as beneath contempt) leave with Betty to place her with the supposedly real firebrand that was Adam, on the set to confirm that the fix was in. She and he have a second when their eyes meet, drinking each other in for the sake of what could be but won't be. On coming down in flames in the region of Diane, Betty (given a thoroughbred exposure by the super-supple Naomi Watts) takes us by the throat through what Frank DeVol glossed over in terms of "rather have the blues than what I've got." Her being conversant with so much more lends to a self-demeaning conversation with Coco at the lacerating wedding-announcement party an almost suffocating embarrassment. Her excruciatingly sterile petitioning a Camilla quasi-regally at ease—her "You drive me wild" as Betty fondles her breasts is delivered at the same register she would use in thanks at a hairstylist's—and numbing pain in being dismissed ("We shouldn't do this anymore"), and also her despairing tears on a face cruelly contorted as she masturbates—all emanate palpably from a land of *rit* gone horribly wrong. (This variable vial of splenetic lava—wielded with haunting mastery by the diva of "Crying"—is visited upon the various louts—extending even so far as the loopy but gentle-eyed outback *Bête* of Winkie's—to lay down a comedic undertone to their otherwise nightmarishly hateful cowardice. The visual [and musical] design-savvy spectrum includes the ["Aaagh, *man!*"] hog's signal to Diane that Camilla is toast, namely, an old Schlegel key tricked out in baby blue, being supplanted by a fascist-era, drop-dead-sleek Italian shaft, graced with an expensive patina, in the mold of *esposizione* towers.)

Along with the expensive blue key, Rita has carried away in her purse a big-time number of dollars, so she's fixed for a long haul—money-wise, anyway. Her contrarian presence, then, carries a major magnitude of uncanny whimsy, one last link to Cocteau and Demy.

For more commentary about film noir, visit: [www.springtimepublishers.com](http://www.springtimepublishers.com)