

Ghostly Femininities:  
*Christabel, Carmilla, and Mulholland Drive*

What does she want? To sleep, perchance to dream, to be loved in a dream, to be approached, touched, almost, to almost come (*jouir*). But not to come: or else she would wake up. But she came in a dream, once upon a time.  
(Hélène Cixous, *Sorties*)

<sup>1</sup>Hélène Cixous, "Sorties", *The Newly Born Woman*, ed. by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément (London: I.B.Tauris, 1996), 63-129, 67.

<sup>2</sup> The figuration of femininity-as-absence has well known theoretical antecedents, via Freud and Lacan. The relation between spectrality and femininity, between death and what has been called "the uncanny woman" has also been scrutinized, as in Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 3-58.

<sup>3</sup> See Barbara C. Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 128.

<sup>4</sup> Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, 116.

The concept of ghostly femininities is clearly expressed in these lyrical words which condense at once the idea of a female subjectivity suspended between life and death, waking and dreaming; the feeling of a desire to be desired, fulfilled as in a dreamlike future to come; and the sensation of a spectral return from the past, an endless, phantasmatic repetition implied in the fabulous "once upon a time".<sup>1</sup>

Between the ghostly and the dreamy, the female body stages itself, as if women, like ghosts, hovered within the interstitial spaces between the visible and invisible, the symbolic and the imaginary, the real and unreal, the material and metaphorical.<sup>2</sup> Feminist studies on the representation of womanhood in literature have pointed out that the creative and productive force of femininity lies exactly in its posing a fundamental contradiction: woman is both uncanny for her unspeakable alterity and seductive by virtue of her enigmatic quality; she is both repulsive because threatening and attractive because unfathomable.<sup>3</sup> She shares with the ghostly this uncanny double: the ghost wavers in a liminal zone between the living and the dead, human and non-human, presence and absence, "staging a duplicitous presence, at once sign of an absence and of an inaccessible other scene, of a beyond".<sup>4</sup>

This inbetweenness assumes a sublime connotation – what cannot be spoken, what exceeds any representation – and a specifically feminine figuration in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's unfinished long poem *Christabel* (1797-1800), Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's ghost story *Carmilla* (1872), and David Lynch's postmodern movie *Mulholland Drive* (2001). The 'beyond' as ghostly and the ghostly as a gendered space will be examined in this study, together with the way in which the representation of ghostly femininities becomes a powerful site of contestation, offering the spectre of a powerful, different womanhood. Here the phantasmatic becomes the site in which femininity reveals its alternative agency.

The texts under scrutiny share striking similarities in both content and form. They seem uncannily to stage almost the same narrative plot which evolves around a couple of young women (each one the physical opposite

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of the other) who come together apparently by accident after a carriage/car crash in the middle of the night. A sudden fatal bond develops between the dark-haired women who suffer the consequence of an unaccountable traumatic event and the blond women who help the amnesic girls by giving them hospitality. Not only does the female ghost appear as female guest, but the spectral also becomes specular, thereby highlighting the halo of mystery and ambiguity that surrounds the women's relationship and their identities as well. Indeed, their powerful attraction becomes the core of the narratives of the danger and deceit that whirl around them. The "dim, obscure, visionary" quality of these texts feeds off other recurring themes, such as nocturnal/dark atmospheres, blurring thresholds between dreaming and waking, reverie and reality, feminine love tinged with lesbian tones, absent/spectral mothers, doubles, figurations of femininity as ghost, *revenant*, *lamia*, vampire, *femme fatale*.

From the structural and formal point of view, the texts appear like enigmas deconstructing and unsettling the linear logic of narrative in different ways. First of all, they stage a temporality that differs sharply from the modern concept of a linear, progressive, universal time; theirs is a temporality of haunting, through which events and people return from the limits of time and mortality, thereby troubling the boundaries of past, present, and future. Moreover, their failure as linear narratives is connected with their phantasmatic mode of writing: the ghostly feminine produces a breach in discourse, breaking the sequence of teleological narrative and defying the transparency of language and univocality of interpretation.

The following analysis tends to demonstrate that even though these texts are written and produced by male authors, it is the female phantasm that starts up narration, introducing a disturbance in meaning, as unsettling as it is unsettled.

## 1. *Christabel*: Spectral (M)others

*Christabel* is a fragment of a longer poem that Coleridge never completed. It is compounded of two parts, written respectively in 1797 and 1800.<sup>5</sup> This haunting fragment is a marvellous seduction poem which tells the story of Christabel, a "lovely lady" who goes out alone into the woods near her castle in the middle of the night hovering between dream and reverie, sleeping and waking (*C*, 23). There, "beneath the huge oak tree", she finds a "damsel bright" named Geraldine, "beautiful exceedingly!", who relates how she had been abducted by some warriors and left in the forest (*C*, 58, 68). Christabel pities the stranger and takes her home with her. During the night Christabel and her guest lie together in bed, and Geraldine seems to cast some sort of spell over the girl. The second part of the poem revolves around the reactions of Christabel's father, Sir Leoline,

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Christabel* (1797-1800), <<http://theotherpages.org/poems/coler02.html>>, 15 November 2008. The conclusion to *Christabel* was written in 1838 by James Gillman who cared for Coleridge during the latter years. Hereafter indicated as *C*.

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with whom she lives as a motherless daughter, and a premonitory dream made by the Bard, Bracy. Sir Leoline becomes more and more charmed by Geraldine, but he is warned against her menacing nature by the faithful Bracy who interprets his dream of a dove threatened by a snake to be a presage of evil and danger. Angry about such inhospitality, Sir Leoline orders Bard Bracy to abandon the castle and departs with Geraldine. It is there that the poem ends, offering neither a resolution about the aftermath of the story nor a clear view of who or what Geraldine is.

The fragmentary nature of the text is strengthened by the inability of the narrative voice to say clearly what happens. The opening stanzas introduce ambiguity about time and random temporal shifts: “’Tis the middle of night by the castle clock/ And the owls have awakened the crowing cock”, “And hark, again! the crowing cock,/ How drowsily it crew”, to which Sir Leoline’s mastiff bitch “maketh answer” (*C*, 1-2, 4-5, 9). The initial description suggests a liminal state between past and present, between the realm of owls and that of cocks, thus between night and dawn; the events take place “a month before the month of May”, therefore between spring and summer (*C*, 21). Moreover, the poem shows uncertainty about the relation between cause and effect through the narrator’s mode of questioning – asking, stating, and then doubting (“Is the night chilly and dark?/ The night is chilly, but not dark”, *C* 14-15; “What makes her in the wood so late,/ A furlong from the castle gate?”, *C* 25-26) – a mode that only raises more questions and casts the narration in a state of mystery and abnormality. The opening stanza introduces the first feminine figure, who sounds very uncanny though familiar: “Some say, she sees my lady’s shroud” (*C*, 13). The narrator, whose narrative function cannot be clearly gendered (is it male or female?), speaks of a bodiless female figure, a spectre that proves to be disorienting as he/she is once again unable to tell who she is and what kind of relation there is between them.

The mysterious, eerie atmosphere is evoked especially in the fatal encounter between Christabel and Geraldine which takes place in proximity of an oak tree where Christabel is praying (again, a very strange pagan setting for a Christian rite); a sudden sensation of danger is felt when Christabel hears a moan “seemingly” coming from the other side of “the broad-breasted old oak tree” that is typically feminised and, maybe not by chance, figured as maternal. Caught between fright and curiosity, Christabel with “beating heart” steals to the other side and “What sees she there?” (*C*, 57):

There she sees a damsel bright,  
Dressed in a silken robe of white,  
That shadowy in the moonlight shown:  
The neck that made that white robe wan,  
Her stately neck, and arms were bare;  
Her blue-veined feet unsandaled were,

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And wildly glittered here and there  
The gems entangled in her hair. (C, 58-65)

There is a certain ghostly nature about Geraldine, highlighted, from the very moment of her appearance, by a language that is both ethereal and somehow frightening. Words like “shadowy”, “blue-veined”, and the strong descriptions of how “white” she is, all add to the strange and scary ghostliness of this encounter. Geraldine appears to Christabel as a forlorn lady who has “lain entranced” after an unaccountable abduction and therefore cannot offer any answer to Christabel’s anxiety to know about her misadventure. Geraldine soon becomes an enigmatic figure inasmuch as her presence in the forest is unexpected, and as an ambiguous figure she is unintended. Christabel cannot interpret this figure because it does not belong where it is, and it thus becomes unintelligible. Therefore, the feminine in the guise of Geraldine appears as both uncanny and alluring, tainted with fear and desire. Christabel is indeed so charmed by this stranger as to invite her into her father’s castle where, in a significant way, the two women repeatedly cross thresholds: “they crossed the moat”, “over the threshold of the gate”, “they crossed the court”, “they passed the hall”. Once over the final threshold and inside Christabel’s chamber, the strange lady with altered voice engages in a muttered quarrel with the spirit of Christabel’s dead mother: “Off, wandering mother! Peak and pine! / I have power to bid thee flee” (C, 205-206). The ghost of the “wandering mother” is another ambiguous female figure haunting the text. She represents the protective good mother Christabel longs for: “Woe is me! / She died the hour that I was born. / I have heard ... / How on her death-bed she did say, / That she should hear the castle-bell / Strike twelve upon my wedding-day. / O mother dear! that thou wert here!” (C, 196-202).

The return of the “spectral mother” stands for the desire for what has been irreducibly lost and that triggers Christabel’s fragmented identity. According to Madelon Sprengnether, “the loss that precipitates the organization of a self is always implicitly the loss of a mother ... The mother’s body becomes that which is longed for yet cannot be appropriated, a representative of both home and not home, and hence, in Freud’s terms, the site of the uncanny”.<sup>6</sup> In an ambivalent way this feminine (m)other as “womb-tomb-home” is the site of death. It is the site from which life emerges, but it is also the site where mortality is inscribed on the body at birth. This figuration of the uncanny maternal body resembles the description of the ghost given by Cixous in her comments on Freud’s essay in which she says that the Ghost is “the direct figure of the uncanny” inasmuch as it is “the fiction of our relationship to death”.<sup>7</sup> Mortality is an “impossible representation”, as only the dead know its secret. Cixous goes further in her reflections explaining that what renders the return of

<sup>6</sup> Madelon Sprengnether, *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 9. “The preoedipal mother, in Freud’s unsystematic treatments of her, emerges as a figure of subversion ... [with] a ghostlike function creating a presence out of absence ... Her effect is what I call ‘spectral’ in the full etymological sense ... related to ‘spectacle’, ‘speculation’ and ‘suspicion’ ... she is an object of fear and dread” (5).

<sup>7</sup> Hélène Cixous, “Fiction and its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud’s *Das Unheimliche*”, *New Literary History*, 7.3 (Spring 1976), 525-548, 619-645. Hereafter indicated as *FP*.

the dead so intolerable is not so much that it announces death per se, as the fact that the ghost obliterates the limit which exists between two states, neither alive nor dead: “passing through, the dead man returns in the manner of the repressed” (FP, 543). In *Christabel* the dead who return seem to be female ghosts in the form of the bodiless mother and the excessively embodied Geraldine who claim something repressed about Christabel’s identity.

The reference to the uncanny is once again helpful for the exploration of the ghost/return of the repressed/sexuality relation. It is common knowledge that Freud takes on Schelling’s definition of the uncanny as “all that which should have remained hidden and secret and has become visible”. In her rereading of Freud’s essay, Cixous offers a new perspective by linking “the *Unheimliche* to a lack of modesty” where at the end “the sexual threat emerges”; in this way, she relates the uncanny to an offence against decency that foreshadows the menace of sexuality which, in turn, is necessarily linked to an unconscious and ambiguous erotic desire where the self is questioned in its integrity, being forced to see what should have remained concealed and has come to light (FP, 530). In

*Christabel* this uncanny eroticism is explored in one of the most disturbing scenes of the poem, set in Christabel’s chamber after the departure of the ghost of her mother. The description of the two women undressing as they prepare for bed reveals a latent sexual intercourse which remains unsaid except for Christabel’s active participation in following Geraldine’s deeds and gestures: “as the lady bade, did she./ Her gentle limbs did she undress/And lay down in her loveliness.” (C, 236-38). From her bed Christabel observes Geraldine who disrobes, though “through her brain, of weal and woe,/So many thoughts moved to and fro,/That vain it were her lids to close” (C, 239-41), as if she were both troubled and excited by the sight:

Beneath the lamp the lady bowed,  
And slowly rolled her eyes around;  
Then drawing in her breath aloud,  
Like one that shuddered, she unbound  
The cincture from beneath her breast:  
Her silken robe, and inner vest,  
Dropped to her feet, and full in view,  
Behold! her bosom and half her side –  
A sight to dream of, not to tell! (C, 245-253)



Fig. 1: “Christabel’s bed”.  
Lancelot Speed, “So half-way from the bed she rose”..., illustration to Coleridge, “Christabel”, in Andrew Lang, ed., *The Blue Fairy Book* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1891), 323.

The naked body is at once adored and condemned because sexually charged, it is unspeakable, yet intelligible only in dream, as if the narrator voiced Freud’s insight that dreams



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are phantasms of suppressed sexual desire. In psychoanalytic terms, phantasms have very much in common with dreams as they both stand for the expression of a wish-fulfilment, or even a compensation or correction of an unsatisfactory reality.<sup>8</sup> The lines above show the impossibility of representation, inasmuch as the narrator is unable to describe what happens. That which must remain hidden because unthinkable and unnameable has become uncannily visible and is therefore threatening: what has been revealed is Geraldine's bosom, and with it metaphorically a feminine queer desire.

Yet Geraldine nor speaks nor stirs:  
Ah! what a stricken look was hers!  
Deep from within she seems half-way  
To lift some weight with sick assay,  
And eyes the maid and seeks delay;  
Then suddenly, as one defied,  
Collects herself in scorn and pride,  
And lay down by the maiden's side! –  
And in her arms the maid she took. (255-263)

The sensual and contagious embrace becomes fatal insofar as Geraldine's arms prove to be "the lovely lady's prison" from which there is no release (C, 304). What is more striking is that this scene loses its same-sex erotic connotation to assume a clearly maternal nurturing implication: "And lo! the worker of these harms,/ That holds the maiden in her arms,/ Seems to slumber still and mild,/ As a mother with her child" (C, 298-301). These lines condense sexuality and death in the figure of the ghostly mother who becomes at the same time the abject source of desire and loss, life and death. Studies in psychoanalysis have shown the connection between the "desire for the mother" and lesbian sexuality as unfolded in the mother-daughter relationship of an unresolved Oedipus complex. As Kristeva points out, "lesbian loves" have been equated to "the embrace of the baby and its nourishing mother".<sup>9</sup> Actually, the maternal phantasm has been envisaged as a memory of the mother/daughter unity projected into the place of desire. Unlike psychoanalytic views in which femininity is conceived in relation to the maternal "only as it effects social or gender reproduction, and not as it affects sexuality and desire", thereby reconfirming a patriarchal heterosexual paradigm, Teresa de Lauretis highlights the centrality of the spectral presence of the maternal metaphor in the display of an exclusively feminine desire, maintaining that "the fantasmatic relation to the mother and the maternal/female body is central to lesbian subjectivity and desire".<sup>10</sup> Geraldine, therefore, may be seen as the embodiment of the return of Christabel's mother conceived of as the phantasmatic projection of Christabel's repressed queer desire.

<sup>8</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Edition, 1997), 68.

<sup>9</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1989), 81.

<sup>10</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 166, 171.

Yet, Geraldine is more than a 'surrogate mother' since, after all, she is a witch, a sorceress who casts a spell upon Christabel: "In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,/ Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!" (C, 267-268). Under this spell, which bears again a maternal connotation in the figure of Geraldine offering her breast, the helpless Christabel will remain speechless, unable to tell her father the unmentionable secret of her sexual transgression. In the second part of the poem another figuration of ghostly femininity becomes visible in the representation of Geraldine as *lamia*. Defined as a sort of female vampire ante-litteram, lamiae were mythological figures embodying haunting ghosts in the guise of half-woman and half-serpent which employed illusion in the seduction of young men from whom they sucked blood.<sup>11</sup> In *Christabel* the dream of the Baron's servant Bracey about a "bright green snake" coiled around a dove's wings and neck foreshadows the depiction of Geraldine as a vampiric serpent-woman: "A snake's small eye blinks dull and shy,/And the lady's eyes they shrunk in her head,/Each shrunk up to a serpent's eye,/ And with somewhat of malice, and more of dread,/At Christabel she looked askance!" (C, 585-589). Like more conventional vampires, Geraldine is capable of hypnotically entrancing her chosen victim. Christabel's resulting weakness, which becomes more and more pronounced the more time she spends with her not-quite-human guest, suggests that Geraldine is some sort of psychic vampire who is somehow absorbing the other woman's vital energies.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, it could be guessed that the erotic embrace between Christabel and Geraldine unfolds, though concealed, a vampiric kiss which means for Christabel a contagious seduction and a 'little death' at the same time.

## 2. *Carmilla*: Feminine Hauntologies

Christabel and Geraldine embody the literary ancestors of Laura and Carmilla, the two female protagonists of the ghost story *Carmilla* by the Victorian writer Le Fanu.<sup>13</sup> Some critics have pointed out that *Carmilla* is a conscious attempt to render *Christabel* into prose.<sup>14</sup> The present analysis, however, tries to go beyond the mere plot similarities in order to show how both texts, through the representation of spectral female figures haunting the narrative, uncover unspoken desires and unknown or unsolved traumas.

*Carmilla* is presented in the form of an autobiographical narrative written by Laura after her traumatic relationship with Carmilla and delivered to us by an editor after Laura's death years later.<sup>15</sup> Like Christabel, Laura is a lonely motherless girl in her late teens who lives with her aged father and two governesses in an isolated castle in the Austrian province of Styria. Her solitary life is saddened by the news that Bertha, the niece of her

<sup>11</sup> *Lamia* is also a narrative poem written by John Keats (1819).

<sup>12</sup> Some critics have pointed out how Christabel

is gradually transformed into a phantom as she is deprived of her will and her speech; drained of agency and selfhood she becomes "a phantom soul".

See A. Taylor, "Coleridge's Christabel and the Phantom Soul", *Studies in English Literature 1500-100*, 42.4 (Autumn 2002), 707-730.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla* (1872), ed. by Sandro Melani (Venezia: Marsilio, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> James B. Twitchell, *The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature* (Dunham: Duke University Press, 1987), 129.

<sup>15</sup> *Carmilla* was first published in the magazine *The Dark Blue* in 1872, and then in the author's collection of short stories, *In a Glass Darkly*, the same year. It includes five short stories presented as a selection from the posthumous papers of the occult detective and psychic doctor Martin Hesselius. Hereafter indicated as *Ca*.

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father's friend General Spielsdorf who should have come to visit her, has suddenly died under mysterious circumstances. Laura's domestic peace is definitely shattered by the unexpected arrival of a beautiful but enigmatic young girl named Carmilla. Like Geraldine, she is brought by a carriage accident not far from her *schloss* by moonlight. Carmilla's mysterious mother arranges to leave her injured daughter with Laura and her father until her return three months later; Laura persuades her father and, again, as in *Christabel*, the female stranger is welcomed as a charming and unfathomable guest. This event proves to be uncanny from the very beginning as it reveals something familiar to the narrator. It is worth pointing out that the narrative begins with a terrifying dream recounted by Laura when, as a six year old child, she lives a traumatic experience from which she never entirely recovers. In her dream she is alone in the nursery room and feels neglected and anxious; then she is visited by a female figure who at first comforts and caresses her until the dreamer feels a terrible pain in her breast and the female ghost disappears:

I saw a solemn, but very pretty face looking at me from the side of the bed. It was that of a young lady who was kneeling, with her hands under the coverlet. I looked at her with a kind of pleased wonder, and ceased whimpering. She caressed me with her hands, and lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me towards her, smiling; I felt immediately delightfully soothed, and fell asleep again. I was wakened by a sensation as if two needles ran into my breast very deep at the same moment, and I cried loudly. The lady started back, with her eyes fixed on me, and then slipped down upon the floor, and, as I thought, hid herself under the bed. (*Ca*, 48)

Like *Christabel*, in *Carmilla* it is the female ghost that starts up the narration since her appearance represents the only event in Laura's life to be worth telling up to that moment, as she says: "The first occurrence in my existence, which produced a terrible impression upon my mind, which, in fact, never has been effaced, was one of the very earliest incidents of my life which I can recollect" (*Ca*, 46). Yet she is unable either to decipher her dream or to decode the message received by the ghostly feminine figure, since the scenes she describes "stand out vivid as the isolated pictures of the phantasmagoria surrounded by darkness" (*Ca*, 50). Thirteen years later a young lady breaks into Laura's life, but soon she discovers that Carmilla is the same beautiful dark-haired and melancholic girl she saw in her childhood reverie. What is even more striking is that Carmilla also had a similar dream when she was a child. She tells Laura how she was visited by "a beautiful young lady with golden hair and large blue eyes, and lips—your lips—you, as you are here" (*Ca*, 78). During Carmilla's tale Laura, like Christabel, becomes speechless as if she were under a spell: "There was a silence of fully a minute, and then at length *she* spoke; I could not" (*Ca*, 76). This uncanny moment of recognition starts up an



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<sup>16</sup> Jean Laplanche and Jean Bertrand Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality", in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. by Victor Burgin (London: Methuen, 1986), 5-34, 8.

ongoing ambivalent play in which it is difficult to discern between vision and reality, dream and illusion, and between specular and spectral figures.

The childhood dream-reverie, which in Laplanche's words is "not a fantasmagoria, but a text to be deciphered", signals the beginning of a breakdown of boundaries between Laura and Carmilla who feel strangely drawn to each other with an ambiguous alternation of attraction and repulsion, pleasure and fear on behalf of Laura.<sup>16</sup>

As in Coleridge's poem, the spectral mother hovers over the two protagonists. In Laura's childhood reverie, Carmilla looks like a spectral maternal figure who appears when the child feels neglected and forsaken as if needing a mother to soothe her to sleep. This figuration recurs throughout the tale, staging an ambivalent play between maternal tenderness and erotic passion: "From these foolish embraces ... I used to wish to extricate myself; but my energies seemed to fail me. Her murmured words sounded like a lullaby in my ear, and soothed my resistance into a trance, from which I only seemed to recover myself when she withdrew her arms" (*Ca*, 86). This image vividly recalls Geraldine's maternal embrace "that holds the maiden in her arms ... As a mother with her child", making Christabel gather "from out her trance;/ Her limbs relax, her countenance/ grows sad and soft ...", while "she seems to smile/ As infants at a sudden light" (*Ca*, 300-301, 312-314, 317-318). But, like Geraldine, Carmilla is simultaneously the embodiment of Laura's mother and the dead mother's antagonist; in one of her dream-reveries Laura actually hears a voice, sweet and terrible at the same time, which says: "Your mother warns you to beware of the assassin" (*Ca*, 128). A voice which very uncannily recalls Geraldine's altered voice saying: "Off, wandering mother! .../ this hour is mine/ Though thou her guardian spirit be,/ Off, woman, off!" (*Ca*, 205, 211-213). Thus the mothers in both narratives are not simply reincarnated mother figures: from beyond the grave they try to warn their daughters about the dangers of their guests, who might lure their hosts by providing a different kind of intimacy they offer as a substitute for the one they have lost.

From a different perspective, the maternal ghost resurfaces upon discovering that Laura and Carmilla are related through their mothers. Much of the story deals with the sensual and queerly erotic relationship which develops between the young women, and with the attempt of various males (Laura's father, General Spielsdorf, and Baron Vordenburg) to free Laura from the vampire's spell. Carmilla is, in fact, a vampire who reappears through the centuries with the anagrammatic names Carmilla, Millarca, Mircalla, and who haunted Laura in her childhood. Carmilla is a descendant of Mircalla, Countess of Karnstein whose portrait dated 1698 is found by Laura in her castle. It resembles Carmilla in a striking way. Surprisingly, Laura reveals her mother's mysterious origins by stating that

she is maternally descendant from the Karnsteins too. Later on she understands that her story repeats that of Bertha (the dead girl she was waiting for as a guest) and Millarca, a beautiful lady who betrayed general Spieldorf's hospitality by killing his niece. In Le Fanu's novel, time and histories are, thus, blurred and interrelated in a *hauntological* paradigm with the past casting a shadow over the present. The figure of the spectre is ubiquitous in the anagrammatic profusion of its names, materialising in the form of an incorporated and externalised feminine otherness and repeating its return as if it were the first time.<sup>17</sup> The mysterious woman is a female vampire, but she is also called "spectre": "She was at first visited by appalling dreams; then, as she fancied, by a spectre, sometimes resembling Millarca" (*Ca*, 174). Not only is Carmilla/Millarca/Mircalla a ghost in flesh and blood, an embodied undead who returns from the past to share the domestic present, lost mothers and dreams, but Laura also represents a figuration of ghostly femininity.

In this connection I draw on Nancy Holland's feminist reading of Derrida's *hauntology*, for she poses questions about ghosts and inheritance, and the ghostly as a gendered space.<sup>18</sup> Derrida discusses the corporeality of ghosts and defines the spectre as "a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some 'thing' that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other". While "flesh and phenomenality ... give to the spirit its spectral apparition, [they] disappear right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the *revenant*, or the return of the *spectre*" (*SM*, 6). Discussing the place of the daughter in Derrida's patriarchal hauntology, Holland observes that "at the very moment when Derrida attempts to say something, however partial and attenuated, about the ghost, he must at the same time recreate a tradition in which the Father/Ghost, and all that they represent, speak only to the Son" (*DO*, 70). I would argue that unlike the patrilinear inheritance in which the "Father/Ghost" speaks only to the son, *Carmilla* shows a matrilineage in which the Mother/Ghost addresses the daughter and, thence, claims an exclusively female kinship system; even Laura's father emphasizes that his daughter's Karnstein connection is purely matrilinear and that his family is free of vampiric pollution, thereby asserting a matriarchal eros as opposed to the patriarchal logos.

Moreover, Holland suggests that women are haunted "not by the ghost of the father, but by the father's ghost," with the consequence that exorcism is not possible, nor is parricide a solution (*DO*, 68). In contrast to the ghost of the father, who appears as a spectral Other, the father's ghost is the daughter's internalized spectral Other who "is not my father, or not only my father, but also my father's vision of the eternal, idealized Woman he would have loved—as he never could love my mother or my/self" (*DO*, 67). It

<sup>17</sup> For Derrida, hauntology is "repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time* makes of it also a *last time*". Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 10. Hereafter indicated as *SM*.

<sup>18</sup> Nancy J. Holland, "The Death of the Other/Father: A Feminist Reading of Derrida's Hauntology", *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 16.1 (Winter 2001), 64-71. Hereafter indicated as *DO*.

<sup>19</sup> The Victorian ideal of the “Angel in the House” finds its reverse in the fin-de-siècle *femme fatale* model, a ‘deadly woman’, seen as a sort of enchantress, vampire, female monster or demon. The figure of the *femme fatale* is another male construction closely tied to misogyny and fears of feminine alterity; nevertheless it remains an example of female independence, threatening traditional female gender roles.

could be guessed that Laura is “the ghost of a woman who never lived”, the spectral figure of what patriarchy wants to see and must see when it looks at a female form (*DO*, 67). In other words, Laura embodies the ghost of the perfect image reflected in her father’s vision of the idealized woman displayed in the feminine stereotype of the ‘angel-in-the-house’.<sup>19</sup> Yet, as opposed to the image of Laura as male construction, the narrative proposes the phantasmatic projection of Laura as the fatal-other woman. Carmilla may be interpreted, indeed, as the specular image of Laura, her double, the cruel, sensual, bold *femme fatale*, with a *lamia*-like look, seductive and hypnotic, that lurks beneath the image of the remissive woman deprived of any sexual desire and agency, and submitted to male authority. The *lamia* figure is metaphorically evoked by the tapestry in Carmilla’s room, representing Cleopatra with the asp to her bosom. Whereas Carmilla is associated with the serpent sucking blood from the woman’s breast as a vampiric act, the figurative identification of Laura with Cleopatra hints at Laura’s *femme fatale* alter ego, and also at her ambiguous sexuality torn between the pleasure and repulsion Carmilla’s lesbian vampirism arouses in her.

The narrative questions another assumption according to which, in Holland’s words, “a father cannot teach a daughter how to live; he can only teach her limits within which she must live” (*DO*, 63). Both Christabel and Laura defy those limits from the very beginning by usurping the role of the father in the house. They challenge Derrida’s assumptions about the laws of hospitality since it is a female in the first instance who offers hospitality, defying her father’s laws; Geraldine and Carmilla enter their victim’s home, depriving the fathers of their patriarchal power and dominance, and thus, along with the lack of a ‘master’, they create a powerful female ‘daughterly’ plot; moreover, both narratives perform a queer hospitality since if the invitation of Geraldine assumes the ritual tones of a bride waiting for her ‘disguised’ groom in the bedroom, Laura fancies that her guest is a “boyish lover in masquerade” (*Ca*, 88). This kind of hospitality is linked to the folkloric belief that it is necessary to invite a vampire into one’s house before it can enter. The house is a metaphor for the subconscious mind. When a vampire is invited into one’s house, it is symbolically invoked into one’s personal subconscious, where it is then free to feed upon one’s spiritual vitality. This is why the vampire’s visitations occur overnight, when one is asleep and dreaming, and most vulnerable to entities in the subconscious mind. The coming of the female ghost-vampire unfolds a tale of forbidden, exclusive female desire. Carmilla, in fact, represents the subconscious sexual instinct Laura has had to repress. What was implicit in *Christabel* becomes clear in *Carmilla* as it explicitly reveals its queerness in the depiction of lesbian love between the two girls. As Laura comments:

It was like the ardour of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet over-powering; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips travelled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, "You are mine, you *shall* be mine, you and I are one for ever." Then she has thrown herself back in her chair, with her small hands over her eyes, leaving me trembling. (*Ca*, 88)

By letting the vampire enter her dream-reveries/psyche, Laura is invoking a phantasm that can satisfy her secret repressed desire and destroy her at the same time in order to expiate her sense of guilt. But the descriptions of her vampiric visitations in terms of an unspeakable *jouissance* hint at the troubling fact that she might not want to be cured from her 'evil'.

The plot apparently ends with the ritual killing of Carmilla but the conclusion to Laura's tale remains ambiguous. During the spring that follows Carmilla's expulsion, Laura's father takes her on a tour through Italy in order to cure the melancholic state she has fallen into after her traumatic experience with Carmilla, but his attempt fails. She writes that, despite the passing of time, "the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alternations – sometimes the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend ...; and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing-room door" (*Ca*, 206). Laura ends her account fancying that Carmilla is on the brink of entering her bedchamber, thereby dejectedly longing for her return. This uncanny conclusion suggests the figuration of a femininity caught in a melancholic eros that reflects its endless, unlimited longing for a love it has never possessed and is only fulfilled in the embodied ghost of Carmilla.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, the conclusion displays *Carmilla's* open-endedness as well as its circular narrative structure, since the female ghost opens the narration with her apparition in Laura's child dream and also closes it as she continues to haunt Laura's memory. Indeed, the entire narrative structure is incompletely framed, even though in a different way from the unfinished *Christabel*. The novel opens with a brief prologue in which the editor comments: "upon a paper attached to the Narrative which follows, Doctor Hesselius has written a rather elaborate note, which he accompanies with a reference to his Essay on the strange subject which the MS. (manuscript) Illuminates" (*Ca*, 40). Yet the narrative ends without

<sup>20</sup> On the topic of vampirism, eros and melancholy, see Vito Teti, "Il vampiro, o del moderno sentimento della melanconia", in *Il Vampiro, don Giovanni e altri seduttori*, ed. by Ada Neiger (Bari: Dedalo, 1998), 165-190.

<sup>21</sup> For images, information and a detailed discussion of illustrations to "Carmilla", see Simon Cooke, "Haunted Images: The Illustrating of Le Fanu", *Le Fanu Studies*, 2.2 (November 2007), <<http://www.jslefanu.com/cooke.html>>, 1 May 2009>.



Fig. 2: "Laura's bed". David Henry Friston, illustration to Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, "Carmilla", *The Dark Blue* (March 1872).<sup>21</sup>



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<sup>22</sup> The text hides other ghostly figures. Laura pointedly addresses her story to “a town lady like you”, thereby eliminating the male link between the narrator and her reader and providing a direct route from one woman to another (*Ca*, 91). Like the men’s failed attempts to contain women in the patriarchal order, the editor similarly fails to frame them in his narrative. It could be guessed that the woman to whom the narrative is addressed is a ghost narratee, an absent presence who never appears but haunts the text.

presenting either Dr. Hesselius’s note or the editor’s concluding remarks. Instead, *Carmilla* ends with Laura’s reverie. The cryptic prologue hints at the story as “unveiling ... some of the profoundest arcane of our dual existence” thereby stressing an ontological ambiguity which further blurs psychic, spatial and temporal boundaries. Linked to the enigmatic ending, this hint may suggest the final figuration of ghostly femininity embodied by Laura as hovering on the edge of a radical splitting till she confuses herself with *Carmilla*.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. *Mulholland Drive*: Phantasms of Desire

Though not immediately evident, Lynch’s postmodern film *Mulholland Drive* (2001) appears as a palimpsest of multiple textual layers uncovering phantasmatic traces of both *Christabel* and *Carmilla* which, indeed, prove to be haunting intertexts of his movie. Like *Christabel*’s ending in medias res and *Carmilla*’s enigmatic conclusion, *Mulholland Drive* disappoints its spectators’ and critics’ desire for narrative closure. Through its visionary and imagistic power which opens the text to an endless number of interpretations, *Mulholland Drive* frustrates narrative logic, unfolding unresolved mysteries. The open-endedness of its plot reflects the indeterminacy and doubleness of its characters as well as the enigmatic and puzzling nature of the events displayed throughout the film. Its fragmentary narrative structure is shown especially in the representation of two plots, with the first part of the film being a specular/spectral projection of the second.

The opening of the first part proposes what seems almost a ‘familiar’ narrative plot staged in a different setting; the dark wood surrounding Christabel’s medieval castle and the misty road near Laura’s Victorian *schloss* become a contemporary gloomy and dusky highway crossing Hollywood hills which is shown to be Mulholland Drive. A beautiful dark-haired woman (played by Laura Elena Harring), is driving up it in the back of a black limousine (like *Carmilla* in a stagecoach) where she escapes imminent murder by the drivers because of a car accident (like Geraldine’s abduction). Injured and shocked, she walks down Mulholland Drive and onto Sunset Boulevard and hides in the bushes outside an apartment complex where she falls asleep. The next day she wakes up and sneaks (like a *lamia*?) into an apartment which an older woman has recently vacated. At the same time, a blond girl named Betty Elms (played by Naomi Watts) arrives from Canada to Los Angeles as an aspiring actress and takes a taxi to the same apartment she has borrowed from her aunt. There she finds the dark-haired woman confused and amnesic who assumes the name “Rita” when she sees a poster for the film *Gilda* (1946) starring Rita Hayworth. Betty befriends Rita, anyway, and decides to assist her in assembling the fragments of her memory in



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order to discover her 'true' identity. Indeed, she has no cues to her identity, just a lot of cash and an odd blue key found in her purse.

From the very beginning the two female protagonists seem to embody the ghosts of Christabel/Laura and Geraldine/Carmilla, the naïve and unselfish blond woman and the helpless and mysterious dark-haired woman who come together by pure chance and eventually enter into an intensely emotional and close relationship. In their attempt to figure out the mystery behind Rita's identity, the girls embark on a series of adventures which lead them to the apartment of one Diane Selwyn, the only name Rita can remember out of her amnesia. There, they are horrified to discover a woman's rotting corpse lying on a bed. Frightened by an impending danger, back home they create a disguise for Rita that makes her look like Betty, and that night Betty invites Rita into her bed, echoing Laura soliciting Geraldine to share the couch with her ("And I beseech your courtesy,/ This night, to share your couch with me", *C* 122). Another striking similarity is clear in the following scene where the ensuing sexual encounter between the women is initially figured as maternal, invoking once again the "mother-daughter plot of lesbian romance".<sup>23</sup> Indeed, with her voluptuous body that looms up out of the bedclothes while approaching Betty, Rita appears for a moment as a 'noir mother' who tucks in her daughter. Then, after some moments of intense eroticism and surprise, this image dissolves into very titillating sexual intercourse as Betty confesses to Rita that she has fallen in love with her. The sequence clearly echoes Carmilla and Laura's "warm kisses" and passionate embraces, as well as their open avowals "I live in you; and you would die for me, I love you so" (*Ca*, 109).

The next filmic sequence shows Rita waking up in the middle of the night and asking Betty to take her to Club Silencio, an eerie theatre where they watch a series of simulated performances and where an M.C./magician explains in several languages that everything is an illusion ("No hay banda! And yet we hear a band", "It is all recorded"). A woman introduced as "la Llorona de Los Angeles Rebeka del Rio" performs a Spanish version of Roy Orbison's "Crying" but suddenly falls dead on the floor while the song goes on. At that point Betty finds a blue box in her purse that matches Rita's key. Upon returning to the apartment, Rita unlocks the box and the camera goes inside; then, both women mysteriously disappear from the frame.

This uncanny scene is the narrative hinge separating the two parts of the film; the second part shows in fact an unaccountable reversal of characters, role plays and situations which fractures narrative linearity and logic coherence. From this point onwards, it is not easy to figure out any causal connections as the boundaries between real and unreal, sleeping and waking, dreaming and vision, life and death become blurred. Significantly, this second section begins with the haunting presence of the dead female body in Diane Selwyn's apartment, when a weirdie

<sup>23</sup> H. K. Love, "Spectacular failure: the figure of the lesbian in *Mulholland Drive*", *New Literary History* 35.1 (Winter 2004), 117–132, 126.

<sup>24</sup> Not only do characters change names and identities, but events and situations are also repeated 'with a difference'.

called Cowboy suddenly shows up and tells her to get up ("Hey, pretty girl. Time to wake up"). The awakening girl named Diane is indeed Betty, but she is now unrecognisable as the perky, radiant blonde from the first part of the film. Diane is portrayed as a depressed, run down, failed actress who came to Hollywood when her aunt died after winning a jitterbug contest. Moreover, she is in love with Camilla Rhodes who, unlike the helpless and insecure Rita, appears as a beaming and successful actress seducing and then shattering her. Camilla is in fact engaged to a talented director for whom she decides to break her relationship with Diane, thus making her sink in "a very strange agony" (*Ca*, 110). One of the most suggestive sequences of the second part of the film shows Diane in a limousine driving up Mulholland Drive, just like Rita/Camilla at the beginning of the movie.<sup>24</sup> She arrives in a wooden area at nightfall where she finds Camilla who appears from the trees and says: "It's a short-cut. Come on, Sweetheart. It's beautiful ... a secret path". Then she takes Diane's hand and leads her through the grove. The magic surrounding this female intimacy strikingly evokes, once again, Geraldine and Christabel as well as Carmilla and Laura as they wander across the forest during the night.



Fig. 3: "Laura and Carmilla".  
Michael Fitzgerald, illustration to Joseph Sheridan  
Le Fanu, "Carmilla", *The Dark Blue* (January 1872).



Fig. 4: "Camilla and Diane".  
Still from David Lynch, *Mulholland Drive*,  
2001. Universal Picture (Italy) s.r.l.

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Camilla actually embodies several figurations of ghostly femininity similar to those displayed by Carmilla and Geraldine. She appears as the tempting and devouring *lamia* with her seductive and hypnotic gaze bewitching both men and women; she also embodies the ravishing and cruel *femme fatale* under the guise of a vamp/vampire sucking blood and life out of Diane who, not by chance, becomes a melancholic ‘phantom soul’ deprived of her vitality and soundness.<sup>25</sup> As a victim, Diane kills the vampire, just like Laura does with Carmilla, but like her, she fantasizes about her return in a hallucinatory spectral projection of ‘another life’. Indeed, Diane hires a hit man to have Camilla murdered and eventually, driven mad by remorse, shoots herself in her bedroom, thus setting the scene for the discovery of her rotten body by Betty and Rita earlier in the film.

This female dead body plays an important role in the text as a figurative hinge appearing at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the film. Its ambiguous and uncanny presence is evocative of a femininity hovering between sleep and death, dreaminess and ghostliness. The film has in fact been interpreted in various ways as a dream, the first part being Diane’s long reverie of an idealised perfect world as opposed to her frustrated ‘real life’ staged in the second part; yet, the clear-cut filmic divide may allude to the projection of a ghostly dimension unfolded by a distorted specular image in which embodied female phantasms return from the world of the dead.<sup>26</sup> Betty and Rita may be the ghosts of Diane and Camilla respectively, as the latter is murdered, while the former commits suicide. Significantly, in the Club Silencio sequence which signals the gap/caesura between the two worlds, Betty/Diane identifies herself with *la llorona* (“the crying woman”), a figure that proves to be a haunting female spirit in the film. Derived from Hispanic-American folklore, *la llorona* is a spectre, the ghost of a mother who murdered her children to be with the man she loved, but was subsequently rejected by him. After killing herself because of her overwhelming remorse, she is doomed to wander in search of her lost children, always weeping. On the stage of the Club Silencio a performer called “la Llorona des Los Angeles Rebekah Del Rio” sings a sad love song, “Llorando”, and suddenly dies falling on the floor while her voice, split from the body, continues to be heard. The song moves Betty to tears because it communicates a sense of loss; the singer is ‘crying’ over a lost love object, over a lost sexual relationship (“llorando por mi amor”) and this touches Betty as if it were a repressed reminder of the murder of her lover. Like *la llorona*, Betty is a weeping ghost doomed to an irredeemable sense of guilt. Moreover, the recorded song playing beyond the death of the body is an apt metaphor for the survival of the spectral memory of the dead Rita-Camilla.

The female ghosts in *Mulholland Drive* appear as *revenants* who double lost love-objects: Camilla stands for the impossible object-cause

<sup>25</sup> The *femme fatale* is closely tied to the vampire myth. In the 1920s, the role was played in silent movies by actresses such as Theda Bara, also known as “The Vampire”: dark and sensuous, her vampirism consisted in using men’s bodies and souls for her own sexual and emotional needs. In the 1940s and 1950s, the *femme fatale* appeared in noir films as a *vamp*, short for *vampiress*, and applied to any sexually assertive woman who sought pleasure on her own terms.

<sup>26</sup> See Bianca Del Villano, “Cinema and Identity in David Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive*”, *Anglistica* 11. 1-2 (2007), 145-157; Luca Malavasi, *David Lynch. Mulholland Drive* (Torino: Lindau, 2008), 83-113.

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<sup>27</sup> According to Laplace and Pontalis, the phantasm is located at the interface between need and desire.

It is a kind of 'scene' or 'scenario' in which we find ourselves when in a kind of hypnagogic trance or second state as in a dream or reverie: "Phantasms are produced by an unconscious combination of things experienced and things heard." (Laplanche and Pontalis, "Fantasy", 32).

<sup>28</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey, Vol. 14 (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 239-258, 245.

<sup>29</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. by Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 3-30. Hereafter indicated as S.

of Diane's desire which becomes attainable only in the phantasmatic scenario played by Rita and Betty. In a psychoanalytic view, the phantasm is the very stage or setting for desire, that is, an imaginary scene which stages the unconscious desires of a subject who is present both as protagonist and spectator. The phantasm inaugurates a scene which is more real than reality, since it structures the very appearance of reality.<sup>27</sup> *Mulholland Drive* actually shows the unreality of reality itself, as the two dimensions of dreaminess/ghostliness and sleep/death continually overlap, while Betty/Diane as a desiring subject is both protagonist and spectator, appearing indeed as the first female ghost that acts as starter for the narration.

In *Mulholland Drive* this phantasmatic mise-en-scène is closely linked to melancholia and loss. In this respect, it is useful to draw on Giorgio Agamben's reworking of Freud's theories on melancholia. Freud distinguishes melancholia from mourning by considering the latter as the 'normal' form of grieving that results from the withdrawal of the libido from its attachments to the lost loved object and its transference to a new one. In contrast, melancholia is 'pathological,' since rather than investing the libido onto another object, the melancholic narcissistically identifies with the abandoned object by 'incorporating' that other into the very structure of ego. Yet, this theory hides a paradox in relation to melancholia. Unlike mourning, melancholia is difficult to explain since it is not clear what has been lost.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to this theoretical aporia and 'pathological scenario', Agamben's investigations highlight the erotic constellation and the role of the phantasm eluded in Freud's account of the dynamic of melancholic incorporation.<sup>29</sup> Agamben emphasizes melancholia's relationship with the erotic impulse, which engages melancholia in an "ambiguous commerce with phantasms" (S, 24). He rejects identification of melancholia with paralysis or the impoverishment of the ego, perceiving rather incorporation as an imaginative capacity that confers upon the lost object a "phantasmagorical reality" that opens "a space for the existence of the unreal" and marks off "a scene in which the ego may enter into relation with it and attempt an appropriation such as no other possession could rival and no loss possibly threaten" (S, 20). From this perspective, Diane is a melancholic subject/ghost who holds an ambivalent relation with her love object, Camilla, who assumes a phantomatic status as she is at once real and unreal, incorporated and lost, affirmed/possessed and denied/killed. The first part of the film is, thus, the phantasmatic resolution of Diane's desire which transforms Camilla, the impossible object, into Rita, the enjoyable and accessible lover, thereby providing Diane with an escape from a loss which reality affirms but the subject must deny because it is too unbearable. Rita and Betty appear, therefore, as "phantasms of desire", considered not so much in the Freudian sense of "hallucinatory



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wishful psychoses” conjured by the desire to avoid the reality test,<sup>30</sup> as rather in Agamben’s eroticized reformulation:

<sup>30</sup> Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia”, 244.

The imaginary loss that so obsessively occupies the melancholic tendency has no real object, because its funereal strategy is directed to the impossible capture of the phantasm. The lost object is but the appearance that desire creates for its own courting of the phantasm, and the introjection of the libido is only one of the facets of a process in which what is real loses its reality so that what is unreal may become real. (S, 25)

This intense turn away from reality by withdrawing the libido inward unfolds another epiphanic realm of experience in which the lost object “can be possessed only with the provision that it be lost forever” (S, 26). Rita/Camilla and Betty/Diane, then, emerge from their “interior mute crypt in order to enter into a new and fundamental dimension” (S, 25) which allows them to escape the deadlock of desire and share a full feminine *jouissance*.

Actually, it is this phantasmatic realm of experience that marks the point of origin for narrative. The film begins with a few blurry shapes of human bodies dancing a jitterbug; out of this field, the triumphant face of Betty emerges as a ghost in a halo of white light. Her ghostly appearance as the protagonist of this scene signals a wish-fulfillment dream that sets the film’s narrative in motion. Significantly, *Mulholland Drive* shows a circular frame, as the last scene of the movie shows the fading and overlapping phantasmatic faces of Betty/Diane, Rita/Camilla with a blond wig (like Laura and Carmilla, Betty/Diane identifies with Rita/Camilla till she becomes her) and a scary monster/bum figuring, maybe, Diane’s ‘diabolical’ unconscious desires.

The disturbing feminized tramp is in fact the metaphor of the leftover of all discourses, “the epiphany of the unattainable” (S, 26), that which cannot be taken in charge by language and yet remains. It may allude to the unrepresentability of death itself shown in the guise of a monstrous ghostly femininity. The word uttered in the last scene by a blue-haired woman sitting in an empty theatre – once again a ghostly femininity – whispering “Silencio” may be understood as the expression of this ineffability, while it also signifies the silence of the dead who metaphorically return to repose in the mysterious blue box.