Opening the Box: Narratives of Fantasy, Desire, and Marginalized Women in Theocritus' *Idyll* 2 and *Mulholland Drive*.

Theocritus' *Idyll 2* tells the twisting tale of a woman on the margins of society whose heartbreak drives her to nefarious actions. While hardly new grounds for ancient myth to tread upon, the sympathy granted to Simaetha, a young woman who lives on her own and practices witchcraft, is unusual, even for modern standards. Some two thousand years later, David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* presents a similar protagonist, Diane Selwyn, whose heartbreak drives her to self-delusion and dark, other-worldly deeds reflecting those of Theocritus' Simaetha. These women are not only similar in character, but they follow strikingly parallel winding narratives that operate within a complex labyrinth of Lacanian symbolism and generic similarities that makes them both compelling and informative to compare. My Lacanian analysis of Theocritus *Idyll 2* attempts to draw out similarities between the Hellenistic poem and similar Lacanian theories (cf. especially Cook, 2011; Love, 2004; MacCabe, 1996; McGowan, 2004) with regards to Lynch's neo-noir-horror-thriller. In so doing, I hope to expound on the unique connection these two pieces share, and the manner in which they underscore the particular position society puts marginalized women in when their defeated hopes lead them to desperate actions.

The narrative of both *Mulholland Drive* and *Idyll 2* is a-linear to the point of being almost difficult to follow—notoriously so, in the case of the former. Moreover, both follow a similar structure of moving from a fantastic world created by the protagonist into reality, which is then punctuated by traumatic flashbacks seen from the protagonist's perspective. This structure lends itself naturally to the formulae of Lacanian analysis. Both Simaetha and Diane create a fantasy for themselves to escape the unfathomable pain of the Real. To avoid confrontation of the

unachievability of *jouissance* in their respective *objets petits a*, both women plunge themselves into self-created worlds of denial: Simaetha turns to witchcraft, while Diane creates an entire alternate fantasy universe, imagining herself as the naïve and winsome Betty. Using Lacanian analysis, especialy that of MacCabe, 1996; Love, 2004; McGowan, 2004; and McDowell, 2005, and applying it to parallels I observe in *Idyll* 2, I will demonstrate how both Lynch and Theocritus portray women whose Lacanian plight creates a deep and effective *pathos* for their respective audiences. In the end, both Diane and Simaetha find confrontation of the Real so unbearable that they resort to the same solution. Both women have their own literal and metaphorical "boxes" to open; both "boxes" appear first to contain a fantastical mystery—one which allows these women to sustain their fantasy, via love spells or dream worlds. Later, however, both boxes are revealed to contain instruments of murder, in a misguided attempt to avoid confrontation of the Real via murder of the *objet petit a*. Tragically, this physical elimination has no bearing on the *pathos* of desire: both women are doomed to continue suffering from their unachievable desires. Diane Selwyn performs these consequences on-screen, with her suffering, now punctuated by an unbearable guilt, ultimately leading her to suicide, but we are able to surmise that Simaetha's own future cannot hold a "happy ending." We suffer as we watch these women because the *pathos* born of their Lacanian plight leaves no possible solution to their dilemma.

Neither Simaetha nor Diane is famous; neither is mythical or divine; both live on the margins of society, alone; both are in love with an impossible paramour. Most importantly, both demonstrate the painful tragedy that befalls anyone who cannot accept the Lacanian reality of an impossibility of *jouissance* in their *objet petit a.* The very hint of the confrontation of the Real throughout both *Mulholland Drive* and *Idyll 2* drives both protagonists to create elaborate

structures around themselves for self-preservation from a realization that would, and indeed shall, destroy them. David Lynch and Theocritus both choose women whose story is not particularly unique; however, the manner in which they treat their stories, the *pathos* they lend to women whose story is still so often ignored, creates two artistic depictions of a very real, heartbreaking facet of humanity in decidedly similar ways.

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