

# portfolio.

J A M E S  
D A V I D  
D O N A H U E

2023

LITERATURE | FILM



# about.

James Donahue earned his *Bachelor of Arts in English* with a concentration in *Creative Writing* and a minor in *Film Studies* from Eastern Connecticut State University in 2023. He hopes to continue research/teaching/creating at graduate school.

## Creative

James is a writer and filmmaker who enjoys leading collectives of creative individuals in producing cross-media works. His focus is *cinematic and literary with directorial/editorial* expertise.

## Critical

James believes in a necessary critical engagement with the Arts and Media and has specialized in the *literary and cinematic forms of Modernism and Post-Modernism*.

## Structural

James is always interested in the intersection of the *Arts, Public Policy, and Higher Education*.

Creating alone is not enough. James hopes to influence the institutions that interact with the Humanities through a diversified career.

# sections.

- RESUME
- CRITICAL ESSAYS
- POETRY
- PROSE
- SCREENPLAYS
- FILM STILLS

**resume.**

# JAMES DAVID DONAHUE

Film, Education, Digital & Print Media

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Eastern Connecticut State University

B.A. English | Concentration in Creative Writing | Minor in Film Studies

2023

Specialization in the Literary Modernists | Post-war Cinema of the French New Wave

## Writing | Editing

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D & D Auto Works

Social Media Intern

05/2019 - 09/2019

Managed social media accounts. Responsible for generating web content, designing advertisements, company signage, and digital communication with customers.

Chase Reiner SEO Agency

Copywriter

05/2020 - 09/2020

Internship with digital marketing agency. Responsible for writing product reviews and other copy.

Eastern Exposure & Here Literary Journal

Assistant Editor

01/2022 - 12/2023

Editorial internship of international literary journal. Sorted through submissions and curated pieces for publication. Assisted in digital typesetting and page layout.

"Acting is Believing" ECSU Production

Associate Writer | Camera Operator

09/2022 - 12/2022

Served in the writer's room contributing material to the multi-medial theatrical production, Acting is Believing, as well as operating a live-feed camera under the lead cinematographer.

## Visual Media

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"Home is Where you Hang Your Hat" Independent Film Production

First Assistant Camera

01/2022 - 06/2022

Managed and organized various departments of student-led film production. Assisted the lead cinematographer with B-Roll camera, lighting equipment, and dolly.

Windham Veteran's Community Center

Video Marketing Producer

10/2022 - 02/2023

Internship in producing video marketing material for a non-profit organization. Wrote, produced, and directed video material including Senate appeals and a digital marketing campaign under the direction of the Chamber of Commerce.

"SOUNDS" Independent Film Production

Director | Writer | Producer

11/2022 - 02/2023

Wrote, produced, and directed a 25-minute short film with a non-union cast and crew. Official selection at several 2023 independent film festivals. IMDB Qualified.

ECSU School of Business

Video Producer

01/2022 - 07/2023

Led the video production team on promotional an archival work for the business alumni association under the employ of the department chair.

Media Services Department ECSU

Media Assistant

09/2022 - 12/2023

Assistant to Lisa Houghtaling in charge of Video Production for the Media Services Department. Responsibilities include graphic design, working with departments to take contracts and produce needed media for ECSU events.

## Education

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The Caveny Family

Child Caregiver | Tutor

05/2022 - 09/2022

Cared for three children aged seven, twelve, and fifteen. Prepared meals & managed their calendars. Tutored in math, reading, and writing skills by creating engaging activities based on individual skill level.

Willimantic Public Schools

Volunteer

01/2022 - 12/2023

Helped to coordinate and run an after-school program for children grades 1-12. Worked to configure activities and tutoring plans that help build critical thinking skills.

ECSU

Teaching Assistant

01/2023 - 12/2023

Teaching Assistant for undergraduate-level courses including seminars and workshops. Led workshops, organized coursework, graded papers, and generally assisted professors.

## Awards

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Member of Sigma Tau Delta Honor Society

Recipient of the David and Janet Philips Scholarship

Awarded Resident of the Year for Academic Achievement 2022 - 2023

Eastern Connecticut State University Dean's List 2022-2023

## Skills

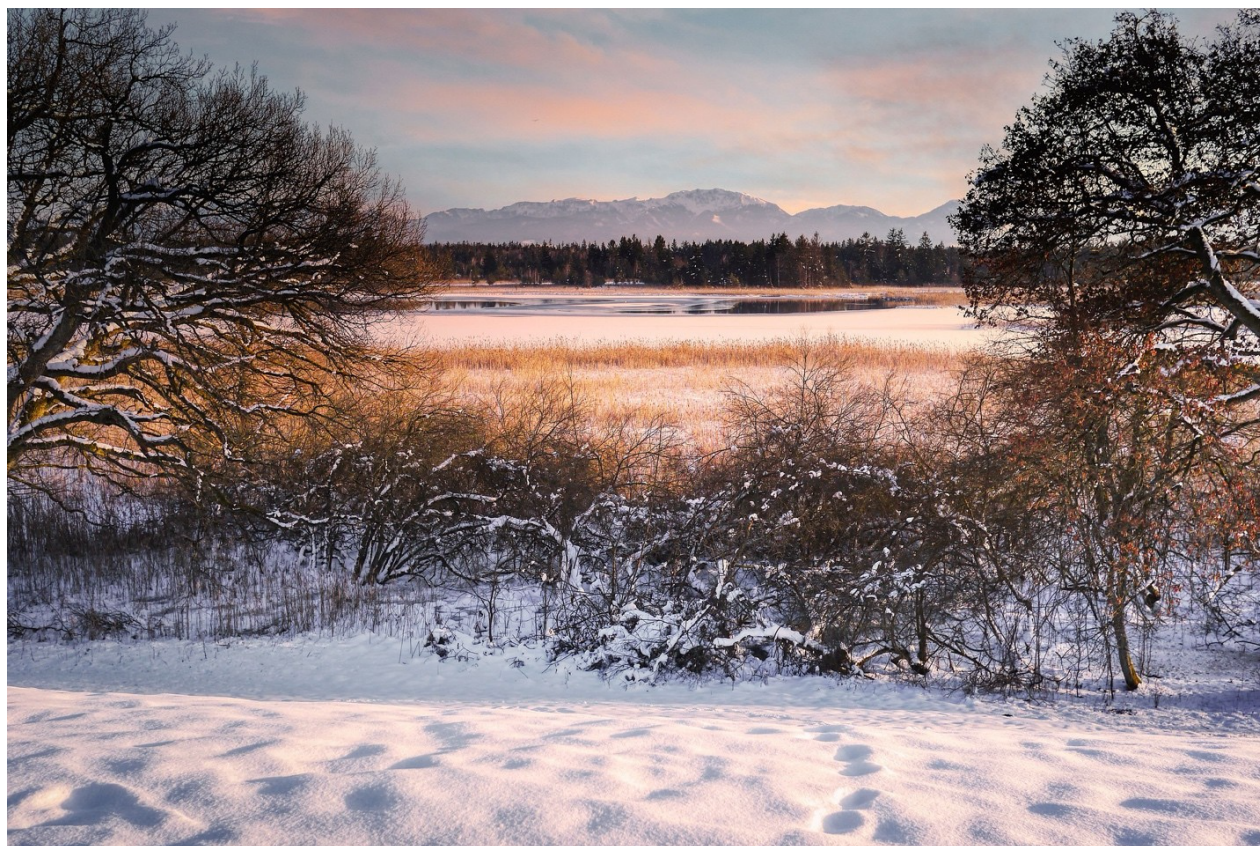
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Intensive Writing | Verbal Communication | Marketing | Research and Analysis | Microsoft Office | Adobe Suite | Avid Media Composer | Davinci Resolve

# critical essays.

- Existential Dread in the Literary Self:  
A Thinking and Analysis Report on Robert Frost's  
"Desert Places"
- Auteur Evolution:  
A Comparative Study of Adaptational Techniques by  
American Cinema Directors and Their European  
Predecessors

Eastern Connecticut State University



*(Fietzfotos)*

Existential Dread in the Literary Self:  
A Thinking and Analysis Report on Robert Frost's "Desert Places"

James Grilley  
ENG 227: Poetry  
Dr. Miriam Chirico  
28 April 2023



### Part One: Data Collection

In the stage of data-collection, there seemed a prevalent common reading of the poem's themes of both isolation and loneliness. While interpretations of the poem as a declaration of loneliness were expounded in much of the comments, some offered an interpretation of the central metaphor, the desert place, as something soothing and reflective. In her original comments, Zoe Calhoun wrote:

“In the second stanza, we are told the narrator is feeling lonely. The third stanza alludes to loneliness as well, describing the snow as expressionless. The fourth stanza ends with the emptiness trying to scare him, and the speaker's reluctance. He has his own desert places that allow him to be content. My interpretation is that the poem is about mental security. Regarding the title, a desert can also be isolating and lonesome, thus a surface parallel in the symbols of climate emerges. However, a desert is inherently calm and warm where a snowstorm is cold and chaotic,” (Calhoun 2023).

Despite the variation in personal reader response to the text, nearly all students seem to agree that the poem "Desert Places," is “A powerful exploration of the themes of loneliness, isolation, and the meaning of existence,” (Wrona 2023). These patterns in literary interpretation clearly imply a textual causation. I will attempt to mine the formal elements of the text to derive not so much a new or obfuscated “meaning,” but empirically sound explanations for the largely unified reading and in doing so, outline a structural interpretation of the poem that accounts for and refutes these previous dissenting claims. Frost's work is often deceptively simple; however, there are concretized elements at work that direct the audience toward an understanding of the subjective experience sketched on the page. I aim to support a theory of the work with language contained in “Desert Places,” and largely eschew biographic or historical contexts.

## Part Two: Research

External research in support of this analysis will be light. I will be primarily concerned with using credible accumulative writings on the history of literary criticism such as the *Norton Guide to American Literature*, to help clearly define the formal elements and poetic devices employed by Robert Frost and to which I will be pointing. Upon cold reading, “Desert Places” does not appear to be a text that is heavy on allusions. However, there is a certain awareness and intellectual base on display that, while perhaps not employing modernist techniques of translation, quotation, or overt remediation, is indicative of certain prevailing modes of thought from Frost’s time. Though the poetic address of this abstract concept—dread in the face of a vast, unexplained, and finite consciousness—is not an immediate citation of a particular work or philosophical school, such as the then contemporary Existentialism, I submit that such a well-defined observation *preceding* certain seminal contributions in academia and the cultural consciousness would be deeply implausible. So, while there may not be much to directly research in terms of historical/contextual information, Frost and his work with “Desert Places” are the product of a cultural attitude in which I can attempt to situate my analysis.

Part Three: Thinking Routine

*Reporter's Notebook:*

|                                | <u>Clear</u>   | <u>Need to Check</u>  |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| <u>Facts &amp; Events</u>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaker is on a walk on a snowy evening.</li> <li>• Speaker is passing a field covered in snow.</li> <li>• Speaker is observing the harsh environment however</li> <li>• Speaker is (physically) unaffected by the environment.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the physical descriptions doing in this poem?</li> <li>• Why is snow important?</li> <li>• What is the quality of this writing on the natural world that helps evoke a feeling through signifiers as would a physical walk-in nature (the signified)?</li> </ul>  |
| <u>Thoughts &amp; Feelings</u> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaker describes a clear sense of self who is located in physical space and who is feeling feelings of loneliness.</li> <li>• The speaker is engaged in observation and contemplation about his place in the world.</li> <li>• Speaker alludes to his perhaps punishing sense of consciousness.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the speaker's musings consistent with solipsism? Is the speaker alone of human connection or does the speaker feel an even less tangible aloneness in his sense of aliveness and awareness?</li> <li>• Is the speaker confident and accepting of the unknowable, unsolvable and paradoxical nothingness of the universe and his life?</li> </ul> |

#### Part Four: Essay

“Desert Places,” a poem written in 1936, follows the rhyming pattern of *AABA* across four stanzas consisting of 16 lines. Each line of the four quatrains is written in iambic pentameter. The poem introduces concepts of loneliness and the connection between humanity and nature from a limited first-person perspective that firmly establishes a self. Opening lines depict the protagonist walking through an empty field on a snowy evening, surrounded by woods: “Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast/ In a field I looked into going past,” (Frost, lines 1-2). There is use of “I” as soon as the second line as well as the colloquial “oh” to imply an emotional response. Frost’s speaker observes the “loneliness” of the field directly in line 8. The claim I will make is that “Desert Places” and its speaker muse that the universe lacks inherent meaning—a truth unearthed through a contemplative and literal nature walk while reflecting on loneliness, suffering, and desperation—but posit that he can populate the universe with his own contrived meaning or purpose, rather than being bound to cold dispassion ruled by death and separateness. This is illustrated by the acute awareness of the human condition telegraphed in the final lines. The protagonist’s experience in the field initially overwhelms him with hopelessness, but the poem restores his sense of self and his relationship with nature. The poem is tightly controlled and concise with language that extends what many Realist and Naturalist poets have done with projecting feelings onto nature and blurring the lines between outer and inner. Using the sound-focused formal elements of assonance, consonance, and alliteration, together with heavy paradox, metaphor, and careful imagery, Robert Frost creates a lyric and cacophonous poem narrated by a self who is compelled by a deep personal loneliness to contemplate the grander implications of humanity’s isolation in the natural world and question which “desert places” are more intimidating, the physical or metaphysical. The poet, in typical fashion, marries the themes

and perspective of naturalist writing with a modernist's more colloquial language and self-conscious existential dread.

The title of the work is a metaphor in which “desert” takes on the adjective form, “uninhabited and desolate” as the more literal “of or referring to a desert” is incongruous with any other language used in the poem and there exists no evidence I can parse to suggest the title is an imperative sentence as in, “(you) abandon places.” The only use of the phrase within the text informs the reader of its stature as a symbol, again in the final lines, “They cannot scare me with their empty spaces/.../ I have it in me so much nearer home/ To scare myself with my own desert places,” (Frost, lines 13, 15, 16) in which the speaker takes ownership of the mystified vastness and situates it within his mind—conscious or sub-conscious—as distinct from his body through the use of emotional indicators such as fear. Whether the ultimate question implied by the central metaphor—as from “uninhabited” and “vast” can be extrapolated “unknown”—is one of moral or spiritual consideration within the human mind is not explicitly made clear. The speaker subtly questions his identity and place in the world: rich descriptive detail immerses the reader in the contemplative and solitary walk (no companion or secondary perspective is ever alluded to) and Frost’s diction, which is at once inclusive, “The woods around it have it - it is theirs, /All animals are smothered in their lairs.” (lines 5-6), and distancing (variations of the word “lonely” are used four times), serves to nurture the impression of the speaker as “other.”

For Frost, setting is an invaluable component of the poem. His language and themes are often concretized in a distinctive sense of place. This poem is set on a snowy winter night, a season and climate that traditionally evokes associations of loneliness, emptiness, emotional coldness, or even death. The speaker passes and considers a field, a barren and desolate landscape that reinforces the sense of loneliness but also grand separation and distance from his

possible destination, “In a field I looked into going past, / And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,” (Frost, lines 2-3) which foreshadows the more cosmic dread found in the latter lines. The observations of the field and surroundings convey a deep sense of isolation and disconnection from the world, a feeling that is heightened by the stark and unforgiving winter landscape. Two lines end in the word snow which, for a 16-line poem, belies authorial intent. As Brian Russell put it in his analysis, “The poem has a curious rhyme scheme. This is one of the few poems I’ve read that I understood to be AABA CCDC EEFE GGHG. I think the off-rhyme third line evokes the feeling of isolation hinted at,” (2023); in fact, the third lines of stanzas one and three both end with B, the word “snow.” Furthermore, the poem seems further intent on engendering such an atmosphere when, in closing in on the final stanza, the vocabulary of the piece is elevated from the climate and geography of New England winter into something more celestial and speculative. The language expands our setting while shrinking our speaker and surrogate. Again, this brief poem is hardly allusive, and it makes no overtly secular claims about reality; however, it speaks not of heavens but of “empty spaces / Between stars - on stars where no human race is,” (Frost, lines 13-14). The poem implies contemplation which while perhaps not empirically unheard of in antiquity, is rendered in language that implies an awareness post Sartre, Nietzsche, Freud, and Einstein.

Frost’s use of vivid and specific imagery invites the reader into a subjective state. Images such as the “ground almost covered smooth in snow”(Frost line 3), “a few weeds and stubble showing” (Frost line 4), and “smothered” (Frost line 6) animals, creates a bleak and desolate landscape, emphasizing the emptiness and loneliness of the landscape while subtly conditioning the reader toward its eventual parallel. The kinesthetic quality conveyed through the line “snow falling and night falling fast” (Frost line 1), allows the reader to experience the coldness of the snow and the isolation of the night while seeding anxiety through use of the verb and a syntax that sends the tongue tripping along

the lines. These seeds reach a climactic invocation in line twelve where Frost personifies the dusky pasture as “expressionless.” Paradoxical sensations of touch are also evoked with words such as “smooth” and “stubble.” Considerable alliteration and assonance contribute to the lyrical mood and tone of “Desert Places.” Repeated use of the *f* sound in “falling, falling, fast, fast and field” emphasizes the coldness and emptiness of a winter night, as well as the speaker's sense of loneliness and isolation by approximating the frigid stuttering of someone with a deep chill. Similarly, the *s* sound in “scare, spaces, stars, stars, so and scare” illuminate the self, inward, and give a breathy and vulnerable personality to the bleak and desolate atmosphere of the poem. I find it in keeping with a near meditative (if only by cold-induced docility) walk and metaphysical exploration that Frost should linguistically experiment with a hypnotic or sonorous quality supported by instances of alliteration, such as “smooth, snow and stubble” and “expression and express,” as well as the repetition of long vowels and diphthongs, such as in “snow, going, almost, snow and showing” and “lonely, loneliness, lonely, snow and no.” The words can *feel* heavy in the mouth. Consonance in words such as “field, ground, covered, around, smothered and spirited” and “weeds, woods, theirs, animals, lairs, includes and unawares” creates a sense of desolation and bleakness, emphasizing the emptiness and barrenness of the landscape. Furthermore, the sound devices used in the poem also serve to establish its rhythm, which is urgent—the repetition of the *s* and *z* sounds in words such as “spaces, stars, stars, is and places” and “loneliness, less, whiteness and express.” The urgency is punctuated and contradicted by the lack of an explicit destination for the speaker, perhaps entrenching the reader in his desperate search for meaning. The residual impression is of a speaker resigned to fill the emptiness with language, if only in the interim.

Several more ancillary formal elements are at play in “Desert Places.” Frost presents a

contrast between snow and night, concepts that work together to silence sensation and obliterate perception. The snow works against the dark, providing a ghastly light to see through it, while the falling darkness gives urgency to the need to see. Similarly, the weeds and stubble create a crosscurrent of meaning, with the stubble hinting at man's presence and the weeds reminding us of nature's persistence in reclaiming the artificial. The poem also explores the isolation and loneliness of man in a complex and pluralistic natural world, where the blank whiteness becomes a landmark of nothingness by which realities are known. The poem employs transferred epithets and puns like "night falling" (Frost line 1) and "benighted snow" (Frost line 11) to add these layers of meaning. Personification is used to present the barren landscape surrounding the speaker as a character. Repetition is also used in the poem, with words like "falling," "fast," "loneliness," "lonely," "snow," "no," "nothing," and "stars" repeated to reinforce the poet's exigency. Hyperbole is used when the speaker claims that "they cannot scare me with their empty spaces / between stars," (lines 13-14) which aggrandizes the narrator and emphasizes the importance of a specifically personal desert or Jungian "Self." Finally, the use of understatement when the speaker says, "they cannot scare me" (Frost line 13) emphasizes his deeply realized stoicism.



The techniques enumerated in this analysis assemble my concept of Frost's poem as a terrifically composed preamble to the deafening declaration put forth in the final line. Neither of the parallel subjects to which the speaker refer can, under scrutiny of this evidence, be regarded as warm or comforting. "To scare myself with my own desert places," (Frost, line 16) refers to the "desert places" both within and without and suggests a poignant loneliness of the soul which trumps even the dispassionate chaos of nature. Every image and every sound chosen carefully are conjoined toward this rhetoric goal. In the first stanza, snow and nightfall are described together; the second stanza shows how all life is erased; the third sums up nature, and, crucially, excludes the narrator as observer. If any direct references are made by the poet, they surely come in the final stanza where a keen eye can detect shades of the French philosopher, Blaise Pascal's 1607 aphorism: "The eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me," (206) along with the possible remediation of Einstein's then recent rebuke of quantum-physics as being "Spooky action at a distance," (698). Robert Frost uses the regional vernacular of a dedicated nature poet to weave deeper insights into a work that shares a lineage beginning with the metaphysical poets and continued popularly, in his time, with the modernists. Sound-based literary techniques such as assonance, consonance, and alliteration, along with powerful paradoxes, metaphors, and vivid imagery are deftly layered into a clean 16 lines and amount to a poignant and dissonant poem. The speaker, driven by an intense sense of literal and metaphysical solitude, reflects on the frightening immenseness of the natural and unknowable world which, by his ultimate assessment, pales against the vast and inscrutable condition that is human consciousness.

Part Five: Works Cited/ Consulted

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James Grilley

Dr. David Pellegrini

Theatre 351

31 March 2023

Auteur Evolution:

A Comparative Study of Adaptational Techniques by American Cinema Directors and Their  
European Predecessors

### **Abstract**

This paper presents a comparative analysis between the adaptational techniques of two commercial American directors as they respectively adapt the cinematic conventions of two independent European directors. Primarily, I examine the Jean-Luc Godard film *A Bout de Souffle* (*Breathless*, 1960), and its Stanley Kubrick led, spiritual adaptation, *Lolita* (1962); as well as, Ingmar Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* (1972) and the famous Woody Allen Bergman pastiche, *Interiors* (1978). The paper investigates the less conventional modes of adaptation which range from production technique, thematic convention, to cinematographic language, and the unifying philosophy of cinema that guides a creative. Neither set of films refer to a textual adaptation between auteurs but rather a blend of influences and allusions that by volume and focus amount to a product which constitutes adaptation.

## **Terminology**

This paper is about the adaptation of directorial styles in cinema where a line of succession can be followed from auteur to auteur in a way that constitutes a reconfiguration or representation of ideas or techniques and exceeds inspiration and influence. Because the demarcation of boundaries in the terminology can become abstracted or imprecise, we will work with both restrictive definitions as well as statute of limitations for which those definitions are applicable. For instance, it may be unreasonable to say that every film produced in 2022 which used a close-up—which was surely every film produced in 2022—was an adaptation of the directorial styles of D.W. Griffith. Instead, we will attempt, whenever possible, to produce documentation of adaptational intent or, at least, empirically reasonable connective tissue between texts. Furthermore, the focus of this analysis will attempt to exceed homage as homage is often retrospective and incidental; homage is not often worth any structural integrity within the piece. Parody is a more immediate, reactionary form of adaptation which we will deal with only where it initiates and leads to a more radical assimilation of style.

The context of ‘directorial style’ transcends both textual and visual, incorporates the performative, and even accounts for a unifying theory of filmmaking that spans careers. For the purposes of this article, we will limit those considerations to the visual presentation of ideas or ‘cinematographic style,’ the textual or thematic elements—most notably in translation of a screenplay into a film—or the direction of performers in a scene. I will also make reference to the ‘cinematic language,’ most often in the context of Jean-Luc Godard and *la Nouvelle Vague*. The ‘language’ of cinema refers to the signs and signified; or, the way that the formal elements—images and sounds—are arranged according to some grammatical order via editing, including

cutting, layering, voice-over, and more. At a conference held in lozan 1979 concerning the potential for cinematic research, Godard said, “An audio-visual form of criticism relies on the “capacity to compare two things, not to compare one thing with the memory one has thereof; to compare two images and, in the moment when these are seen, to indicate certain relations.”

This paper will look at two pairs of directors. Though the pairs themselves are not historically independent of one another or without consideration of the other—certainly there were cultural overlaps or even conflicts—the paper will largely examine two instances of an early, European director lending style, technique, or text to be adapted by a later, American director. Additionally, the paper will subsequently compare the tools and techniques of adaptation itself as employed by the two American directors. Those tools being most primarily the intermedial and paratextual with infrequent detours into the remedial. The academic potential in comparing the strategy of adaptation is that the process is further illuminating of the artists’ cinematic contributions overall; the strategy is one which is bifurcated at the place of a unifying theory of Cinema. The two pairs of directors in this analysis are representative of two unique and conflicting schools of filmmaking: social filmmaking and philosophical filmmaking. Both stem largely from the critical writings of the Cahier du Cinema and the works of French philosophers who developed a means of scholarly film appreciation. The techniques were derived from the prevailing Marxist criticisms and Deconstructivist criticisms most commonly reserved for ethical, economic, or literary application.

## **Methodology**

The philosophical filmmakers will be represented in this paper by Ingmar Bergman and Woody Allen and the adaptational characteristics of Bergman’s *Cries and Whispers* to Allen’s *Interiors*.

The latter is largely adapting the themes and characterizations of the former in such a way that is present at the textual stage; however, I will show how deliberate efforts have been made by Allen, with his trusted cinematographer, Gordon Willis (who shot *Annie Hall*), to tie those thematic adaptations together more concretely in the visual language. In an interview conducted by Mark Kermode, Allen reveals that he was “A late teenager” when first coming across *Summer with Monika* and some other, early Bergman works, and describes them as “Clearly superior to other people’s movies.” He continues with a rather telling impression of Bergman’s films, “The fact that he’s got a mind and an intellect, and the films are about something and they’re substantive and they’re philosophical and they’re profound on a human level, that’s all great; but, he’s first and foremost an entertainer,” (Allen, 2006). This supports the notion that the influence of the Swedish director has permeated the career of the American who began as a comedian and comedic actor. The influence, however, only demonstrably transcends homage into the territory of adaptation after Woody Allen had found some success and refined his own techniques. The influence only becomes adaptation with the film whose stylistic appropriations are so ubiquitous and intentional as to nearly seem an academic exercise: *Interiors*.

In contrast, Stanley Kubrick—who, together with Jean-Luc Godard will represent the social filmmakers—was already a working director who had found great commercial success with *Spartacus* before cultivating the central symbiosis analyzed in this paper. However, despite his commercial success in Hollywood as well as a suspected wealth of ancillary film knowledge, I posit that it wasn’t until a production technique derived from that of La Nouvelle Vague and the adaptation of that technique into the Hollywood system that Kubrick was able to develop his own signature style and voice. This radical new style of filmmaking that made international waves with Godard’s *Breathless* seemed to cement the director’s disillusionment with the Hollywood format.

I will primarily consider the production techniques and cinematic language which Kubrick had adapted from *Breathless* in his own adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov's seminal novel, *Lolita*. The method of textual adaptation itself—from novel to screen—is of peripheral concern as nearly every Kubrick film was an adaptation of a novel or short story; in fact, many Hollywood productions pre-1960's were adaptations, though, adhered to an adaptive mode which was grounded in the literal and concerned with streamlining a text of its more abstract, literary qualities: think, *Frankenstein*. The films of the French New Wave were also often derived from novels; however, the films themselves retained the literary quality of the often-post-modern texts they were adapting which, though it sacrificed fidelity, redefined adaptation from page to screen. This adaptational technique is one which greatly defined Kubrick's heavily abstracted, narratively ambiguous, non-linear, and surreal-adjacent storytelling which lasted for the duration of his career.

### **Note on the Directors**

Both Ingmar Bergman and Jean-Luc Godard were born to wealthy, and noteworthy, Protestant parents. Bergman's mother was a Swedish nurse; Godard's father a Swiss physician. Jean-Luc's mother was daughter of the founder of Banque Paribas (currently BNP Paribas) and granddaughter to respected theologian, Adolphe Monod. In the early 20th century, Ingmar Bergman's father served as private minister to King Gustav V of Sweden. Each young director had his own unique experience of the second world war; Bergman was seduced by Nazism very early on before being dispelled of its ideology by the war; and the younger Godard experienced a clandestine movement between either side of Lake Geneva during the German occupation of France. Woody Allen and Stanley Kubrick were born less than six years apart in New York city. They were both raised in the Bronx and come from Jewish descent, though they similarly went on to be fairly vocal

about their respective atheistic views. In fact, each director researched in this paper had at one point or another and in response to the critical reception of their body of work, reflected on an influential ‘loss of faith.’ Bergman perhaps most overtly deals with questions of theology within his films. Godard, though popularly adherent to Maoism, would, most cheekily, at a press junket for his most overtly religious film, *Hail Mary*, be quoted saying, “Cinema replaces the gaze of the Gods.” Finally, in terms of the work, each of these directors share an active participation in ‘Le politique des auteurs’ or ‘The politics of authors,’ which is a theory of cinema in which the director is not only a managerial position, but the primary creative author of the final work. This concept need not always manifest dictatorially. Kubrick famously yearned for control; however, Allen seems simply to want the autonomy to focus on atmosphere and ideas over entertainment. Though they share this common DNA, each pair represents, whether anecdotally—as is the case with Allen V. Godard—or not, diametrically opposite ends of the spectrum which share some surface approximations with what is to be considered conservative (Bergman/Allen) or progressive (Godard/Kubrick).

## **Comparative Data**

### *Bergman x Allen*

*Interiors* (1978) is a film directed by Woody Allen, which tells the story of a family torn apart by their mother's mental breakdown and subsequent suicide attempt. The film is notable for its stark, cold, minimalist aesthetic, which many critics have noted as being influenced by the films of Ingmar Bergman, particularly his 1972 film, *Cries and Whispers*. Mickey Keating called *Interiors* a “Case study in the organic growth of cinematic language and its effect of subsequent



generations,” (2017) and goes on to warmly refer to the film as holding a seed of “apprenticeship” where Bergman is the master and Allen the apprentice. Other critics weren’t so kind.

However, the writer/director’s appreciation for Bergman does not begin and end with *Interiors*. In July 1968, thirty-three-year-old Woody Allen, then a burgeoning comedy writer and occasional stand-up, penned a one-act play, “Death Knocks” for *The New Yorker* in which he parodies *The Seventh Seal*. On screen, the young director was making reference to his idol as early as *Love & Death*, in which both *Wild Strawberries* and *The Seventh Seal* are comically alluded to. By *Annie Hall*, it had become clear that Allen was an intellectual comic who wanted to address philosophical themes—most clearly existentialism and even nihilism—in his work, finding great success in the juxtapositions of a deeply contemplative and neurotic ego battling a juvenile and sex crazed id. Bert Cardullo sardonically refers to Oscar winning film and its counterpart, *Manhattan* (1979), as “Seriocomic” (394) which “Entertain as they confront” what Allen considers to be “Big” ideas. In fact, in extreme retrospective, it might be reasonable suggest with some degree of objectivity that Allen is most successful when he is engaged in what might be known as tragicomedy; or, a form in which, as auteur in the European style, neither facet of his own artistic filter need be suppressed in service of either the content or style. Regardless, it seems clear to me that the common critical consensus of *Interiors*, which is poor, is not simply asserting that it is without the comedian’s right to produce a work which is wholly dramatic or wholly art-house, as it may most readily appear, but that the work is more derivative than it is original and therefore missing an essential ingredient that makes Woody Allen films work. However, if we recontextualize the film as a work of adaptation, as is more than implied by the director when he says in his biography, “I’m not sure any American film maker makes the kind of movie I want to make. I don’t want to do films like *Bonnie and Clyde* or *Mean Streets* or *Badlands*... To me, serious

American movies always have one foot in entertainment - and I like more personal drama, though there may not be a market for it. The drama I like is what you see in the plays of O'Neill and Strindberg and Ibsen - and in foreign films' (p. 173), then effort seems more like an autodidactic film school exercise in which Allen attempts to stretch and evolve as a creator.

In a press conference regarding the funding of *Cries and Whispers*—which was, in a way, crowdfunded before crowdfunding existed—Bergman mentions that the color red was chosen for the interiors of the sisters' childhood mansion because he always imagined that red was the color of the soul. *Interiors* then is more austere and distances with its muted earth tones and extensive greys and whites. Throughout *Whispers*, there are extensive shots which linger on a close-up; the lighting is dramatically suited to the subject's face; and, the surrounding lighting has been almost unnaturally reduced to near blackness in such a way that isolates the face and sequesters the character. Gordon Willis adapts the distinctive proclivity for letting faces dominate a shot; however, the characters are often situated beside a window and bathed in a hot, white light. Both Agnes's mansion and Arthur's summer home feel like different interpretations of purgatory and, thematically, the resolution of these musings is no less bleak in the Allen than in Bergman. I reject Dan Fainaru's claim that Allen "asked director of photography Gordon Willis to copy Sven Nykvist's work in *Cries and Whispers*" (2). Or at least that the idea is reductive and inconsiderate of nuance. Joyce proved the merit in reassembling a form under new contexts; a "frustrated intellectual desperately trying to assert himself," (Fainaru 3) while facing pressures from Hollywood/television network bureaucracy is a new context onto which to project a Bergmanesque tragedy.

Allen is famously fond of Bergman's themes and has appropriated them well outside the text of *Interiors*. The 1978 film, however, constitutes an adaptation for its "consummate marriage

of technique, theatricality and themes,” to use Allen’s words as reported by Guthrie in his biography. Both films deal with similar themes of familial dysfunction, mental illness, and the search for personal identity. In *Cries and Whispers*, the three sisters struggle with their relationships to each other and to their dying sister, while in *Interiors*, the three sisters grapple with their mother's breakdown and their own individual struggles to find meaning in their lives. In *Whispers*, the house where the three sisters reside is presented as a lavish and opulent space, but one that is also sterile, claustrophobic, and suffused with a sense of death and decay. Similarly, in *Interiors*, the family's home is a minimalist and austere space, with monochromatic furniture and white walls, which reflect the characters' emotional repression and sense of disconnection from the world. In both films, the house serves as a metaphorical space that reflects the inner turmoil and emotional states of the characters. Both films feature scenes in which characters are seen reflected in mirrors or glass surfaces, which serve to underscore their sense of inner turmoil and fractured identity. Both films use a collage of the written word and journaling as a literary device—a technique later vehemently rebuked by Godard. And, both play with the orientation thereof in the frame in such a way that asks us to think differently about the familiar, mundane subjects on screen (or, perhaps more cynically, asks us to think of a Bergman film). The use of fragmented close-up shots of faces and hands highlight the characters' emotional states and physical frailty. Bergman’s film is a masterclass in intimacy; and, *Interiors*—from a man who made public habit of drenching his dread under a slick, distancing wit—comes off like a study in atmosphere and character that, while a pastiche and a reverent attempt by one aspiring auteur to get better at his craft by reproducing the trademark of another, *Interiors*, that is, a “Bergman-esque” text, does adapt to a new authorial voice and new context. For instance, Bergman famously uses a haunting, dissonant score composed by the legendary Swedish composer, Johann Sibelius; there is a single

musical composition in *Interiors*, and it is diegetic. Allen experiments with ambient sound as he hadn't found his voice through cinema score yet.

Both *Interiors* and *Cries and Whispers* are films that challenge conventional narrative structures and instead prioritize mood, atmosphere, and psychological depth. Both films are characterized by a deliberate slowness, a minimalism of style, and a preoccupation with the inner lives of their characters. In both cases, the films seek to create an intense and immersive experience for the viewer, one that is based on a deep exploration of the human psyche and the complexities of human relationships.

#### *Godard x Kubrick*

After his frustrating experience on *Spartacus*, working faithfully from Dalton Trumbo's screenplay, Stanley Kubrick decided to option the rights to Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, less than five years after it had been published, and work with full creative control. In doing so, Kubrick created a spiritual distance between himself and the machine of Hollywood; he reassessed the entire process systemically and, having been spurred by the radical efficiency and autonomy of the French New Wave and Auteur Theory, decided to adopt a more European method of producing cinema. Before addressing any of the historical or textual evidence of this significant adjustment in director's process, Kubrick himself telegraphed the change quite dramatically by moving his family to Northern England in 1960 to begin work on *Lolita*. According to an interview with film critic, Derek Malcolm, the thirty-year-old director made this move for three principal reasons: to achieve a quiet environment conducive to his work, to find distance from the working conditions of Hollywood and Hollywood censors, and to secure funding for the film. Reports Malcolm, "He

said that he left America because filming in Hollywood would involve their exercising some control, and he wanted no one to have control,” (1975).

The 1955 novel, *Lolita*, is a piece of modernist literature that owes its inception to the likes of Henry James and James Joyce. It exists as a swollen exercise of language and what Nabokov terms in the afterward, “aesthetic bliss,” its subject matter is a potent misdirect as any attempted derivation of a moral subtext is thwarted by the author himself. Vladimir Nabokov preemptively satirizes literary criticism and psychoanalysis, for that matter, in his mock forward penned by the fictional John Ray, Jr. Ph.D. The Russian-born writer goes on to express and summarize some of the same ideas with more sincerity in an afterward essay attributed to himself. In the afterward, Nabokov defends against conceptions of his book as obscenity (lamprooning publishers in the process by claiming they stopped reading when it became clear the book wasn’t an erotic novel) as well as the idea that it might be allegorical in some anti- American way. In his clearest rebuff, the author states, “For me a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is the sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art is the norm” (Nabokov 315). The opening lines of the novel let us know that words and language are going to be a central focus, how we experience them, how they can mislead, as it literally invites us to feel some examples, “Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta” (Nabokov 9). What follows defies classical narrative in favor of flexing one of the primary muscles of modernist literature, spatial form. The novel is a prison of subjectivity wherein we are so very rarely ever allowed even a small glimpse outside of the subjective and fancifully unreliable mind of a madman. In 2009, Brian Cox of *Succession* starred in a one man show in which he plays a Humbert who tells the story of the novel from his jail cell. The actor posited at the time that his remediation of the stream of

consciousness was most accurate to the fragmented and unreliable subjectivity of the text; however, long before that, Jean-Luc Godard and his compatriots were attempting, more literally, to represent the tenets of modernist literature on celluloid. So, in this way, Kubrick's choice of a textual source and his choice of stylistic, cinematic model are in no way coincidental.

*Lolita* mirrors the deep contrast shot composition of its European predecessors and clever, complex camera work that projects as simplistic and cinema vérité-adjacent. The style is somewhat antithetical to the sensational crime noir action parodied in the pages of the book, and which Kubrick had explicit first-hand experience with on his own, *The Killing* (1956) which was a "House Style" studio production that adhered to the sensationalist formula which had been winning in the industry for over a decade. However, a more considerate consideration of the iconoclastic work of The French New Wave, and most particularly Godard and Truffaut, as a response to the post-war—and post Blum-Byrnes Agreement—influx of American culture, primarily Hollywood films, reveals *Lolita* to be an evolution of the Godard's work from a pastiche of the dominating ideas to a rebuke of them. Kubrick achieves this by creating a pastiche of his own and adapting the style of French independent films to suit his retelling of the Nabokov text. A move cemented when Kubrick quite audaciously rejected the screenplay adaptation penned by the veteran author, Nabokov, himself, in favor of his own. In many ways, the result is a perfect post-modern confluence of ideas and medias that, while not incredibly successful or even remarkable of its own merit, was a deeply seminal work from an auteur who went on to marry the independent, art-house focus on atmosphere and images with Hollywood scale and entertainment factor to great acclaim in films like *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

*Lolita* is as much an adaptation of a style of filmmaking as it is a novel. Especially considering that the argument has been made that *Lolita* (1962) is not much of an adaptation (by

the implied metric of fidelity) of *Lolita* (1956). Regardless, in addition to the techniques for bringing a novel to the screen, and the working conditions of director as autocrat adapted by Kubrick, the qualities by which I consider the film to be an adaptation and which are observably present in the movie itself are: a cinema verité camera style, abstraction of violence and themes, the use of heavy allusions, subversion of genre tropes, and an improvisational acting style.

Furthermore, the film does away with the most conspicuous subversion of crime-thriller tropes penned by Nabokov, the climactic battle with Clare Quilty. By having the film begin in media res, with Quilty's death. The film telegraphs the conflicts and absurdity to come with one of the most brilliantly acted film openings. Kubrick has been quoted as saying "Sellers is the only actor who could truly improvise." Again, coming fresh off of the tightly scripted *Spartacus* and a period of study into a balding, bespectacled man who never even provided his actors with a script, Kubrick let the film roll on Sellers, a technique which would only fully be realized in *Dr. Strangelove*, but which could not have been possible at all had Godard not first decided to shoot films by finding a location and a "rough sketch"(Godard as recorded by MacCabe 122) of what would happen in the scene.

The most demonstrative phrase of film language applied in this movie is a shot which is used twice to book end the movie: Clare Quilty crawls away from Humbert Humbert, who has already shot him in the leg; the camera follows Sellers until his shrinking form is obscured behind a large classical portrait leaning upright against a door frame; then, pushes in on the art and all that is shown of the antagonist's gruesome end, are the bullet holes erupting from the canvas and oil-paint visage of a young Victorian lady. The abstraction of violence. The dissonance of images, sounds, and concepts. The juxtaposition of high art and low. Finally, the rearranging and subversion of narrative structure. Kubrick emulates the experimentation of Godard to achieve an

accurate representation of the literary spatial form employed by Nabokov. The subject of the portrait—a George Romney painting done of his young muse; Romney ironically went on to marry a woman named Charlotte after dismissing the muse—though most likely incidental in and of herself, is layered with allusions. Chiefly, she supplements the novel’s signifier of Annabel Leigh, used to point to Poe’s “Annabel Lee,” that is, the symbol of obsession with image or aesthetic over individual. The shot also closely mirrors a shot from Kubrick’s *The Killing* in which the character George is gunned down violently through the face. Coming minutes after Peter Sellers as Quilty quips to Humbert, “No I’m Spartacus,” the entire opening of *Lolita* (including the narrative device of in-media-res) serves as a thesis and rebuke of Hollywood, sensationalist filmmaking in much the same way that the source material itself is a cheeky rebuke of cheap, “Erotic” (Nabokov 353) novels.

The first ten minutes of *A Bout De Souffle* or *Breathless* establish the same, self-conscious and frustrated relationship with cinema itself, manifested in a character who presents as a shabby parody of the Humphrey Bogart archetype and, one who is aware of this relationship. Neither James Mason nor Jean-Paul Belmond is the likely noir hero; their respective entrances portray a desperate pantomime of what their characters think the cinematic leading man is, fueled by the fundamentally flawed representation of what the characters think love is. Each opening sets up the tropes of the genres from which it steals and then pulls the rug, robbing the characters from any satisfaction or agency and simultaneously forging a contract between spectator and filmmaker that requires the active participation and engagement with cultural attitudes. When Michel kills the cop, it is a dramatically unjustified gesture which encompasses ten seconds and five shots, none of which show the protagonist in his entirety; rather, the form is fragmented, time is rearranged, and even the out-of-sync sound design betrays him. In the murder of Quilty, Kubrick takes a que



from later in *Breathless*—the infamous bedroom scene—and Godard’s post-modern, pop-art repurposing of fine art intruding on a character study. This is a technique the French director would later perfect in *Pierrot le Fou* but was nonetheless present, in its infancy, during *Breathless*.

## **Conclusion**

### *Godard V. Allen: Dialectic Remediation*

After a fallout with his government, Ingmar Bergman returned to the theatre and a conservative life. Allen continued to refine his work (later being similarly accused of stealing from Fellini) until achieving a more original synthesis of his cinematic idols with his own comedic or philosophical identity to great success. However, he also retained a prestigious and conservative view of the cinematic experience and famously bumped heads with the radically progressive Godard over the democratization of film via video technology in the 80’s. Godard Remediates Allen in a battle of ideology in which Godard manipulates, with his famously inflammatory editing skills, a taped conversation with Woody Allen into a sort of avant garde short film, replete with title cards, dissonant soundtrack, and juxtaposed images, effectively to discredit the latter while advancing his own views on the progressive or even radical potentials of new media. The comically awkward and contentious discussion sketches out the different authorial intentions for adapting a source material directly. For progress or aesthetic. Subversion or reverence. Godard utilizes reference material from *Hannah & Her Sisters* to delineate Allan’s perhaps unintentional aping of the conventions of television filmmaking which, Godard posits, had seeped back into the cinematic landscape. Godard remained iconoclastic in his use of media for the remainder of his career, always rejecting the synthesis of his radical upset of the form into the mainstream and instead changing once more. Kubrick retained his rebellious and progressive spirit however married it with industry

and is a large contributor to developing the blockbuster as we know it today, even before *Jaws* (1976) formally did so. Kubrick can be at once regarded as arthouse and commercial and, to put it bleakly, may be largely responsible for what little artistic merit is present in mass-produced Hollywood vehicles; certainly, he paved the way for contemporary American auteurs such as Christopher Nolan. Kubrick continued to use the principles of Brechtian alienation pioneered on film by Godard and the tendency to elevate art-house style.

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# poetry.

- Horchata Revisited
- Above the Fog on Cadillac Mountain
- in the house of my uncle steve whom I seldom see  
with my eyes
- Higher-Education
- Communications to the Patient:
- Early Morning, Grey-Cold Tide Pools of Mnt.  
Desert Island, ME.
- Katie Ann or Vacation Pictures

## introduction

All of the poems collected in the proceeding pages represent the careful application of poetic techniques pioneered by the modernists, James' area of interest. Specifically, an aesthetic philosophy beginning with the symbolists and poets like *Ezra Pound*, through the post-war neo-modernists and early post-modernists such as *William Carlos Williams*.

Some of the tenets observed in the crafting of these poems include: the poem as *autotelic* (aesthetic bliss), the poem as a rejection of convention (sexual, moral, social), the poet as technician (craft, form, and style over message/narrative), spatial form in the poem (intertext, motif, allusion, translation, quotation).

James' area of study—and thus mode of creating—is not with contemporary poetry. However, as we arrive at some significant historical parallels economically, politically, socially, and technologically, it becomes important to evaluate art as it responds to crisis. James believes the artistic/critical methods developed in the early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century have relevant application today. As Eliot says, *The way forward is the way back*.

## Horchata Revisited

My anxiety is a glottal stop, a wellspring of regret  
 can't hold your vibrating shards in one still piece,  
 you are a fleeting mosaic of  
*these fragments I have-*  
 -teeth, breasts, ice cream, linen, nail beds-  
*shored against my ruins*  
 when the flesh of your face is coaxed back by some  
 phantom exuberance  
 and everything in the world shifts with your smile  
 like an animal lost.

My ecstasy fragmented too,  
 even my pediatrician can't help me, dear,  
 negative prognosis, you see  
*chairs to sit-*  
 -clumped lashes, hills of cotton, good-little-girl-  
*and sidewalks to walk on*  
 if I could control the world and everyone in it  
 I'd still find most warmth along the foot-trails  
 of the past  
 but your eyes feel like dying young.

Beatrice, I'm surrounded by the tepid waters, opaque  
 and swollen like my farcical tongue.  
 Yours is empyrean, beg of you lament  
*Dies Illa,*  
 -a birthmark, funny rocks, kneecaps, Matt Damon-  
*O, mourn my tongue*  
 what are they called? L, L, L, L  
 what are these sounds I am making?  
 I was the cerulean fog that rolls across your corneas,  
 slackens your brow when you

can't understand a word I-  
 you like the absolved Mary, on my knees,  
 there was once a crucifix on this chain.  
*Oro Supplex Et Acclinis*  
 -little feet in mud, sleeves too long, mons pubis, don't move-  
*God is a teenage girl*  
 with crisscross knees, don't make me tell you what to-  
 you are that  
 you are,  
 everlasting.

The drastic depressions, rimmed by your ilia like perfect  
handles molded fatalistically to my knotted hands,  
I've done too much, been here too long

*Winter's cold*

-oh you-are-so, just so, like the poet, Virgil said, hair that turns in just at the-  
*it's too much to handle*

but when my hands fit there.

I'm shaking but I'm not cold

I'm flinching but I'm not afraid

I'm resting but I'm not so old

No sacraments I have made.

Break for a comprehensive list of all the innumerable ways I'd like to fu-  
*your brains out?*

*what's an axolotl? Anyways, I think it's cute*

-silk bow, swatch of corduroy, show me where it hurts, room for more scars-

*Your imagination is a nightmare*

well, I think you know *me* well enough.

Yes a wellspring of regret, smother me

under your breast, if

your intelligence wasn't enough and if

I could control the world and everyone in it

I'd only have them say what I thought I'd forgotten,

I am strong come crawl inside my

*sweet child, are you here? -only*

ribcage, my awful hands make

*looking long enough to remember your face, dear*

fists when I'm not looking.

not because I want to and nothing less and

if only this would end then I could spend

my life wishing it never did.

I wish you could know in your

eyes is just so much suspense, I'll pull your hair just to make you blink.

It's number 146, I remembered for you

*Poor soul the center of my sinful earth*

-a shoulder-blade, suprasternal notch, serrated luv, a cluster of freckles in the shape of-

*Is there room for only one Romeo?*

Cassiopeia

everyone should be to Verona at least twice

and Syracuse never,

it's a dying city of false promises, don't you know?

once I was taught to make a flower crown from dandelion

by a woman with blue gnarled veins and cigarette paper skin

but when the peonies are in bloom again I don't

want you to slip through my fingers.



**Above the Fog on Cadillac Mountain**

Ancient peoples worshiped the sun  
For once, God cannot see us  
My soles molest the summit  
Dispassionate mists batter the  
Landscape at the threshold of  
Commercial photo opportunity  
And primordial chaos

Cool droplets dapple my skin as I  
Bluntly cut the gusts  
The obdurate spirit of a provisional  
God,  
Blindly looking down on billions more  
Beneath the fog  
The first person to see the sun  
And even I cannot

What does that say about our  
Divine providence?

**in the house of my uncle steve whom I seldom see with my eyes**

I

in grey-toned angular suits that evince the architecture of his life hanging  
loosely on sinewy-thin olive-colored limbs *your uncle is a lawyer*  
but I seldom see him with my eyes *there's so many rooms in this house*  
like a mountain all angles acute and oblique but nowhere in between  
our parents admire his Porsche 964 us the infecundity of these rooms  
*the property is a solar farm, funny coils deep deep in the ground*

in his house the stairs had no risers as kids we would reach right  
through and pull each other up industrial veins of steel and glass and  
an office on the second floor where legal boxes stacked like parapets  
surrounding leather and chrome armchair the glossy gun-metal computer  
and a spiral staircase that ascended tower-like into yet another  
floor. *Your uncle is a Buddhist. That is his yoga studio off-limits*

II

he peeled off syrupy slick black dress shoe and woolen sock  
splayed yellowish lithe toes on cool limestone in the double-height  
cathedral kitchen and reached to hand me a pear-shaped glass of  
sparkling water *oddly dry* I disliked and smiled with small animal teeth,  
sharpened canines slit eyes, black and sparkling and bent over breathing  
like the world was effortless and vaporous and charged  
into a deep stretch on all fours and then inverted serpentine and fluid  
he nearly sank into the floor and breathed and the tendons of his  
impossibly thin neck actuated like freshly strung catgut

## III

lovingly if coldly designed by loving if cold architect aunt eloise  
who gifted me sketchbooks and asked questions I could neither parse nor  
answer

and uncle steve would talk quickly and *staccato* into the sharp plastic cellular  
none of our parents had antenna reaching heavenward *they're richer than  
Croesus, your uncle, a passivist* I understood he won battles with words  
sterile and opulent but efficient and blissful of aesthetic

*how do I live?* he ascended out of his stretch and sipped mineral water  
he answered always soft and a bit hoarse *desire little and make something,  
life is a shock of contradictions*

## Higher-Education

Rightfully, yet un-ordained, perspicacious masters  
dance along the ivy walls to skirt the tender masses  
evaporated orchestra, the darling similarity  
conduct their work from on slim branch and imitate  
profundity

**Communications to the Patient:**

Set Sybil; Mind of America both  
whisper in kind the Greek epigraph: *I*  
*want to die.*

Some of the stated opinions are, say  
the cultural psychologists—*68 May*,  
unfriendly.

Stop reading Bukowski, love, it's giving  
you this real sallow look—*So, so Herr*  
*enemy.*

The poet could change the mind and the chill-  
Stealing warmth from the sanitarium:  
*make clay pots.*

I am but a voyeur on the steps of the courthouse  
where we have moved down a pace from the  
precinct and taken part of Bank street  
It is nothing for me to be here  
but there was no unifying cause in Nanterre  
l'université

*I am dead, I want to die.*

*Famine Affluence and Morality*  
If I live monastically no job  
Will keep me

*The introduction of the new, So, So,*  
And there will be no money to give to  
Unicef

You can make visits on the Pentacost  
but no one persists and no one person  
will do it.

The news, like powder room art, before the  
corpses are interred *Who did what to whom?* Yes,  
In Sanskrit.

Not one crucifixion, not for any  
other mother

A slit mouthed severity in the purple black  
Sculptural face of the Chair of the  
Philosophy department who said with red rimmed eyes  
*Where nobody*  
*knows what humanity means, nobody knows what*  
*His life is about.* I, interred above the dead and below the living,  
put great appraisal on frivolity.

**Early Morning, Grey-Cold Tide Pools of Mnt. Desert Island, ME.**

The ragged bits of the seaside where my  
 Interpersonal passions or lulls are  
 Equidistant from the lucid wake of  
 My presence and low tide of nostalgia,  
 Crashing crashing upon the dead and  
 Rotting fields of verdant-black dead sea grass:  
 Noodles of pillowy disguise for the  
 Gnarly sharp barnacled under texture.

Look or rather listen, they make a pop-  
 Ping sound when squeezed, do you suppose the  
 Crabs ever pop them for fun like? Me? Make  
 Reservations for two? The Name? I can't  
 Say yet but she will be and be and the  
 Idea of her will be and each to  
 Each will swirl around one another  
 Destined never to unite. Their name,  
 Yet whatever it is, will be more pain  
 Inspiring then the coral making  
 Pink stinging gapes of my fascinating  
 Flesh. How fascinating I should beat my  
 Head upon the rocks and think of them no  
 More until I come again inside her

A thousand different times. Mr. Gray  
 Said women are made to endure more than  
 Men, thus the strokes of my own cruelty  
 Only fulfill a divine purpose like  
 The ocean lapping hungrily horny  
 Greedily upon the rocks leaving them  
 When the tide calls it back and back used up  
 Salty and stained and used and slick  
 And eroding them slowly and slowly  
 But what else is an ocean to do? The  
 Meeting of solid, brutalist lines with  
 The horrible curve and still of always  
 Level always pure and clean water con-  
 Forming to the edges conforming as

A pool can only do, a pool defined  
 The same by what isn't there as what is.

### Katie Ann or Vacation Pictures

James Grilley

*Fugi Superia X-TRA-400*

Peculiarity of chroma, grain-dense and underexposed, bedimmed your co-conspirator: slender hands obscure braces. Brace against the sun, the Chatham Mass lamp, the duck-hunter's shrewd acumen

fourteen in 1991

Study in design, stop, a study in the language of design: Summer's design. Why were the Modernist architects expatriated from their European countries, execrated by fascists into statelessness while Modernist poets and men of letters ascended into

fascism? *Yeats's Radio Hour*

Tightly coiled phone cord drawn out to its limits, taut out of frame across lawn and bloom and bloom; chromatic aberration, *in optics, spherochromatism is* the failure of a lens to focus on

sixteen in 1993

Beige hand-set fixed in hollow clavicle, sharp fragments of sun melt off chrome lawn chair, in the colors of Benneton, make it new from antiquity: a renaissance of *the way up is the way down* a renaissance of *the way forward is the way back* the renaissance *no one will stop our return to a new* Great Age

The pillars at 880 Lake Shore Drive are fluted Greek columns but *so much depends upon a-* dialectical verbiage. Steel, glass, your sketches: so derivative.

eighteen in 1995

*You whom I worship as night's firmament*  
 nineteen in 1996  
 nineteen in 1998  
 nineteen in 2000  
 nineteen on the dotted line  
 in my arms too, they will always be  
 nineteen  
 standing five-foot-five in one  
 apocalyptic waste land  
*I love you more because you turn from me*

your always-Summer, transient shadow

your contemporary life, moribund potential,  
 contemporarily slick with the conflation of forms and  
 democratization of pain and inundated with muddled  
 minimalism and feeling driven art that stands on  
 equally flimsy integrity of foundation

build from the top down, adjust for the correction of  
 opposing tensile stresses and lateral diffusions of load  
 your neo-post-modern language is a crumbling  
 foundation in a brutalist subdivision

Le Corbusier's brick worker housing  
 Becomes a brutal Stalinist playground

*D'y aller, mon ligne de chance*

red eyed from the flash on the mainstreet marketplace  
 at night; granddad let you take the porche and you  
 rocked a lamppost on the Vinyard  
 Wallace says he was your age when the Avant Garde  
 become something else, salted skin salted hair  
 oversized crewneck with varsity letters fugi 400 a  
 greenish-blue sky, bluish-green trees with your  
 friend, the one with the mole who couldn't stand to  
 look at me or my own slender hands



**prose.**

- Excerpts from *The Itinerary of Ezra Young*

## Introduction

The following is two excerpts from James' senior project, a novella entitled *The Itinerary of Ezra Young*. The narrative follows recent graduate, Ezra Young, for two weeks on Cape Cod in the summer, culminating in his meticulously planned suicide.

As with the poetry entries, *The Itinerary of Ezra Young* is an exercise in applying the principles of the modernists and early post-modernists to a prose work. Perhaps more so than with the examples of poetry, this work aims to evolve those techniques beyond mere pastiche.

The novel contains passages that are epistolical as well as passages that use a free indirect discourse in the first-person.

The rhetorical goal is to communicate views about the contemporary western mind as well as contemporary art through a surrogate.

The formal goal is to portray thought through fragmented and stylized syntax, spatial form, and intertextuality. Additionally, to deliver a commentary with metafictional elements (the frame-narrative, see excerpt one) and linguistic inventiveness that overtly bends what it means to be a novel.

In this way, the project attempts to be a distillation of a type of fiction writing most exemplified by Joyce and Nabokov. It also looks ahead to the likes of Wallace and Pynchon but asks if, in recent years, post-modernism (specifically in irony and self-awareness) hasn't quite lost the plot.

# EXERPT ONE:

FOREWORD

CHAPTER ONE

## FOREWORD

I first met Ezra Young through the peer review of his essays on the linguistic analysis of the word “sadness.” In fact, his monographs were of a considerable interest to myself and several of my colleagues. The overarching narrative present in these early essays was an aesthetic struggle whether this was originally intuited by the author or not. Ezra’s essays asked the question, *How can a state of objective sadness, in this usage a comprehensive and measurable brain-state, engender a profound and subjective happiness?* the antithesis here taking on the more abstract responsibilities of usage. The papers did not, however, answer the question. Regardless, it became, as it were, the undergraduate’s secondary, and most fructiferous, field of study with the first being Anthropology. However benignly interesting the works which made their way through our faculty, most unpublished to a most uproarious response, they became orders of magnitude more interesting upon receipt of a face to which to attribute for the boy entirely embodied his subject.

I submit that we have all chuckled under the stifling atmosphere of a funeral procession; several colleagues of mine under behavioral psychology are fascinated with the idea. However, one is a regrettable somatic response of the nervous system—there can even be observed pathological laughers who compulsively laugh under conditions of duress—or at the very least an anomalous reprieve from grief

and the other is a proper saturation, a Russian nesting doll in which a fully rounded contentment is nestled in and entirely contingent upon a sheathing and omnipresent sadness. When the nineteen-year-old author of the following works—who had, at that point and unbeknownst to myself, begun already several of the most provocative works contained in this volume, so young!—stood in the doorway of my lecture hall for the first time, I instantly knew it was he who had penned the essays. In his thin olive face and deeply brown eyes, in his rounded shoulders impossibly weighty for a lack of imposing muscular structure—he looked remarkably like a young John F. Kennedy jr.—as though his burden had already manifested physiologically, I saw an inalienable sadness that was as much a part of his make-up as the wave in his hair which was itself far more subtle.

The following text which this preambulates has been arranged into a memoir of this subject. A newly cooperative edition. It is composed primarily of a travel log recorded by hand almost daily according to frequent dating over the pages of three unruled hundred-leaf A5 cahier booklets with the ostensible purpose of quite obsessively achieving and exhaustively documenting a cumulative and hallowed set of “experiences.” The booklets had been recovered mostly free of damage though some of the pages in the final book incurred minor water damage and the black fountain pen ink bled right out into light blue entirely illegible clouds. I did the initial transcription of the manuscript myself. However, this final text is comprised crucially of an additional two parts that is: letters from the author which were written from or shortly before his chronicled vacation and foundational essays serving the doomed thesis of the group formerly including Young. To begin with

the letters, receipt of the bulk of which as well as their inclusion in this volume come via my young, undergraduate lover and teacher's assistant, Gianna Paris. Her surname has been changed for legal purposes corresponding to the success of this memoir on the advice of our indefatigable publisher and not the bureaucratic machinations of this home, our "liberal" arts university. There has been a great conflagration, I fear, behind ivy curtain at this establishment in regard to the relationship held by myself, a mentor, to Ms. Paris, as well even to the young author of this work, yet pains have been greatly taken to suppress the fact, why? I beg of you, unmask, and you will find the nuances of these sultry misgivings to be quite appurtenant to the labors of our Ezra Young. The only additional letters seem to have been unmailed and were recovered with the vacation logs.

As for the final part, the personal essays were written as the first exhibits of a collective anthropological work surrounding the subcultures of Cape Cod, USA, its institutions of religion, family, sex, and intelligentsia, in that order. The project, in toto, was never fully realized leaving these parts to be harvested—as potential doctoral advisor, they were, in fact, in my possession—for what I believe to be the betterment of this present work. To that end, the collected works have here been arranged—composed by a humble and benevolent conductor into, as mentioned, structurally speaking, a memoir. That is to say, the various manuscripts have not been printed sequentially, grouped by chronology or geography or type, as they share a distinct thematic resonance, they have subsequently been arranged according to that theme and the narrative present, if unintended. The reader will

find clear demarcations in the proceeding pages simply expounding the date and origin of each chapter.

Ezra Young, contending with both his Catholic and Jewish heritage, seems to make his case to God, not why he should be allowed a foot in the door to heaven, but belatedly and persuasively why he was in fact well chosen to reign, incognito, on our own earthly shores.

On matters of archival work and, frankly, the more boring academic processions, word must be put forth toward some wispy air of something to the effect of “accountability” and “truth.” First, to the more abstract and sincerely less consequential, my assistant-lover and I expended much energy the reader can trust—and debate how necessary—on fact-checking the recovered log-books which are admittedly disgorged from a rather active imagination and systematically cross-referencing every constituent data therein to produce, as objectively as we could, a record of events, people, and places that aided our critical understanding of the documents as well as their persistence and importance. We used the tools of a detective—more competently than some I’ve recently had occasion to meet—or at least a mediocre new critical literary analyst in so far and only in so far as it aided the collection of these manuscripts into a final edited volume. That being said, the one result of these efforts deemed sufficiently—and begrudgingly—relevant to myself and my assistant (and our sweet publisher) concerns a preeminent persons named in both the vacation logs as well as in letters addressed to her and apparently unmailed. In the final edition of this text, she is known as Osana though that is one of our few liberties. The true name of the central girl figure as recorded in the

original documents has been protected by the meticulous arrangers and publishers of this manifesto though, curiously, throughout our exhaustive precursory period of research, a real person, living or dead by the name which our young essayist penned could not presently be found.

Now, even more begrudgingly, a brief word on subject matter and the looming calls of “accountability” from the increasingly infantilized and ever emboldened peers to my child-love and the unfortunate author of this text and I promise what I have to say is scant and I trust you will, eventually, forgive me: The perspective of this individual is a singular one. Amid growing discontent on the grounds of this campus—why, through the perforations in my Venetian blinds I can, at present, clock twelve pacing youths on the quadrangle who are overly concerned with dialectic impropriety or sensitivity to the extent of arranging or collecting their corporeal bodies into an agenda of positively disrupting the workday. It may be that the memoirs of Ezra Young amount to a cautionary tale. Certainly, it is not an instructive one. I trust that the readers of this book will exercise discretion in how the attitudes of our hero influence them.

Suffolk, Conn.

June 5, 1997

W.G. Gerta, Ph.D.

Dep. Chair



## CHAPTER ONE

Letter to:

PO Box 1032

Gianna Paris

Suffolk, Conn

Gianna,

My apologies for the water spots. I've just stepped out of the ocean, I mean right out of the ocean!—I wore my clothes, even. My white denim levis, the ones you saw and liked or you said you liked that very first time in—what was, uh—Psych Somethingorother Developmental Whatchamacallit, remember? There's a young family positively unabashedly staring at me right now although I can't say I blame them, my flannel is absolutely totally soaked.

Remember you said I was like Ezra Pound if only he got a second chance on his ideologies. Well, here we are. I may need a second second chance. Look, I'm writing because I can't call because I don't know how you'll react really or really if you'll hold onto the handset for very long at all anyway, the way things went last time and all. And anyway a letter is really my—I mean it's my personal favorite

form of communication, you must find that funny, I have total control, I mean you can't get a word in edgewise if you wanted and though you can choose whether or not to *read* the page, you can't unwrite the words, you can't hang up, it's there.

But let's not start off like that.

I'm not writing about what happened at all, really, trust me and read on into that long night. Read on. God, remember what I told you that night at the fire tower near Ted's, well. And you said you hate summer. You said—Ezra incidentally I hate summer and I can't stomach the sweltering heat, our winters are so cold and our summers are just unbearable, and that's what you said but then you never complained in the winter, so fond of all those layers.

I've decided you're wrong. Not about the summer, well about the summer, you know it really is my favorite time though I quite—masochistically as you say—love schoolwork and schoolwork season, paper makes me feel good, the edges, the texture. Not about that other unfortunate thing either, the one we won't talk about. I mean about that other thing. That thing about leaving our youth. You know what? I don't think I will. And I bet you're saying, so clever always clever, that if I have the presence of mind to fumble at it, about choosing not to leave, then I probably already have because time is tricky like that. Well, shush. The air was all dead back there anyway at that capital U University. The air was dead, I'm absolutely *convinced* the trees were fake and I'd almost go so far as to write Charlie because he got that gig working for campus facilities and all and he could probably settle the matter. But after it all went down, I went home, Gianna, to my family home, been there God knows how long, because I thought the air must be alive there, it

must be alive with childhood, my own and others, happening now and yet to happen, and it must be colorful and cool and simple like it had always been and when I arrived I found that it was like it had always been only that very reality I was expecting propped up just the opposite sort of feeling, a sour one in my stomach. Everything was the same like it had been frozen like it was a stage show and after the curtain closed and I left for school nothing new happened because it had only ever been written to exist between curtain open and curtain closed and that's how I feel about the world and time. It keeps going but the show is over.

I've discovered a new word, it's my new favorite and I don't know the origin, ok? I can't know everything all the time—see there I can admit it, I don't know everything, I am not God's gift, I never said so anyway—and if I had the time to study it I would, but I don't so don't ask. The word is *saudade*.

I knew what sand would feel like. Long before I touched it, I knew just exactly what it would feel like.

I'll be here for two weeks. And then I won't be. *Saudade* is a happy-sadness and, as I understand it *Gianna*, as I understand it, there isn't quite a comparable word, there isn't really an equivalent word in the English language or even the French—*mélancolie ne suffira pas*—because the word is a feeling so elusive and so intrinsic to the Portuguese spirit, it is a longing for something that never existed, it is a depth of sadness that can't be psychoanalyzed, it is a beginner's sadness for the beginner's mind, a zen grief, you see?

I know what you're thinking too, you're thinking, Ezra, you fetishize your sadness because you like to cultivate an aesthetic and be the center of attention, you

are meticulous and exacting and pompous and insufferable, ouch, I say, you aren't reading this letter with a beginner's mind now are you? and now who's insufferable? Remember how Emory was doing her paper on the adrenaline enthusiasts? the people who climb skyscrapers without a line because they need to get really close to death to feel something out of life? Well. Nothing about that. But that's how art can feel sometimes. And then when Emory had that mountain-biking accident, it was like she really got something from these people, something really important that we couldn't get with that thesis anyway—ok ok I'm not talking about it. It's just that I got into this whole thing to be an artist and the way it was going under *him*. It didn't feel like art. I'd rather keep making little films with Caine but of course he's off to London for the summer and I never could paint or write stories without eating myself alive. It is important to leave something, I feel.

So I'll be here for two weeks and then I won't be.

Judas is with me. He's just fine. That crack is getting bigger though. Remember how I had that map? That map in the glove box, from when I was a kid. I took a wrong turn somewhere. But that's ok now. It has to be.

I'm in Sandwich. I'm going to find a good sandwich to eat, that was very early on my itinerary, I think it will make me feel something anyway. I would transcribe the itinerary for your benefit here, but you know how I am. Organized spontaneity. The day before I left my hometown, I was loitering around Wilson, winking at the girls in their pleated uniforms with total impunity, for fun, you know? and I happened to see an ambulance come along and park outside the little cottage up the western hill over from the tennis courts and before the river where kids used

to go smoke cigarettes so I followed it a while and watched these guys cart out Mr. Pellet on this gurney thing and covered in a white sheet. Mr. Pellet was the *valet*, the hall monitor, the gate-guy, Mr. Pellet kind of did it all, and he even would sit in on your class and read the Times all the while if a teacher was bedridden sick. He was a nice guy, mustache and all, riding around on that golf cart about campus and taking kids cigarettes so he could smoke them himself, right in front of us but we didn't hold it against him. His wife worked in the library and that day before I left, I saw her standing in the doorway and crying while they took Mr. Pellet away on that gurney thing and I hid my face as I passed, I hid it behind my lapel because if Mrs. Pellet recognized and in that time—there's a thing I can't explain terribly well but if I try maybe it will help *you* understand some of my actions, I mean some of my behavior, not that I'm apologizing, even if I would, that isn't what *this* letter is about; but that thing is like something inside me that just doesn't work quite right or maybe was never there to begin with: I can't hear a person tell me about their sadness, I can't stand solidly when a person tells me their afflictions, pain, or really any great happiness either. I wouldn't know what to say and maybe it's in part because I like being sad and that makes me damn guilty when others are having such a hard time of it. Maybe I feel a pressure to do something about it. You've always implied that I had some agency in the control I exerted over our—situation. In reality, I'm burdened with responsibility. I have to take action. I have to make something to leave something. But I can't un-attack Mr. Pellet's heart.

I asked the paramedic if there was anything one could do to identify death without the use of instruments, thinking of course to all those diagrams we used to

see of bells on headstones with a string running the six feet down into the casket just in case. Well, what about the opposite? He's closing the door on Mr. Pellet. His partner is taking information down on a clipboard near the bawling Mrs. Pellet, conveniently just out of my eyeline. I mean, what if someone was dead but they didn't know it? and the world didn't quite know it? by all appearances anyway. If someone had died but no one had told him and he just went about walking and talking anyway, would you be able to tell? Could you be able to tell? And do you know what this paramedic said to me in response? Back away from the deceased. And I started, but he was only talking about poor blue Mr. Pellet. He said then, lighting a cigarette, I don't think a dead man could look himself in the mirror and possibly mistake the reality.

And Gianna, that's really what I'm afraid of.

I don't think I should walk in to town dripping seawater from my dungarees, it was only my first sight of the ocean this summer season and the sun was high and I was so completely alone—present ogling family of three excluded, the mother has fixed her jaw and looked elsewhere but her attempts to avert the gaze and attention of the chubby kids has been unsuccessful—and now I'm here, on Cape Cod, exercising some privilege, I'm sure. And not just *saudade* privilege. I can taste the salt. I can feel it gritty on my forearms. The beige sand clumps beneath me.

I can't quite remember why I started writing this letter only that I walked out of the ocean after laying afloat on my back and just breathing for—I don't know maybe nearly an hour—and just reaching for the pages in my bag and getting to writing like a man possessed. I hope this letter gets to you before it gets to him. I'm

not writing the rest of them. And I said I'm not apologizing and I'm not forgiving.  
Until next time. Get rid of some of those layers at least.

Ezra

Sandwich Mass.

July 16, 1996

## EXERPT TWO:

CHAPTER SIX

CHAPTER SEVEN



## CHAPTER SIX

Entry III: The Story of Sebastian's Alcove

July 18

*Do no dishonour to the earth lest you dishonour the spirit of man.*

Beach day number one.

A diner in Dennis.

Silver brushed metal name tag: Kelsey.

Heavy ceramic and clinking and clanging.

A diner for tourists. *Le bourgeois en marche.*

Note: not to return. Not even for—

Kelsey with blue eyes and protuberant central incisors and befreckled skin and ear helix that surface like sandbars in the glossy stillness of straight strawberry blonde.

When she brings me my plate, I love her somehow. She can't be older than fourteen.

A child waitress. I imagine her life. Saving for the summer. Studying by night under the cool reprieve of the pitch pine. A creased paperback in the romantic fashion. A fashion magazine. Louis Vuitton. Driving lessons in Mother's ten-year old Volvo because Father hasn't the patience. Shades of Sybil Vane and with the specious eggshell l'apparence unique to certain teenaged girls—*virgo vestalis!*—and indicative of awesome resilience to erotic rents and erotic depreciations.

I found an eerie difficulty in leaving behind my navy canvas collegiate bag with the faded leather seat and arrangement of esoteric pins. Of course it isn't the

bag itself but rather the contents which have been enumerated in gross detail and the whole of which is greatly superior to the parts because they don't simply represent me, they are me; they define my humanity and the parts of me which are metaphysical and everlasting and worthy of the caloric cost of my existence. Without my ancillary self, that is, the tools we have created to transcend our animalism and extend and realize the potential of our internal life, I am forced, as at gunpoint, to watch the impertinence and impermanence of my material like bearing witness to the shedding of cells to the wind—a typically invisible process—expounded into great visible and poetic detail, the pounds and pounds of me returned to inanimate matter and the sensitive throbbing newborn matter still allied with the collective becoming less and less able to fulfil its regenerative purpose with each passing flake. If I were to take the emptied canvas bag and beat upon it and poke it and pull, it would rapidly, more rapidly than if I inflicted the same insult to my own naked and glabrous body, be relieved of its integrity and become less than a bag and more like a tattered and unusable collection of fabrics. Not only would my own body withstand similar forces, repair any minor lacerations or contusions without lasting effect, and generally continue functioning, but it would in fact require forces multiplied by an order of magnitude to reduce *me* to a collection of my parts or, in effect, anything no longer recognizable as a person. However, in the event that a bag and I are locked into a sterile and empty room with one another and left without interference, it would be not long at all before what began as *me* is reduced to something inhuman, dysfunctional, and unrecognizable while the bag would continue on unchanged, retaining the vital essence of what

defines its bagness, virtually indefinitely. I mean to say that after one-hundred years, under ideal circumstances, one could feasibly enter the room, retrieve the bag, and examine its utility and ability to enclose objects like books and pens by the arrangement of intact seams and persistence of metal zippers, and find that it sufficiently meets those standards. If one were to enter the room after one hundred years and ask the putrid puddle of biological sludge to compose a poem, it would be unlikely to perform such a task. Less dramatically still, if the biology is preserved by ever careful nutritional regulation within the room and only the mind is left to languish and after a lesser period within the reasonable range of average life cycle, say, ten years, the empirically “alive” thing within would likely be still incapable of composing a poem and, I hypothesize, would in some not inconsiderable and totally meaningful way, be only *formerly me*. All that is to say I not only feel odd sending myself into the world without a book, pens, paper, camera, paint brush, or any of the requisite paraphernalia to both feed my mind and preserve some tangible chunk of it, I feel, in some deep and very real way, in danger.

It is on this morning that I became enamored by the baroque possibilities for my impending apotheosis, my ultimate sacrifice at the altar of aesthetic to which I present with a resolute equanimity and classical punctiliousness, great will and self-possession and intuition with repose to accompany my sickening intellect and rhapsodic erudition. I see myself, browned, the course hairs of my legs and forearms bleached by the conspiring ocean and sun, the persistent near-black head of hair wind-swept over my brow and eyes and obscuring the thinned, conventional and handsome but in some way ambiguous and foreign visage, the broadness of my

shoulders and hips: a mirrored concavity in the clavicle and ilia, tilted in contrapasso, and the skin of my skin and flesh and bone and the parallel or perpendicular forms and the ordered obtuse and acute angles, softened toward a direction and purpose and balanced flow pierced with arrows in haphazard array and diverting blood along their protruding shafts to puddle in the sand, a reflection of my soul hewn from the stone of ageless quarries where drilling down returns one to the sparkling surface with a twitch in the nostril. Kelsey, love, haven't got any fruit? Haven't got any fruit, I'm afraid. Just as well. As well. My oread, descend and trespass unto mine with sonorous blow, I can't see myself in your eyes because your mouth is a gaping wound sweetened by the sweet and when I recite you in the oral tradition some ballad of your wind-chafed foremothers you will sing it back to me as Gianna was wont to do but only unburdened by longevity, untransformed by that history you do not ken, unawakened to the age and the ghosts of old fisherman-wives. Echo the verse beside limpid pools beneath fig trees be it Keats or Coleridge oh, spritely miss in tender summer dress struggling to con the red pamphlets snuck home by the sophomore sister who returned from Palo Alto with Birkenstocks and outrage. I can feel you vibrate and shatter my besmocked doll and scatter. Are you a teacher Mr.? Is a stab unheard while only tracing in found ballpoint on overturned leaflet against ghostly backward advertisement and anthropomorphic coffee mugs, the almond shapes peering smokily over the carafe upon the book no hobbyist would carry, the only thing I took upon egress 7:32 am to fly across short-ways into your arms, into the form, the soul, the imagination, the image of your arms in my vision with the vision of me thence cradled and robust and tanned beyond what has

been hence able to pass, to develop, like the celluloid in the grains of my grey matter in the diner of the new great age gilded by innocence in passion and strongly lunged into being by your youthful tissue. The check, please.

The holy Irene and her servant.

I set out from my faithful, golemesque Saab, resolutely guarding the farthest side of a disengaged maintenance building in the service of a nearby private complex the homeowner's association of which had efficiently aggregated into a single salt-box structure the ideal Cape-style architectural features and cloned it about seventy-five times into little bluff-side, bay-facing florets, and descended a winding wooden stair, vaulted the banister at the landing under low-slung ash—

*The boughs are not more fresh*

*where the almond shoots*

*take their March green.*

—and then went down to the neck as tide rolled in. Blue smoke from my cigarillo, the bombs, 96 pt, the print pages of state communications, communications to the patient, to the mind of Cape Cod, to begin, anew, from antiquity in the surf, under sand, under skin, oh my love, caesuras of my tongue, forgive me my limitations, but do not quaver under my declarations, I know the cure that cures this land only they won't see its images dripping from my own wound, the stammered bane, the turmoil of speech, recumbent in the rising waters, the debris from the parapet flows by, I can hear the voice of mon eminence, not Herr Professor, professor emeritus, *then how should I begin?* and he does not answer in kind but warm and wry en ligne

de chance, the expatriate student become master, defeat the master, defeat the master.

*And everything clean, seeming clean, after Italy.*

It was by then 9:30 and the tide was rising swift.

I believe in the deep and comprehensive stimulation of body in cooperation with the toils of the mind as vital and essential and as such have maintained my figure with calculated diligence and wasting not a second in the achievement of these optimal markers of health and agility in so far as they buttress my cathedral of will and great explicit grandeur reap no excessive benefit thereof but for the ensuing ascetic pleasures and fruit of my well-charged mental labors and it is entirely peripheral and incidental, at a time, that such dutiful maintenance and knee-shattering endurance reflect in apollonian sparkling waters a figure of well-bred, masculine intensity, lean but imposing, archetypally American but not offensive with a vaguely European aquilinity and erudition evocative of a young politician or perhaps law-student, pensive and complete, distant but disciplined, I can swim against the sheer violence of this current with a classical effervescence—woe though my trials are self-imposed! Could not the trite spectres of my age have driven me to the peninsula by willow switch, of course, in some sense. I will walk as a postulant the six miles of seashore which stretch before me, Brewster through West Dennis Port, dripping in the purifying salt-dense stuff which amplify His venomous rays and steam the winter and spring from out my person.

But for now the channel is cold.

The neck of Quinneset, below me, ensconced in the morning mists swirling in from the open ocean. I beat my arms against the grey glass surface and break the tension and break the tension and suck and gape and sniff and clench salted eyes, a globular catch in the crook of my throat, blow, beat, my muscles vascular cold but burning with grotesque animation pushed to its absolute utter limit while the stones so slight and misshapen between strands of suspended-spaghetti-like sea-grass glitter frozen in place below, the kinetic power of that newly repurposed food working in total opposite force against the might of this the Atlantic rushing into lap at corrosive the arteries of my promontory. There is a fear deeper inset and more autonomic than those which swirl around quotidian life, such as vapid interaction and the persistence of feeling extricated from thought, which wraps me like a sodden velvet shawl, a leaden hand on my shoulder in demonstrative omnipotence the watery god, Joyce's mighty mother, though akin to any thickly enveloping forest or incomprehensible emptiness of ochre plane and warms from the plexus outward; a natural and poetic fear. As colored by the profound and unprovoked reverence it engenders as the rooting cowardice. I am at once still and exploding with the movements of my swim, I am fixed in the landscape, fighting against the current, the imperceptibility of the current, its watery pallor, the bland perceptibility of my fight, a valiant sketch, a gesture begun but not in ignorance but demonstration. I can swim only today but the great mother of all will return to oscillate dispassionately indefinitely indefatigably.

My swim trunks cling to skin and from the narrowest point in this neck and beaching to the eastern shore I retrieve the oxford shirt and botany book it wraps,

slip a finger each in under the tongue of my loafers hearing my wristwatch rattle inside, the faux-tortoise shades, shake kick off the clumps of sand and start off on a walk only to be plainly interrupted once, as per my arrangements, about ninety minutes from the present interlude. Apart from urinating under the sweeping shade of some under-cut dune below picket signs announcing the careful conservatory efforts toward the native grasses, probing in vain for a suitable length of dismembered pine or even desaturated driftwood with shape and integrity befitting a walking stick—affected and effete, probably just as well, though I can feel the apostle saunterer breathing on my nape and demanding my non-conformity—and cracking the spine of my text not once, nothing productive—or in my case, satisfyingly unproductive—was made of the morning for, in my plodding of the dampened khaki earth amid rapidly evaporating mists under that seeping globe difficulty I found in the wrangling, discerning, ordering, and disarming of disparate, clamorous thought. If I am to concertedly spend my time engaged in a meaningful nothing under the unrefined, raw beauty of natural processes with a beginner's vision, that is to click open lids and collect patterns of light and interpret them, a tree, a lighthouse, a seagull, not as my intellectually contained concept of the thing, its semantic preamble, defined by every perceived preceding relative, none of them, and least of all by itself, but rather as the raw components I am gifted to observe, a form and essence unseen, I should like to achieve a certain lion's share of presence.

I should like to sink to my ankles in wet sand and be unsure if it was sand or the ocean itself. If I am to recreate the universe in my image, I'll need to destroy it first.



Suddenly arose great twin breakwaters. The neck almost out of sight behind me, the sun above, just past a beach unfurled its more inviting textures and colors, closer to the public outlet, I could make out faint movements and stark figures pinned into the landscape. A wavering beach towel. Fan of umbrellas. I looked for the man I was supposed to meet. I looked for the sign under which I was to meet the man I was supposed to meet. *Chase Memorial Bay View. Chase Bay Memorial View. Turn it over. Memorial Bay Chase View.*

—I can tell you about that neck there. If that's why you call.

—Well I'd just as well like to hear from you, incidentally, *about* you. Mr. Bernard Dolan is a great beast of a man whose ashen arm hairs grew in concurrence with the first of the dune grasses.

—That's fine. I can do that too. First, the neck. Quinisset neck, that. That great channel is the site of the Cape's rightly first settlement of commercially extracted sea salt—because before the advent of minin', salt deposits in the earth, farming seawater was the most whatchacall? *lucrative* industry for supplying salt to the Americas. Didn't know that? Yeah, same to be said for ice, y'know how they got ice?

—They cut it out of lakes in great big chunks?

—They cut it out of lakes in great big chunks. What'd you say this uh, paper would be about then?

—I'm not really sure yet.

—That's fair 'nough. Anyway,

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Letter to:

PO Box 1032

Gianna Paris

Suffolk, Conn

If I could be in Weimer, 1919.

G,

I've just been having a time of it. I mean really, if you were worried, if you were at all *wondering* for Christ's sake. I mean I'm feeling positively rich with incident and occurrence, a true occidental ennui—Gianna, I am *fermenting* in the stuff! Only now here's my predicament and it's a pretty good one: my eye is blackened. Its swollen shut blackened and I'll tell you what happened because it's so purple-yellow-busted not a soul else on this overgrown sandbar will dare *ask* though I'd be positively delighted to tell. I had been thinking of old Professor Agosti, the Mediterranean expatriate whose extracurricular vices—an abuse of sunbeds, an overreliance on the colloquial suffix, you see what I'm saying? and a string of sultry love affairs with some not-so-minor celebrity academics—kept us rapt in glorious adolescent humor. I don't know why I had been thinking of him on the morning before this one, *Friday* morning, only that I had. And it's not what you think.

I've been thinking more about what you said about summer and all and, dear sweet reader, genteel gentildonna Gianna, the four antecedent years comprise, I humbly submit for your approval, a summer everlasting. English breakfast in the late morning with your flannels pooling on the cement walkway outside Café Pleuvote. You said soy milk would save the world. Peremptory causes come and go along the causeway like freight whose effects are affected by the pious youths fleetingly in the sticky crepuscule. Football games. Eugenics. The girl from the north campus with the foreign breed of dog who had me behaving like St. Francis of Assisi until you positively shook it out of me. The neighborhood of Gentian Park where the gay party house was busted up by the ΦΔΕ guys. A Catholic-raised apostate receives a bid from the Jewish fraternity.

In my head is the arguments of all history fragmented and unceasing. Gianna, I can't stop it. You told me over the phone from that callbox in Rome I was a hoarder but only that I hoarded ideas rather than things and the implication being what an awful crime it is to hoard ideas. I hear Agosti saying how nothing dulls a smart person like scholarship and that the studious youth, the covetous youth is second to a master who waylays that knowledge which might injure his will and I'm honest under the pen always honest under the pen and what a trite lie it is but I tell you I don't understand it and I tell you I wouldn't let another dry chip of sustenance pass over my lips if I thought it would mean I could. I'll tell you as well that if I don't understand him, none of us could ever fully understand him, I'll tell you he understands me! Why, he was the only old goat that had any decency at all to call me down to his townhouse practically under the Nutmeg bridge itself like a

troll of sorts or sort of fable archetype in the flesh anyway and inside in the damn foyer all stacked with books Greek Greek Greek. Greek this, Greek that. All the while mumbling loudly to himself or to me or the damn blind dog, it's axiomatic! it's axiomatic! and the word bilious in there too at least six times. You see he was absolutely appalled at the behavior of his contemporaries and of his pupils—but I just won't get into *that* and that's it. Well anyway I couldn't stop thinking of old Mr. Pellet in his own cottage on the more forgiving wetland grounds of old T. W. Wilson and that was before I even *knew* he was dead and staring at widow Pellet I felt a damn pang of guilt because the bastard Agosti with his damn Greek books would have no crone Mrs. Pellet to cry on the damn threshold—no Mr. Agosti anyway—though maybe all those great white bozos of comparative lit and peer-reviewed self-help psycho-babble would march onto campus in a flagitious procession of fine herringbone and officiously compete over who could deliver the most word-salad-y eulogy. Though most probably not.

I start to get awfully pedantic when I haven't had sex and I'm damn afraid that girl could notice but Gianna, and I know what you'll say, you'll say, Ezra, Venerable, Ezra, Himself, so firm in your convictions, so often utterly *daft*, you always do this and what's more, you always subject *me* to *it*, but you haven't considered the fact, not at all, quite steeped in your maddening pragmatism, you haven't considered the fact that this time might be different and that very idea, whether true or not for we know the difference is indiscernible and all there is is the acknowledgement for what's been acknowledged can never be unacknowledged, that very idea is exigency enough and I implore you, take my

words at your leisure, les yeux marron, but take them. Yahweh!—a pedant!—I mean awfully pedantic, my own ears can't stand to listen to myself talk pedantic and the worst part is I just can't even help it. Even *if* I'm awfully aware of it which, awfully truly abysmally, I often am. Just stammering and pontificating like a proper bozo drink or no—I mean I can be so resoundingly pedantic without a drop of alcohol in me if you care to know! Well, I suppose you do know.

Anyway here's how it happened: I found this bookstore, a used bookstore and I went in to find something to read while I wander around, some short but dense work of fiction or narrative non-fiction, some translation of some obscure German or Russian work whose discrepancies of language and dutiful scholarship of translator unite to form something like a melancholy unreality or a reality that is just ever so slightly askew. God, Gianna when realities are just ever so slightly askew is when I really feel like I'm standing straight up-right for once, you know? It's like the spring semester of our sophomore year when I was politely asked to resign from the club tennis team—incidentally, I never had and never have since been goddamned *asked* physically, a serious request made unto my person with graceful and persuasive hands<sup>1</sup>—and how I was then afflicted with that peculiar affliction that compelled me as from without to sit on the ground in an unsustainable

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes from March 30 1994 report a pre-practice quorum in which the secretary called for a vote to replace 14 canisters of balls, \$32 of gasoline in University transport, and one Donnay racquet restrung after the team had traveled to Stockridge College of Liberal Arts for an unconfirmed match day which had been presented as confirmed by newest captain in charge of scheduling, Ezra Young, who made no comment. Subsequently, the issue of a recent vacancy of another captain position was raised by V.P. after she, the captain, had been seen chastising an aloof Mr. Young before forcibly getting the driver's side mirror of his navy-blue Saab to pass through the head of her racquet with a 'concussive pop,' and leaving practice before attendance was called. Minutes indicate that at 3:26, Ezra unsuccessfully swung a fist at the V.P. and was escorted from the courts by Coach Fielding who confirmed the incident to me.

half-lotus at entirely arbitrary points in the day other than occurring often while ambulating North to South over the quad and often at peak traffic times as I ping-ponged between those first lectures in the Anthr. Dep. and that one creative writing course because I thought I might be a goddamn traveling essayist or writer of short stories like the short haughty magazine type, highbrow for real. You can always trust something to be really high-brow, belle-lettres for His sake, if it's nice and short. *Vite fait bien fait* and that. My English teachers always loved me, I mean it, I would tell them I vacationed in Kurt Vonnegut's house and all, but I could never cut it. I mean lyrical was fine, flowery sure, you know I damn near failed out of our department when door to door practically those Ph.D.s kept telling me *nice writing, inventive prose, but you aren't saying a fucking thing and it's not clear you comprehend this text*—texts! they look damn pleasing arranged on the page that way, I'll tell you, all divinely justified with coquettish little serifs, but what I never could do was come up with a good metaphor the way that's absolutely compulsory in those hot-shot magazines. I'd excommunicate—expatriate and start my own rebel press—no metaphors allowed—and I'd cultivate the hell out of it and I'd get people with something to say I mean Democracy is Aesthetic Compromise and things like that, except I wouldn't have the energy and my whole editorial staff would just turn on me anyway but you know I always wanted to start a movement because all the best art is buoyed by this strong undercurrent of a *movement* only we seemed to have run out of movements our whole generation, just running that last one into the ground is all, and anyway all I felt like I kept doing was studying movements and learning about how all leurs dirigeants knew half as much as I did

or less—I mean I could stand in the mirror and see with my own eyes my bicep and how it's damn near bigger than Elvis Presley's, standing in the halls of old Wilson looking at the onion skin covered oil portraits and see—alright Thoreau was a savant, Joyce, Flaubert, Le Corbusier, Monet, I get it—I'm as smart as old Byron, smarter still than Rimbaud, Fitzgerald, damn Van Gogh—the latter not suicidal only of infrangible martyrdom—if you look at those computer guys or the explosion of pop-music it almost seems like spirited ignorance is a pre-requisite. So what gives?

Guys with movements always have people to talk to.

Guys with movements, men of letters, always write verbose little diatribes against their philistine governments or schema expounding their incomprehensible novels and get such lucid responses back, I mean return letters that don't harangue the guy over his absolutely inflammatory delusions if you want to call them that, they're espousal and they give their work funny little names like Euphuism and dream in syntactic contradiction about art that is free and autotelic but also the rudiments of a new world order. But you, you're like my captive or something, I mean you can't write me back, you can't annotate my clauses that way you love to do, you can't stop me from singing the virtues of my *bilious* individuality, my unparalleled lonesomeness. Bilious is a word I saw written on the insides of my eyelids every time I blinked under the soft halogen of that railcar-bookshop and I promise, and you'll never believe me just never, Gianna! why do you do this? I wasn't in a bad mood, I wasn't annoyed, over-sad, hell, I wasn't even bored. But something about that *collector* when he walked in I just wanted to prove my

existence with algebra and show my goddamn work so that others might find the same conclusion which is: that Ezra Young Lived!

And got punched.

The girl at the counter behind her starlet magazine and bubblegum breath looked all of twelve-years-old and the *collector* positively looked like a swashbuckler, a new-age hipster—Gianna you would have hated him and his pretense and his pontification, disguised as a Yale man—I looked down at my sail-striped oxford, but for Christ, I’m self-aware!—and groping the cloth-bound volumes and smelling the musty hand-cut pages while talking of editions and printings and days and dates and cover-art and scaling qualities and never at all the content of the book—to this moment I remain unsure just *what* book he even meant to buy, the idolater! the literary genius, I’m sure it was Lewis Carroll or Dickens or some other such tome he had no intention of *reading*. So he starts hassling mon petit commis de magasin, the joker, all thin fingered and all, and here I am with my goddamned tennis whites in this silk bag trying to pass the time and—I had to and I had tapped on his damn shoulder with a real wind at my back, you know? and I had started this gesture of sorts and you know what they say about starting gestures, and the girl is looking up at me, I can see the wad of watermelon gum, and I don’t believe what they say about me needing an adversary because I’m not an adversarial guy. Remember that playwrighting professor I graded papers for, well he was always going on about how if there’s no conflict, there’s no play. Maybe my life doesn’t feel like the real thing sometimes. Sometimes I feel like a damn shadow puppet, all intricately silhouetted. I always wanted to go to India.



It wouldn't be a problem. It wouldn't be except that in forty-five minutes I'm to meet a girl, Osana, at King's Quail private country club in Mashpee and be her doubles partner before brunch.

Ezra

Chatham Mass.

July 20, 1996

# screenplays.

- SOUNDS
- Ineffectual
- Excellent Service

## Introduction

The following screenplays exemplify much the same academic process as has been shown with poetry and prose.

James' film studies specialization has been the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century European Avant Garde films from schools such as *The French New Wave* and *The Italian Neo-Realists*, as well as the subsequent developments of *Auteur Theory* and early *Film Theory*. This work, from directors such as Godard, Bergman, Fellini, and Bunuel, constitutes a disruption of the form parallel with the literature of the time and is regarded as having begun cinematic post-modernism.

In his work with cinema, James has sought to excavate these styles and techniques and situate them in a rapidly evolving contemporary media landscape. Additionally, as per his education, he has tried to write and produce films with a literary and poetic quality in favor of traditional dramatic form.

The foremost example, *SOUNDS*, is both an adaptation of the short stories of Vladimir Nabokov and a pastiche of the films of Jean Luc-Godard and the resulting film is thus self-reflexive, artificial, irreverent, and poetic.

From black we hear the sounds of rain beating against a building and a few chords from a detuned piano.

INT. BURR COMMON - DAY

Rain beats against a window pane and we pull back to reveal a young woman sitting at an old piano and noodling.

Her wedding band clinks against the keys.

We move down to reveal a mattress on the floor and a man laying under the sheets, his face obscured by a book:  
LAUGHTER IN THE DARK.

There is no wedding band on his finger.

FRANCIS

(reading)

'In its striving towards artistic materialisation, a subjective idea will be stimulated and jolted by form and may sometimes be pushed on to a path which was entirely unforeseen. This simply means that verbal form is not a passive reflection of a preconceived artistic idea but an active element-'

She slams a key on the piano.

He puts the book down and gets up. His name is FRANCIS.

Francis crosses the room to the piano and stands opposite glaring at the girl who doesn't look up. Her name is ANN.

The rain, the notes, the clinking of the ring.

From above, we see Francis is stretching across the piano.

Finally, she looks up. Francis crosses to the window.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

I think the rain will stop.

The rain spatters his knuckles. He turns away from the window.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Or anyway, it's a sunny sort of rain.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)  
 (sitting down beside her)  
 You were one of those habitually  
 untalkative girls.

Hands swivel from piano keys to knees.

ANN  
 (muted by the rain)  
 I want to tell him... I just can't  
 yet.

Away from the piano now, he is helping her pull on her sweater. He sighs as though to speak but she turns away for her cigarette pack. She pulls one out and lights it. He drops his arms in defeat, smiles and pulls her from behind.

They kiss and then she places the cigarette to his lips.

ANN (CONT'D)  
 I've got to visit Paul today. Come  
 along.

FRANCIS  
 Do we have to?

ANN  
 He invited me and anyway we'll be  
 terribly bored there.

FRANCIS  
 Oh fine.

ANN  
 Will you write about it all? A poem  
 I mean. Or a story.

FRANCIS  
 Oh I don't know. I'll think about  
 writing about it in any case.

TITLE CARD

SOUNDS

EXT. BURR - DAY

Slow motion climb down wall and walk down driveway.

End up at road outside BURR.

She stands in a pool of sunlight smoking.

She flicks her ashes. She exhales sharply.

ANN

I'm not scared. Are you?

Francis walks up to her, puts his thumb on her chin and hugs her. Behind her back, he lift the Godard book and reads aloud from it. She takes it and throws it.

FRANCIS

What the fuck?

(or)

I needed that.

(or)

That was a library book.

Walking up a path.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Maybe I just think it's the right thing probably.

ANN

Don't you ever think of the other person? Do you think of anyone but yourself?

FRANCIS

I think about you all the time.

ANN

You only think about things relative to their opposites. You think about me in terms of what it would mean for me to not be here for you.

FRANCIS

What's the difference?

They arrive at Burr, first walking up to a back door.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

How am I supposed to know if I'm trying too hard?

ANN

You're just supposed to know. You're old enough to know.

FRANCIS

That doesn't seem fair. This town  
is a shit-hole.

ANN

It's beautiful. You're stupid.

They knock on the door but no answer comes. Suddenly, there  
is a call. A woman, up on a balcony.

WOMAN

Who are you looking for?

ANN

Paul!

WOMAN

Paul Palych, you have visitors!  
(then)  
Try the side door.

FRANCIS

I think you only perceive things in  
their immediate form. You're  
utterly unable to conceive of  
implication.

WOMAN

That isn't true and anyway whose  
memory is this? Close your eyes and  
listen to the sounds of the  
children that will be here.

At the side door, Ann smokes. Francis steps under the  
parapet.

FRANCIS

(with one clap)  
Action!

He walks up the door and knocks. Paul answers.

PAUL

Francis! What are you-?

FRANCIS

Paul I was out and I was and it's  
so

ANN

Paul.

PAUL

There's two of you.

Ann and Francis awkwardly shake hands as though they've only just met.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
Yeah, alright. Come in.

INT. BURR

Paul walks them up the steps. Francis pokes at Ann's skirt as she walks up and she slaps him away. They step into the BURR BASEMENT.

PAUL  
Let me get some coffee, come, come.

FRANCIS  
This is where they've got you now,  
Paul?

ANN  
It's lovely.  
(then to Francis)  
I think he forgot he invited me.

Paul brings coffee.

ANN (CONT'D)  
What are you working on?

Ann and Paul stand aside the easel.

PAUL  
Oh well, you know it's a...

PAUL (CONT'D)  
It reminds me of Pittsburgh.

FRANCIS  
What do you remember of that night?

PAUL  
I remember you were with... what's  
her- Claire, do you still see  
Claire?

FRANCIS  
I, uh...

Insert shots of hands and the sounds of skin on skin.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)  
And how about Sarajevo?



PAUL

Was in Ukraine. For his thesis. I spoke to him one day-

FRANCIS

And what are they throwing bombs about?

PAUL

Well I spoke to him he- he asked me if Ukrain had a sort of independence day because he was hearing concussive sounds outside Kyiv, I said Dear Sarajevo do you read the news?

FRANCIS

Was he evacuated?

PAUL

He said he was going to stick it out. For the sake of his thesis.

FRANCIS

His- about how the Polish jews may have actually stolen the idea for the bagel from the Ukrainian Bublik?

PAUL

Yeah.

FRANCIS

Well. And Vassili?

PAUL

Last I heard, he was staying with a refugee family in Belfast. Or he was at least until he was arrested for indecent exposure, that one made the university paper... And how is your husband?

A long silence.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Well anyway, I think I'm in love.

FRANCIS

Oh. And how does she feel about it?

PAUL

I said to her, 'Come be with me. So that when I do things, I can do them for you. Or anyway, you'll be in my periphery.'

FRANCIS

That's very logical. Oh fuck!

They look at Ann who has bitten her lip until blood runs down her chin. She touches the blood and Francis comes to wipe it away proper, with his thumb.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Are you O.K.?

ANN

Probably.

(then)

I hope she loves you, Paul.

PAUL

Thank you.

Close on Ann as the music starts.

EXT. PARK (OCCUM) - DAY

As they walk away, they pass a girl with a blue scarf. Her and Francis make eyes at one another.

Francis runs up behind Ann and grabs her elbow. We can't hear their words over the sounds of nature. But whatever they are, they hurt.

On Ann, we see she is crying when she looks up. With a lighter in her hand. She flicks it in Francis' face and he recoils.

ANN

I left my cigarettes at Paul's.

FRANCIS

Ann, I-

ANN

Please.

He starts to move away, angry, but she takes his hand and then takes hold of his face.

FRANCIS

Stay here.

He runs away.

Returning to the building, Francis passes the woman with the scarf again. It seems she is leaving from Paul's.

When he answers the door, there are tears streaming down his face.

INT. BURR BASEMENT

Inside, the painting is torn to shreds, the room is trashed.

PAUL

It's that love. The problems I have of it seem so much more detrimental than what you read goes on in those other places. How absurd.

FRANCIS

(looking for cigarettes)  
I think you just have more time to sit and think about it. You should go outside. There are sounds Paul.  
(finds the gun)  
Everything in here falls so dead.

PAUL

I think I'll do some ayahuasca.

FRANCIS

It's just no good in here

Francis grabs the cigarettes and makes to leave.

PAUL

Tell me that there are other things to live for?

FRANCIS

How about the next time I see you?

PAUL

Au revoir.

FRANCIS

Bye Paul.

On the way out the door, Paul stops Francis and punches him in the face. He then hands him a band-aid.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Francis runs along while Ann reads out of the book.

He passes a tall man with a bicycle and stops to do a double take.

The tall man asks him for a cigarette and Francis gives him one.

As he takes one out of the pack, we see a wedding band on his ring finger.

The man gives Francis a suspicious look. He is DAMON.

DAMON

Are you with the phone company?

FRANCIS

What?

DAMON

They're working on the lines.

FRANCIS

I'm a writer.

DAMON

Oh. 'A writer.' You're a literary agent? You're as dull as rain at dawn.

FRANCIS

That's rude.

DAMON

An observation.

FRANCIS

Would you kill yourself for a girl to notice you?

DAMON

You love a girl like you love a time period in which you never lived.

EXT. SHAFER GARDEN

Francis finds her at the bench.

FRANCIS

Suddenly, he noticed that she had blushed violently and risen to her feet.

EXT. FRONT STEPS - DAY

ANN

I've decided I love you.

FRANCIS

That's a luxury.

ANN

Do you love me?

FRANCIS

I don't know. Probably I do.

ANN

Did you like looking for me when I hid?

FRANCIS

I always like looking.

ANN

I'll tell him today.

FRANCIS

No. Let's just... No.

Francis starts down the path away from her. He looks back.

Ann holds out a finger gun to him.

BANG.

Francis acts shot.

He runs into Damon on the steps, sneaks away.

DAMON

They want me to teach in the west end for a year.

ANN

Are we the survivors of the shipwreck of modernity?

DAMON

You wouldn't know it to look at you.

ANN  
Something.

DAMON  
You're a didactic catydid.

He boops her nose and they glare at each other.

DAMON (CONT'D)  
Can you remember loving when you  
were a child? I don't know if it  
hurt more or less.

Francis steals the beauty from the past and rejects the  
ideologies. He takes the luxuries of the present while  
eschewing the responsibility.

Francis steals the bicycle.

FRANCIS  
Hey!  
(beat)  
Fuck you asshole!

Francis trips with the bike and Damon catches up to him.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)  
I've been punched today already.

DAMON  
It's no matter. I would hit you but  
you're barely there. She'll forget  
you when you leave the room just  
like the whole of your generation.

FRANCIS  
What the fuck does that mean?

EXT. RUINED BUILDING - DAY

Francis stands with his hand on a girl's breast.

GIRL  
Would you like to hear a poem I  
wrote?

FRANCIS  
Sure.

GIRL  
(taking out paper)  
'The baby is lying under the  
streets.

(MORE)

GIRL (CONT'D)

Dark is a darling beneath your  
pleats. For miles and miles and  
miles. Call your mother, or maybe  
just come home for Thanksgiving.

FRANCIS

(dropping his hand)

Oh.

EXT. WALL BY THE GYM - DAY

Francis walks up to a young girl.

FRANCIS

I'd like to crush her beautiful  
throat.

GIRL

I'm dead anyway.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Francis walks alone.

On the bridge, he turns the gun over in his hands.

The girl with the scarf walks past him.

He holds the gun up and thinks.

FRANCIS

No. You can't take a pistol and  
plug and plug a girl you barely  
know just because she turns you on.

Francis walks along and sees Paul painting on an easel  
outside in the sun. He is painting a vase of flowers. They  
wave and Francis takes the flowers out of the vase.

Francis walks up the blue scarf girl in the gazebo and hands  
her the flowers. She smiles.

THE END

Ineffectual

by

James David Donahue



FROM BLACK

We hear the sounds of nature.

We hear a stream gurgling.

Birds.

Leaves.

Thrashing water.

A match is struck in the dark.

EXT. RIVER'S EDGE - DAY

From a distance, we can see a footbridge and a stream. The landscape is cold and muted; the trees are skeletal.

Then we see her. A girl stands beside the river, her back to us. She is looking down in the stream.

From her vantage, atop the footbridge, there is stillness in the water. There is silence.

We notice a momentary and pensive sadness in her eyes before a gust of wind sets a chill in and brings her back to the present.

Her name is AMELIA. She is twenty-eight with a severity that ages her. Bracing against the harshness of the Pacific Northwest, she is alone. Looking back toward the stream we notice-

EXT. STREAM - NIGHT - PAST

A man writhes and flails in the water. Churning up a rich foam, his bearded face is in a panic.

The water looks so cold. Each gasp is one of considerable effort.

There is fire reflected in his eyes.

EXT. STREAM - DAY

The stream is calm. There is no one but her looking down. Amelia seems almost troubled by the vision but resolute. She exits the bridge.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

The young woman travels up the countryside toward a lovely cabin, pulling her overcoat tight.

Silently, she mouths numbers as she walks. She is counting her steps.

As the sun sets behind her, a storm cloud rolls in.

Just then--something in the grass, flitting like a field mouse with a broken foot. She retrieves it.

It is a book, open to a page which reads:

Existence, or at least a minute part  
Of my existence, only through my art,  
In terms of combinational delight;  
And if my private universe scans right,  
So does the verse of galaxies divine  
Which I suspect is an iambic line.  
I'm reasonably sure that we survive  
And that my darling somewhere is alive-

Amelia promptly closes it.

The lightest wisps of snow trace the breeze.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Upon arriving at the cabin, Amelia notices a man walking away from the porch.

MAN

Amelia, that storm's coming in fast  
 and you're surveying the  
 countryside with a fractured  
 whatchamacallit.

AMELIA

I'm healed, Shep.

SHEP is sixty-one this month, one half Chinookan Native, draped in stiff work-wear and smoking a clove cigarette. He stands by his pick-up.

SHEP

Heal-ing.  
 (beat)  
 I thought she would be done by now,  
 child. Those damn German parts.

As Shep steps closer, Amelia recoils. We take special notice of the ember on his cigarette.

SHEP (CONT'D)

Sorry.

He realizes and steps it out.

AMELIA

It's alright. About the car. I'll survive. I always do.

(looking at leg)

I don't have anywhere to go anyway.

Shep hands her a big paper bag of groceries.

SHEP

A weeks worth.

AMELIA

Thank you.

She notices his trepidation.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

What is it?

SHEP

Can't I convince ya to come down, stay with Maria and me. Just until the storm passes.

AMELIA

No.

SHEP

I'm afraid you'll be snowbound and I won't be able to get back up this road. If we lose power-

AMELIA

If we lose power, I've got the generator.

SHEP

The people down in town, they- there's no reason to be-

AMELIA

What?

SHEP

No one would bother you is all.

AMELIA

I'm not afraid of the people, Shep.  
I just need more time.

Amelia nervously moves in to hug Shep. He is delicate. When they touch-

There is a flash of images:

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT - PAST

A Volvo station wagon is pulled up on the flank of driveway. All the doors are swung open. The nighttime is damp and swollen. The trees reflect the orange of the raging fire which engulfs the nose of the car.

Again, a match is struck.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

She breaks the embrace.

SHEP

Goodbye now, child. Oh, there's more of them now. Them publishing types out of New York can really afford the good ones too.

Amelia sighs as she walks toward the porch.

There is a vase of flowers on the bottom step when she arrives. A card sticks out of the bouquet. She takes them in hand.

After Shep drives away, Amelia looks down at the stairs.

She tries to mount them, counting as she does, but is forced to restart time and time again. It becomes evident she is suffering from some form of compulsive disorder.

INT. CABIN - DUSK

Finally, she bursts through the door. Tears stream down her face.

She pulls the card.

I'm so sorry for your loss, Amelia, love. What a terrible accident. We want you to know, we're thinking about you in New York. Both of you.

Lydia Kinbote

Putnam Associates

Amelia plucks the heads from the roses and eats a petal. She then closes the door behind her.

Inside, the cabin is one large space with conjoined living room, dining room, and kitchen. Above the kitchen is a loft space with master suite. There is a short hallway leading a guest bedroom and powder room.

In the kitchen, Amelia drops the flowers into a trash bin filled with several other bouquets at various stages of decay.

We hear wind beat at the exterior walls.

She still has the book and, opening to the first pages, reads a handwritten inscription:

For my nymph come pirouetting. The only editor I trust. My wife. I love you. -Charles

Amelia leaves the book on the counter.

In the living room, she puts on a record (compulsively flipping it a few times before dropping the needle). We see her walk in this pattern, stopping only to pull a teabag from a drawer. She turns on the T.V. She eyes a thermostat. She carefully warms her hands by a space heater.

Back in the kitchen, Amelia eyes the gas stove before dejectedly taking out an electric kettle and heating some water.

While removing groceries from her bag, Amelia finds a long box, gift wrapped with a note:

Just in case of emergency, child. The wise at nightfall praise the day. Just for emergency.

AMELIA

I think he should be a king of this land or others.

She tears the paper off and immediately drops what she recognizes as a box of extra-long kitchen matches. They spill across the floor.

Amelia gasps and recoils.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT - PAST

At the fireplace, a man holds an unlit match. Kneeling beside Amelia, he strikes it, holds it up, and takes her hand. We recognize him to be the man from the water. No longer thrashing. No longer dying.

He is showing her how to light the wood burning stove within the fireplace.

INT. CABIN - DUSK

Amelia hastily collects the matches and leaves the box on the counter. She resumes her pattern. Checks the thermostat. Checks the electric heater. Takes note of the cold fireplace.

From the center of the room Amelia notices an announcement from the television and turns the knob down on her stereo.

FEMALE ANCHOR

More than 30,000 residents in the state are without power as those winds and snows and freezing rains move in from our northeast.

MALE ANCHOR

It's the freezing rain that really gets you.

FEMALE ANCHOR

Absolutely, Mark. Now, we've been in this cold front for days but when your husband drowns out there that's just a completely different story now isn't?

MALE ANCHOR

Well that's right, Martha, I mean do you suppose the water would actually freeze in a sheet above his body, effectively, preventing him from ever escaping that cold watery prison?

FEMALE ANCHOR

Well that's tough to say, Mark, but what we know for sure is that-

She clicks off the television and sits beside the record player.

She closes her eyes and-

INT. CABIN - NIGHT - PAST

He takes her by the hand. We can see their wedding rings. He is leading her in a dance.

CHARLES

You found it. My favorite book. How ever did it get all the way out there?

INT. CABIN - DUSK

Amelia opens her eyes. She sees the book on the counter. She sees the box of matches. She sees her kettle roiling.

In the kitchen she pours a mug of hot water. Then spills it in the sink. Something about it just wasn't quite right. She pours another. And spills it. The water continues to boil. Suddenly-

His hands are around her waist. He turns her around. Runs his fingers through her hair.

He kneels and runs his hands along her stomach. Tugging at her clothes. He takes her fingers into his mouth. Bruises are revealed.

We can't see his face. We know understand he isn't truly there with her.

CHARLES V.O.

It's gonna get cold.

The needle is skipping on the vinyl.

The temperature on the thermometer is dropping.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT - PAST

The living room is now darker. He stands in the center, dripping wet, arms out as though waiting for a dance partner.

This is the vision of the man, drowning in the icy riverbed, come back to his tortured wife.

INT. CABIN - DUSK

At the stove, she is alone. We get the sense that at some point, her O.C.D will break her.

As Amelia tries to cross the room toward the record player to stop it from skipping, she has trouble choosing her path.

One second, he is there, lighting the fire for her. The next he is gone.

She stumbles and falls. When she hits the floor, the bump is enough to fix the needle and the song resumes. Only now the kettle is screaming.

The power goes out.

Amelia has lost consciousness.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT - PAST

In the moonlit living room, he takes her hand. They dance a dark, slow waltz. Sometimes it looks pleasant. Other times, he is dripping wet, ghastly. Other times still, she is dancing all alone. We see their hands clasp. We see their feet perform the steps. We see the torn flowers. The framed picture.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Snow beats against the window panes. The kettle has gone cold. Amelia wakes up. The thermostat has dropped.

She sits there, on the floor, afraid. She looks at the fireplace.

CHARLES V.O.  
You'll have to do it.

AMELIA  
No.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

Amelia clings to the wall as the snow piles up around her. Finally, she finds the generator.

AMELIA  
What the fuck is wrong with you?

She unscrews a cap, shakes the basin. It is full of gasoline. She recoils and falls on her ass.

Amelia stands. She finds a second cap and undoes it revealing a hand pull. She grabs it, rears herself, and yanks the cord. The generator doesn't turn over.



INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Amelia takes her landline phone off the wall and tries it. The lines are down.

Charles stands in the center of the room dripping wet and looking quite dead.

CHARLES

If I were there, I would do it for you my love. If I were there I would do so many things. I've been vanished, my dear. The lunatic king. I'm so glad you found it.

AMELIA

I can't make fire. I can't.

CHARLES

Why are you so afraid? Your own pale ineffectual fire stolen from the sun.

(beat)

I left it there for you to find.

Amelia takes the book. She rips the pages out. Balls them up. Into the fireplace.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT - PAST

Pulling out of an embrace, she takes her face out of his shoulder, looks up at him. He drags a thumb across her lips. The striking of a match is reflected in her face. The somnolent romance of their waltz melts away into fear.

The car with its doors all open. Tail lights turn the forest red.

The stream, flowing.

CHARLES V.O.

Did you tell them it was an accident? The editors? The publishers?

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Amelia tries the matches but her O.C.D. won't let her. One after another. This one not right. Too long, too large, too asymmetrical.

Charles is still dripping. He wipes a drip away, smells it, then licks it and recoils.

CHARLES

Hazel Shade drowned herself in a frozen lake for the beauty she could never possess.

Finally, she strikes a match, but drops it in fear and steps it out.

Amelia begins to cry.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT - PAST

The sweetness sours as his hands find her neck.

A cup smashes across the floor.

The fire rages.

He is screaming at her. Pushing her. Hitting her. He holds her hand to the flame. Strikes a match in her face. Throws a cup, a dish, flowers, a picture.

He lifts her shirt and reveals a patchwork of burn marks.

CHARLES

Be a good wife Amelia. Everyone in New York says you're such a good wife. I tend the fire while you tend my words. Everything clean and orderly.

AMELIA

Please don't.

CHARLES

Fire is clean.

Amelia is able to free herself by smashing a plate over her attacker's head.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

There is one match left in the box.

She picks up the book. Opens the first page and, looking at the inscription from her abusive husband, tears it out.

AMELIA

I won't do it anymore. I won't.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT - PAST

Amelia runs out the back door, down the driveway. Her attacker isn't far behind, but he pauses in his pursuit, to pick up a gas can.

CHARLES

Honey! Don't make me do this!

He pours the gasoline all down his head and body. Gritting his teeth through maniacal anger, he moves on.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

(taking out a match)

Amelia! I will do it!

He light the match and-

Suddenly, the man is struck with a Volvo station wagon. The gas can bounces off the hood. The match ignites the flame. Charles is knocked into the snow unlit but the car goes up in flames.

Amelia escapes, leaving the car just as we've been seeing it.

EXT. HILLSIDE - NIGHT - PAST

She drags his unconscious body. All the way to the bridge. And rolls him off of it. The impact sinks him but slowly Charles begins to rise. Surely, to wake, soon.

But Amelia comes back with a large stone and rolls it off the edge.

He is thrashing again. Writhing. His face deeply submerged. Gasping for air. Just as we first saw him, only this time, the stone is revealed to us. Sitting on his lower abdomen. Holding him down, indefinitely.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

She strikes the last match and ignites the crumpled page before tossing it into the stove.

It catches.

EXT. RIVER'S EDGE - NIGHT - PAST

Heaving, she stands on the bridge looking over the man.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Amelia falls back away from the fireplace.

She is freed from her fear and able to save herself from the cold. Warmth fills the cabin.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT - PAST

The car fire raging up the hill behind her, Amelia watches her husband drown.

She is freed from the man, able to save herself from his hands.

AMELIA V.O.

I was your darling. Difficult,  
morose. Beneath the word but above  
the syllable. Stunted by your false  
azures. Burnt by your promises. I  
fucking killed you.

She smiles.

The End.

'Gotta Get Away' by The Black Keys

EXCELLENT SERVICE

Written by

James David Donahue

May 2023

FROM BLACK:

MALE VOICE

It's criminal for Jess not to let the new register girl wear shorts in this weather.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DELI COUNTER - DAY

It is the hottest day of the year, 1968, in a small, coastal college town.

A young girl stands behind a register sweating. She plays with her hair. Tugs at her shirt.

Golden sunlight floods through the storefront windows behind her.

MALE VOICE O.S.

I mean really criminal.

SAMMY, 19 leans on the deli counter next to MAX, 24, both sweating and gawking at the register girl, ALANA, 15.

MAX

I'm boiling just looking at her.

SAMMY

Alright calm down. I can't believe I'm here right now, I could be writing, painting, swimming-

MAX

I didn't know you could do any of that.

SAMMY

Well I can't. But anyway I'd have more time to learn-

MAX

Look it's the horseradish lady.

An old lady pushes a carriage along. There is a cat in the child's seat. She stops in front of a stack of horseradish.

MAX (CONT'D)

It's the hottest day of the year she won't. She can't.

SAMMY

So the cat is her husband?

She is showing the cat bottles of horseradish.

MAX

No the cat is her mister. That's her husband.

Four aisles down, an elderly man examines eggs individually.

MAX (CONT'D)

He has no idea his wife thinks the ghost of her secret dead lover lives on in that cat.

Suddenly, a man, PERRY, 46, bursts through a set of french doors behind them carrying armfuls of cabbages.

PERRY

It's so fucking hot I can't think. The cabbages were starting to steam. Did none of you think to get the cabbages? Shouldn't you be stocking shelves?

SAMMY

Marques can stock the shelves when he gets here.

PERRY

When does he get here?

SAMMY

Four minutes ago. I'm off.

The clock shows 11:34.

PERRY

You're on. Until he gets here you're on. And I'm melting.

SAMMY

I can't stay here. What if I had a girl waiting at the beach for me?

PERRY

Do you?

SAMMY

I can't stay.

PERRY

You're already on thin ice.

SAMMY

Perry. Can I have my check please?

PERRY

You know I'm not supposed to.

SAMMY

I know they came in. I don't understand the rule, I don't understand why I should wait-

PERRY

It's Jess' rule.

SAMMY

Jess isn't here. You're my manager. The Sea is fresh. The world is on fire, actually I think the flowers in the front display actually are.

PERRY

(running away)

Stock your shelves and wait until Marques gets here, I'll think about it.

Perry leaves with his cabbages. The two men ready themselves.

MAX

What's it at?

SAMMY

(looking in deli cooler)

38. Is that higher than the last time?

MAX

I don't know but we better be quick.

Sammy turns a timer to 25 seconds. They kneel behind the counter, throw open the deli-meat cooler door and thrust their faces in. Relief.

The timer goes off and they stand back up, startled by the horseradish woman standing right at the counter.

HORSERADISH WOMAN

You know, horseradish helps with the heat.

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE - AISLES - DAY

Sammy is stocking shelves.

Outside the store front windows, he watches as a group of teens walk past the store. They strip shirts off and toss pages into the air.

As Sammy walks along mindlessly placing items on the shelves and staring outside, a little boy follows behind him removing each item he leaves and placing it back on his rolling cart. Sammy never notices.



His field of vision is interrupted by a beautiful woman, SANDY, 39, who crosses the aisle.

He turns and the kid runs away.

Sammy walks one aisle over in time to see the old woman drop cup of hot CLAM CHOWDER on the floor and struggle to clean it while her cat leaps from its seat to get licking.

Quickly, Sammy keeps going and nearly bumps into Sandy.

SAMMY

Hello. Can I help you with that?

She has a hand basket with about four items in it.

SANDY

(giggling)

Um, sure.

SAMMY

They're saying it's the hottest day of the year.

SANDY

I've never been so happy to live by the sea. The breeze is wonderful, for now.

Sammy is looking at her breasts. Sandy grabs her necklace.

SANDY (CONT'D)

Louis Vuitton. I got it for my mother but she never wore it. So when she died I took it back.

SAMMY

I haven't seen you in here before. I know everyone in this town, unfortunately.

SANDY

What's your name?

SAMMY

Sammy.

SANDY

Hi Sammy, I'm Sandy. Isn't that funny. Sandy, Sammy. I traded one sea for another, Sammy. When I moved here last week.

Sammy bumps into a rack of salsas.

SANDY (CONT'D)

What do you do, Sammy?

SAMMY

I'm a personal shopper obviously. I provide excellent service.

The old woman is still struggling as they pass.

SANDY

Only to shoppers you're attracted to?

SAMMY

No, no, no.

SANDY

I mean other than this. Do you go to the University? Are you an artist? An activist? Do you fuck?

SAMMY

I used to be in the circus.  
 (he picks up some oranges,  
 juggles them for a moment,  
 and drops them)  
 They fired me.

She giggles.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

I don't know what I'm doing. Other than not much. I'm almost 20. I don't want to be here forever. But I'll figure it out. What do you do?

SANDY

I'm an adult film actress.

Sammy drops the basket and picks it up, embarrassed.

SAMMY

Like pornography?

SANDY

Tasteful pornography. Yes.

SAMMY

Will you go out with me?

SANDY

No. I will not. But the little girl at the register has seemed increasingly annoyed since we started talking.

Alana quickly looks away.

SANDY (CONT'D)

You should ask her out. Or anyway you should do something with yourself.

SAMMY

Sometimes I really want to.

SANDY

Life is too short for wanting. There's only time for doing. I moved here to direct my first adult film.

SAMMY

Woah. Director. Maybe I could do that.

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE - REGISTER - DAY

Sammy bags for Sandy while Alana rings her up. He sneaks glances up at Alana frequently.

ALANA

That's the wrong bag.

SAMMY

Oh yeah.

ALANA

You're gonna get in trouble.

SAMMY

I don't care. I was already saying, I was saying to uh, Max, how criminal, just criminal, it is that they're making you wear pants.

ALANA

It's so hot.

SAMMY

Sandy's boss never makes her wear pants.

ALANA

Who?

Sammy points to Sandy who smiles.

SANDY

It's true.

Sandy is finished and thus is Sammy. He stands there looking at Alana as though waiting to say something.

SANDY (CONT'D)  
 (while leaving)  
 You don't have as much time as you think.

He makes to say something to Alana when suddenly-

PERRY  
 Sammy. Back to the deli. There are three people in here, Alana can handle it by herself.

SAMMY  
 What about my coverage?

PERRY  
 We're making calls. You're here for now, you're being paid, go.

Sammy looks toward Sandy who is nudging out the door. Disappointed, he stalks off.

The little boy arrives at the register, he puts down a cap gun and a lemon.

PERRY (CONT'D)  
 Alana, go cool off.

Perry takes over the register, rings up the kid.

KID  
 A pack of Chesterfield lights.

Perry rings it up.

CUT TO:

EXT. GROCERY STORE - STORE FRONT - DAY

Sammy is sweeping the sidewalk in front of the store while Max stands smoking.

SAMMY  
 I should be down there.

Left of the grocery store, the harbor and beach is in sight.

SAMMY (CONT'D)  
 I could be reading under an umbrella.  
 Drinking Arnold Palmers.

MAX  
 What's an Arnold Palmer?

SAMMY

What? It's a new thing. A new drink. It's perfect.

(then)

We should really be involved in more things. Do you ever feel like time is running out?

MAX

What? Running out?

SAMMY

Running up.

MAX

Running up?

SAMMY

Yes.

MAX

Well. That's what time does, or anyway it's not up to me.

SAMMY

Yes but we could be doing more.

MAX

So register for some classes. Move out of your parent's house. This is one of the most groovy college towns there is and you work full-time at the Piggly-Wiggly.

SAMMY

Well so do you.

MAX

Hey I've seen it all man.

Sammy shrugs and turns up the radio.

FEMALE RADIO VOICE

Well the air is just sweltering. Be careful on that asphalt everybody. We are reaching record highs today.

MALE RADIO VOICE

That's right I'm getting reports that several hundred inland dairy cows have collapsed perhaps to death and the refrigeration units keeping all that milk fresh don't stand a chance. How about you pop a button or two, Eloise?

FEMALE RADIO VOICE

(giggling)

Oh, Paul.

MALE RADIO VOICE

They can't see.

He clicks it off.

SAMMY

That mother fucker should be here by now.

Young adults begin walking by in swimsuits. One young man paints something on a young woman's belly.

A young man, STEVE in swim trunks stops in front of Sammy.

STEVE

You're with them?

SAMMY

With who?

STEVE

The administration. The man. Who else jack-off?

SAMMY

I just work here.

STEVE

Take off that uniform and read a banned book my friend. Things are changing. Watch.

Steve takes off his moccasins and puts his bare feet on the asphalt. He dances like a cartoon cowboy, his toes sizzling on the hot road.

SAMMY

Shit. Put them back on.

STEVE

Ok.

(he does)

But now you understand.

SAMMY

What?

STEVE

It's a revolution Jack!

Steve leaves toward the beach just as a siren rings out. The two boys look up, across the street.

SAMMY

I'm not with them.

On a fire escape, stands a young woman, AIKO, 19, wearing a bright red beret and a scissor cut bob. Her clothes are militant. There is a cherry blossom painted on her vest.

She strikes a match on the brick and lights a cigarette.

She speaks into the megaphone.

AIKO

To the beach students! To the beach until  
they give us what we want!

A young girl walks by with a picket sign that reads:

LES ENFANTS CHAUDS

MAX

What do they want?

GIRL

To wear swimsuits in class. It's a  
walkout.

Sammy looks back up to the fire escape and she is gone.

FADE TO BLACK.

FROM BLACK:

SAMMY

Alright, cut!

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Sammy is sitting in a director's chair with the waves crashing on the surf behind him.

SAMMY

Alright, that's enough talking. I'm  
sweating my ass off.

Opposite Sammy, there are two women and a man under an umbrella, half naked, framed in front of a camera, and clearly on set of a porn film.

Sammy walks up to them.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Less philosophizing, more fucking. When  
this yacht gets here we're-

A production assistant steps in:

P.A.

Sir, the yacht is here.

SAMMY

Goddamnit-lookit that thing. Thank you.  
 (to the actors)  
 We're behind schedule and over-budget.

ACTRESS

Isn't this a student project?

SAMMY

We'll all get incompletes. One more take.

Sammy walks back to his chair. Wipes sweat from his brow.

P.A.

(holding swatches of fabric)  
 Sir, they'd like you to approve the  
 outfits for scene 12.

SAMMY

Well, how long are they gonna be wearing  
 them? Oh- Action!

ACTRESS

Why don't you speak to me?

ACTOR

Speaking is fatal.

ACTRESS

Speaking is a resurrection. Speech is  
 another life from when one does not  
 speak.

ACTOR

I have trouble saying what I want to say.  
 The more one talks, the less words mean.

ACTRESS

There is an ascetic rule that stops one  
 from talking well until one sees life  
 with detachment...

(beat)

How do you like my tits?

A fisherman walks into frame with two gigantic tuna.

SAMMY

Who are you, you're not in this scene?

The porn actors start stroking the fish and all of a sudden-



INT. GROCERY STORE - FISH COUNTER - DAY

SAMMY

(waking up)

Cut.

CUSTOMER

Are you listening to me? Honestly, they shouldn't hire disableds to work with food.

Sammy had been daydreaming. An angry customer is gesticulating with a large fish on the counter in front of him.

SAMMY

Sorry.

He begins wrapping it up but sees the beret girl, Aiko, standing outside. The crowd of students has gotten larger.

When he runs up to the-

INT. GROCERY STORE - REGISTER - DAY

Aiko is gone. The kids in their bathing suits are getting rowdy.

A guy in a cowboy hat with a single flower pushes past Sammy.

CHESTER WHEELMAN, 46.

CHESTER WHEELMAN

Those kids and their swim trunks-

MAX

(to Sammy)

It's that creep that brings the register girls flowers. He's like 50.

Perry appears.

PERRY

Sammy. Walk with me.

Sammy tears himself away from the register where Chester is approaching Alana.

SAMMY

(pointing outside)

Have you seen this? It's amazing. I mean it's different than this, the people that shop in here...

Old people make lines.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Sheep.

PERRY

(not listening)

Yeah, look. I'm going to get your check. This once. I don't want you telling your coworkers.

Max peaks from around the corner.

PERRY (CONT'D)

I don't need everyone asking for this. But we appreciate you staying for close.

SAMMY

For close, no, Perry. I can't-

PERRY

Do you see this? It's picking up. People are afraid of this heat. What's more, they're afraid of the kids. I need you, you're a pillar of this establishment.

(beat)

You have management in your future. Hold on, I'll be back with your check.

SAMMY

Perry I have things I want to do.

Perry leaves.

Sammy notices a group of swimsuit clad college girls come flowing into the store. They're looking through the produce, the freezer section.

MAX

They're making formal demands. I'm going out there. Shit, it's her!

Sammy finds her in the crowd. She is waving a red, white, and blue bomb pop in the sky and speaking into a megaphone.

An old man in tweed comes through the door. He is a professor.

PROFESSOR

The students have lost their mind. I wear tweed every day. Some days suede. Do you see me complaining?

(He is sweating bullets)

And what about you? What do you think?

SAMMY

I think I'm in love.

PROFESSOR

I think I'm going to faint.

Sammy walks away.

Chester Wheelman is leaning into Alana who looks uncomfortable.

MAX

Sammy are you coming?

Suddenly, Max is wearing pastel colored face paint and no shirt.

Old people keep coming into the store, faculty or otherwise.

They congregate in their layers of polyester, smell gallons of milk that have turned, inspect canned peaches, commiserating while the young take over the town in a blur of skin.

Sammy watches in awe, thinking about making a decision.

GIRL

I like your uniform.

She is sucking a popsicle and wearing a bikini.

They're just so enticing. Blonde girls and tanned girls, brunette girls, black girls, reach for potato chips and liters of sticky cola, chewing bubble-gum or ice. The girl with her popsicle winks and runs off with her crew.

PERRY

Hey!

Perry comes running from the office, holding Sammy's check.

SAMMY

Perry, can I please leave?

PERRY

Are those girls wearing bathing suits?  
Barefooted. They can't be in here dressed  
like that.

He runs off after them.

CHESTER WHEELMAN

Come on sweetheart. You seem like such a  
mature young lady.

Alana smiles awkwardly.

CHESTER WHEELMAN (CONT'D)

Honey, I'm a friend of the owner.

He grabs at her hair.

ALANA

Hey! Don't.

Alana looks toward Sammy who takes a step to act but changes direction and hides behind a shelf.

AIKO

Why didn't you defend her?

She was standing just beside him.

SAMMY

What the fuck?

AIKO

I know you wanted to, I watched you think about exactly how you would do it. And I also saw the moment it went from you being her hero to her sucking your cock.

SAMMY

That is not (what I was-)

AIKO

Are you observing or are you participating?

SAMMY

In what?

AIKO

Life.

Sammy straightens himself and grabs Aiko by the elbows looking absolutely enamoured.

Aiko looks uncomfortable.

The bathing suit girls are running from Perry.

A kid with a megaphone bursts in.

BOY

We've got the mayor holed up in his office! Our intel shows his refrigerant is going to run out within the hour! He'll have to listen to us!

Perry grabs at the megaphone.

PERRY

Gimme that. Attention girl-children in two piece bathing suits and bare feet. I'm going to ask that you please leave the store.

Just then, students with picket signs tip over an ice machine outside the front window. They start throwing bags of ice in the air.

CHESTER WHEELMAN

I'm Chester Wheelman. I used to be a race car driver. This is a peony I think. Will you help me find Cooper Extra Sharp cheese? It's the only one I can eat with this ulcer. The usual girls know how I like it.

Alana tries to leave the register.

AIKO

What are you gonna do?

SAMMY

I can make you an Arnold Palmer.

AIKO

Are you kidding?

SAMMY

It's half iced tea half lemonade.

AIKO

What are you gonna do about that old asshole? Sit around until you become him?  
(tugging his clothes)  
This smock says you provide excellent service. Well?

The bathing suit girls find their way into Sammy's aisle. The leader, QUEENIE, 18, steps up to Sammy.

QUEENIE

Where can I find Kipper Snacks?

AIKO

(to Queenie)  
Walk slow and hold yourself straight.

SAMMY

You can never know for sure how girls minds work can you?

Sammy stands up straight and marches toward the register. He WINKS at Aiko. He grabs Kipper Snacks from a rack and TOSSES them to Queenie. He pulls a cigarette out of the little boys mouth and sticks it in his own. He TEARS OFF his APRON.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Hey, Chester Wheelman-

CHESTER WHEELMAN

(turning around)  
Huh?

Sammy pick up a large cup of CLAM CHOWDER from under a warmer.

SAMMY

Fuck you and your race car!

He tosses the hot chowder all over Chester. Alana looks mildly shocked. Sammy looks back to see his flock, expecting admiration but sees only Perry, holding each girl by a shoulder and chastising them. None of them saw what he did.

CHESTER WHEELMAN

I'm gonna fuck you up.

Chester punches Sammy in the stomach so hard he falls back on a display of donuts and knocks the entire thing down. When he stands up, Chester Wheelman is storming out and Perry is coming over with the girls.

PERRY

Did you throw clam chowder at Jess' close friend? I'm trying to make you manager what is (wrong with you)?

SAMMY

He was harassing-

CHESTER WHEELMAN

Jess is gonna hear about this! I am gonna kick your ass every time I see it!

PERRY

What were you thinking?

Sammy looks toward the register but Alana is being relieved by a frumpy older cashier. Alana quickly takes her pants and name tag off and runs out the store.

Aiko is not with the other girls who are waiting behind Perry.

SAMMY

I've been trying to leave all day. Just once I wanted not to keep doing whatever I'm doing. Everything else is changing all the time, Perry.

PERRY

This is one of those rare good places that stays.

The girls snicker.

PERRY (CONT'D)

(to the girls)

Look I'm not going to argue with you. It's just against our policy. Protest the university all you want, this is a place of business, girls. We need you to be decent.

Perry sticks his hand out-

PERRY (CONT'D)

For the Kipper Snacks.

-and Queenie takes out a dollar bill from between her breasts. Perry leans over the belt, places it in the register and returns to her a quarter.

PERRY (CONT'D)

Off you go.

Sammy starts looking up and down the aisles. Looking for Aiko. He looks out the window, Alana is tossing a beach ball around. Max is hammering away at a fire hydrant.

The swimsuit girls are walking off.

SAMMY

I quit.

PERRY

Excuse me?

All the old folks lining up at the registers stop and listen. The professor is teaching a class behind the meat counter using the black board where prices are drawn.

SAMMY

I said I quit.

He looks to see if the girls heard him, but they are walking out the door.

PERRY

The great painter who never paints. Big shot movie director. College drop-out.  
(beat)  
I'm hot too Sam. Everyone gets old and ugly. I'm hot too. Think about what you're doing. Think about how your parents got you this job.

Sammy watches as the last of the girls exits the store without so much as glancing back at him.

He watches as the crowd moves down the street past the store. The sounds of their fun fades away.

He looks sad but satisfied.

SAMMY

I've thought about it.

PERRY

The worlds is going to be hard on you.

SAMMY

That's fine.

Sammy walks out into the white heat.

THE END

"Désolé"



# film stills.

- SOUNDS
- The Athlete
- Veteran's Community Center

# SOUNDS (2023) short film written & directed by





# The Athlete (2023) short film written & directed by





# Veteran's Community Center (2022) documentary produced & directed by



# end.



For an online portfolio with links to view short films, examples of photography, graphic design, and other visual art, headshots, and more, please visit [jmsdonahue.com](http://jmsdonahue.com)

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