

ADDENDUM TO THE 2015 EDITION

HOUSE OF LEAVES



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EXISTENTIAL TERM PAPER

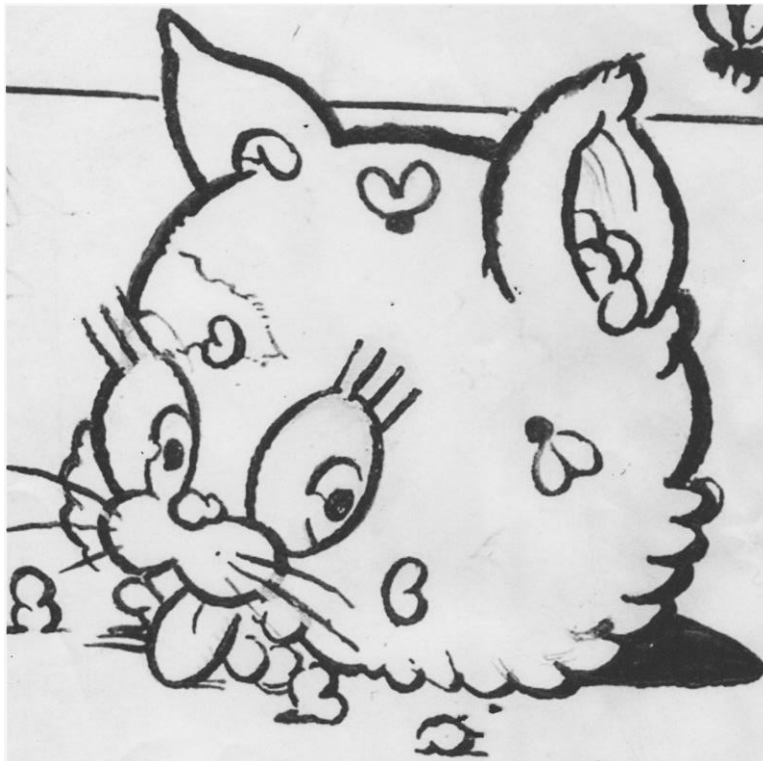
Italian director Federico Fellini captures the existential spirit of Edgar Allan Poe in *Toby Dammit* (1968), a short film of anger, anguish, and loneliest. *Toby Dammit* is based on Edgar Allan Poe's short story "Never Bet the Devil Your Head (1841)," a satirical tale that pokes fun at the notion that all literature should have a moral. Terence Stamp is brilliant as Toby Dammit, a washed up, alcoholic Shakespearean actor who looks like a bleached out version of Poe himself. There is a dark side of Fellini in this film, a rage that we rarely see in his work. The last fifteen minutes—when Dammit races his new Ferrari through the dark and narrow streets of Rome—is some of the director's best work, masterfully shot and edited. Film scholars agree that *Toby Dammit* is an undisputed masterpiece of existential cinema. But, what is existentialism? And, more important to us, how does this philosophy link the works we have read this semester to later postmodern works?

Your term paper will attempt to answer these questions. First, choose any two works that we read this semester which, at least in your eyes, show strong structural or thematic parallels. Once you have adequately linked the works, explain how the authors incorporate aspects of existential philosophy into their characters and stories. Your findings should help you to define the works as postmodern and also help you to anticipate the type of writing and narrative design we will see in Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2001). **In a three to five page, analytical essay, show significant parallels between two of the works we read this semester, highlight some of the shared existential elements in the works, and, finally, argue that the parallels you have uncovered establish the stories as postmodern works.** Because you will be choosing different works than your classmates, and focusing on different aspects for your analysis, you will have to come up with your own, original thesis. No outside research is required for this essay, but if you use any sources, you must cite them.

- After the 1940s, there was a widespread tendency in new writers to view a human being as an isolated existent who is cast into an alien universe, to conceive the universe as possessing no inherent truth, value, or meaning, and to represent human life—in its fruitless search for purpose and meaning, as it moves from the nothingness whence it came toward the nothingness where it must end—as an existence which is both anguished and absurd. The philosophical premise of **existentialism** is that temporality and historicity—a situation in one's present that looks back to the past and anticipates the future—is inseparably a part of each individual's being; that the process of understanding something, involving an act of interpretation, goes on not only in reading verbal texts but in all aspects of human experience; and that language like temporality, pervades all aspects of that experience. The understood meaning of the text is an event which is always the product of a "fusion of the horizons" that a reader brings to the text and that the text brings to the reader. Existential critics approach a text as a veiled or mystified set of representations, whose real meaning or subtext, needs to be deciphered by the knowing reader.

- The term **postmodernism** is often applied to the literature and art after World War II (1939-45), when the effects on Western morale of the first war were greatly exacerbated by the experience of Nazi totalitarianism and mass extermination, the threat of total destruction by the atomic bomb, the progressive devastation of the natural environment, and the ominous fact of overpopulation. Many of the works of postmodernism so blend literary genres, cultural and stylistic levels, the serious and the playful, that they resist classification according to traditional rubrics. An undertaking in some postmodernist works is to subvert the foundations of our accepted modes of thought and experience so as to reveal the meaninglessness of existence and the underlying “abyss,” or “void,” or “nothingness” on which any supposed security is conceived to be precariously suspended.

Requirements: The essay must be at least three pages long but no longer than five (3 and ½ pages). You must properly introduce and explain at least one direct quotation from each of the works you are discussing. So, your paper will have at least two direct quotations. The paper must have your own original thesis in the first paragraph (usually the last sentence or sentences before the transition into the next paragraph). Remember, a thesis is not a question; it is an answer to the question. A thesis is not a fact; it is an opinion or theory—one worth arguing. As always, the paper should follow MLA format. Use white 8½ X 11-inch paper. Font size should be 12 and Times New Roman. Margins should be one inch around (top and bottom, left and right) on each page. Paper should be double spaced throughout. Your last name and the page number should appear in the top right corner of each page. The Purdue OWL website has sample papers written in MLA format.



¹A dead cat's head from *Pim and Francie* by Al Columbia, 2009.

—Ed.

²'The first peculiar thing,' Lude told me, leading the way around a short flight of stairs. 'Were the cats.' Apparently in the months preceding the old man's death, the cats had begun to disappear. By the time he died they were all gone. 'I saw one with its head ripped off and another with its guts strewn all over the sidewalk. Mostly though, they just vanished.'

—Johnny Truant

Haunted by Poe

Ba da pa pa ba da pa pa
Come here
Pretty please
Can you tell me where I am
You, won't you say something
I need to get my bearings
I'm lost
And the shadows keep on changing

And I'm haunted
By the lives that I have loved
And actions I have hated
I'm haunted
By the lives that wove the web
Inside my haunted head

Ba da pa pa ba da pa pa

Don't cry,
There's always a way
Here in November in this house of leaves
We'll pray
Please, I know it's hard to believe
To see a perfect forest
Through so many splintered trees
You and me
And these shadows keep on changing

And I'm haunted
By the lives that I have loved
And actions I have hated
I'm haunted
By the promises I've made
And others I have broken
I'm haunted
By the lives that wove the web
Inside my haunted head

Hallways always

I'll always love you
I'll always need you
I'll always want you

And I will always miss you

Ba da pa pa ba da pa pa

Come here
No I won't say please
One more look at the ghost
Before I'm gonna make it leave
Come here
I've got the pieces here
Time to gather up the splinters
Build a casket for my tears

I'm haunted
(By the lives that I have loved)
I'm haunted
(By the promises I've made)
I'm haunted
By the hallways in this tiny room
The echos there of me and you
The voices that are carrying this tune

Ba da pa pa

What is it Annie?

You think I'll cry? I won't cry!
My heart will break before I cry!
I will go mad.

Rape Me by Nirvana

Rape me, rape me my friend
Rape me, rape me again
I'm not the only one
I'm not the only one
I'm not the only one
I'm not the only one

Hate me
Do it and do it again
Waste me
Rape me, my friend
I'm not the only one
I'm not the only one
I'm not the only one
I'm not the only one

My favorite inside source
I'll kiss your open sores
Appreciate your concern
You're gonna stink and burn

Rape me, rape me my friend
Rape me, rape me again
I'm not the only one
I'm not the only one
I'm not the only one
I'm not the only one

Rape me (rape me)
Rape me (rape me)
Rape me (rape me)
Rape me (rape me)
Rape me (rape me)
Rape me (rape me)
Rape me (rape me)
Rape me (rape me)
Rape me

