

Professor Katie Terezakis presented the second award in Philosophy to Sarah Coppola/

Life is Just a Bowl Full of Strawberries and Milk is an essay that Sarah Coppola wrote for my fall philosophy seminar in Existentialism. The essay closely analyzes one pivotal scene from Ingmar Bergman's film, *The Seventh Seal*. It is a scene, Sarah argues, in which both the looming presence of Death and the unshakable epistemic uncertainty that the film starkly renders fade into the background. The film's hero, Antonius Block, accepts the humble meal of a bowl of fresh milk and wild strawberries from Mary, the young mother in the group he is escorting through a plague-ravaged countryside. In her gift, and with it his notice of the natural, sensuousness of the environment and the temporary companionship of the human group, Block chooses what he calls his sign: he promises aloud to hold dear and remember this one, fleeting Moment and to make it his own.

In Sarah's analysis, Block chooses himself in this transitory moment; he chooses himself in the face of his own finitude, of anguish, despair and absurdity. Sarah shows that in this choice, Block does not mystically *transcend* personal despair or human suffering; rather, he becomes who he is as we all do: in those situations fraught with demands and difficulties that are ever the context of our free agency. Block's freedom, his existential choice of himself, Sarah writes, is thoroughly permeated with the challenges of his situation; where religious faith and the reasonable quest for knowledge have failed to secure him peace or understanding, Block chooses to "find meaning in an elusive encounter." But, Sarah writes, Block's "sign, were he to use it as a roadmap toward praxis, is crucially lacking. He literally *cannot go anywhere with it.*" Block is not free to choose true permanence, metaphysical meaning, or religious consolation. Nevertheless, Sarah holds, Block says a Nietzschean "yes" to life, refusing too the cold comfort of nihilism. "Yes, Block is in a crisis of faith," Sarah writes, "but his ultimate affirmation of immanent presence and experience of the Other are what sustain him."

To further substantiate the meaningfulness of Block's choice, Sarah explores the religious narratives from which Bergman's films draws; she investigates the metaphor of the bowl of strawberries and milk with tools from the feminist philosophy of Irigaray and she considers the temporal nature of Block's moment of choice with reference to Kierkegaardian religious angst and Heideggerian Being. Despite this impressive mastery of philosophical sources, Sarah's unique line of reasoning, throughout the essay, remains eloquently her own.