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**Stranger on a Train:
William Blake and Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man* –
Media and Violence, Poetry and Politics**

Abstract: In his Illuminated Books, William Blake developed a distinct artistic media practice. This practice is inseparable from Blake's media theoretical reflections which anticipate those of Marshall McLuhan in their insistence that 'the medium is the message.' Jim Jarmusch's film *Dead Man* (1995), a reworking of the Western genre and perhaps the most original of the many contemporary works of popular culture which reference Blake, takes up Blake's and McLuhan's thoughts by focusing on the violence trains, guns, watches, and factories wrought upon 1870s North America. This aspect of the film ties in with Blake's trenchant critique of industrial capitalism and its effects on human beings. Blake's status as a 'Prophet against Empire' is then taken up and related to Jarmusch's Blake becoming a 'Killer of white men,' which raises urgent questions about the relationship between art and politics. Finally, the character of Thel Russell, who sells paper flowers in the film, is shown to incarnate Blake's views on the power of the imagination and to resonate with his experience as an artist.