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Adam Driver stars in 'Paterson,' a new film that gives a gentle examination of the ordinary life of a poet-laborer and his wife.

## Film Depicts the Mysticism of Ordinary Life

There is something so necessary about Jim Jarmusch's new film, "Paterson." In giving us this gentle examination of the life of a poet-laborer and his wife, Jarmusch has demonstrated something that we are always in danger of missing: the mysticism of ordinary life.

The story is set in Paterson, New Jersey, which happens to have been the home of the poet William Carlos Williams, whose poetic imagination was an inspiration for the film. Williams was a physician who famously described his approach to poetry as involving "no ideas but in things," a line from his epic poem, "Paterson." Much has been written about what Williams meant by this; what is embodied in Jarmusch's film is a lovely reverence for focusing one's life around the concrete and the particular. Here, the poet-laborer is our teacher.

As beautifully played by Adam Driver, he is a bus driver named Paterson who lives in Paterson. The resonance of that description is typical of the film; Jarmusch is intuitively attentive to synchronicities, those threads that run through ordinary life and

### OPINIONATED JUDGE

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which contain a sort of gentle guidance. Yet Jarmusch does not cling to those threads or tie them into a bow; like a good mystic, he savors them briefly and lets them go. The film is constructed around the rhythms that are evident in seven days of Paterson's life, a structure reminiscent of the cantos of a long poem. Listen for the beats.

Paterson wakes each morning to an inner alarm. He picks up his watch from the night table, notices the time (between 6:15 and 6:30), gently kisses his sleeping wife, who may murmur something about the content of her dreams. He rises, eats his bowl of Cheerios, surrounded by little signs of his wife's artistic energies – curtains and cushions and accents dominated

by black and white circles and fluid lines. He walks to the bus depot in the quiet of the morning, writes a few lines of poetry in his notebook, listens to the daily woes of a coworker, and begins a day of driving the streets of Paterson from the wide perch of the front of his bus.

Paterson's days hum with intention. He resists using an alarm or a smart phone, keeping his body tuned to an exterior rhythm. He is always listening, and not only with his ears, attentive to the sound of his wife's breathing, to the rush of the falls that he walks past each day, to the poetry of conversations among his passengers and the denizens of the bar where he drinks a beer each evening. Walking down

the street, he is alert enough to notice the sounds of a rapper working out a beat, or a child writing in a notebook.

Paterson lives with Laura, a lovely woman played by Iranian actress Golshifteh Farahani. Perhaps they are married, perhaps not, but they are intimately connected in a way that is essential to both of them. I've noticed that critics commonly miss Laura's importance to this story, which strikes me as telling. In her way, she also makes beauty from the ordinary; she is a homemaker in the best sense, not something we are accustomed to valuing. Where Paterson is still, listening, Laura is playful. She paints, makes cupcakes, decorates their small home, and fills their world with beauty and whimsy. Paterson observes to a friend that Laura really understands him, and it is evident that he understands her too. The love between them feels deep and yet spacious, the kind that one expects to stand the test of time. Each notices and appreciates the

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