



## Directing Herbert White: Poems

By James Franco

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### Directing Herbert White: Poems By James Franco

**Directing Herbert White is the debut poetry collection by the actor, director, and writer James Franco**

I'm a nocturnal creature,  
And I'm here to cheat time.  
You can see time and exhaustion  
Taking pay from my face?

In fifty years  
My sleep will be death,  
I'll go like the rest,  
But I'll have played

All the games and all the roles.  
?from "Nocturnal"

"There's never been a book quite like this. Hollywood?fame, celebrity, the promise of becoming an artist?is the beast at its center. Franco knows it like Melville knows whaling. Hollywood in this book devours its young. Obsessed with myths about its own past, it can be survived only by finding a vantage point that is not Hollywood. Bold yet subtle, fearless yet disarming, Franco has made a book you will never forget." ?Frank Bidart

"A star-studded cast moves like ghosts across the screen of James Franco's poetic consciousness, imbuing the writing with scenes of icons who are also humans replete with sorrow and presence in our own psyches. James Dean, Monica Vitti, Catherine Deneuve, Sal Mineo, Heath Ledger, pass and fade. The author has a wonderful, self-reflexive insouciance about his own fame and roles inhabited, from Hart Crane to Allen Ginsberg to Harvey Milk's lover. Franco is a gifted contemporary Renaissance kind of guy, surveying the waterfront of illusion, suffering, and impermanence. We leave the movie theater a little wiser." ?Anne Waldman

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### Editorial Review

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Franco's commitment to poetry has heretofore been expressed in films. He played Allen Ginsberg in *Howl*; created and starred in *The Broken Tower*, a film about Hart Crane; and made a short film based on Frank Bidart's searing poem about a necrophiliac child-murderer, "Herbert White." This volume's title poem is an homage to Bidart, who, like Franco, grew up in California, albeit when, as Franco imagines, being gay was a "secret so dark that he could tell no one." As in his novel, *Actors Anonymous* (2013), Franco—protean, determined, sly, and armed with five MFAs, including one in poetry—writes audaciously about the perversities of Hollywood and how it decimates the vulnerable. He portrays such movie-industry casualties as Lindsay Lohan, River Phoenix, and Sal Mineo, and reveals his own grappling with the largesse and absurdities of celebrity and, ultimately, a confusion of selves: "This fake me is louder / Than the real me, and he / Is the one everyone knows." Franco's bold and magnetic examination of life in the mirrored hall of make-believe and fame taps deeply into our collective mythology. --Donna Seaman

#### Review

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"The stories in *Directing Herbert White* disconcert and titillate, they swagger and collapse, and they explore what it feels like to be a character. *How did we get to be this way?* is the unspoken question--weird, ugly humans, on and off stage, trying and failing? Franco's poems are brave and whip-like, and in the center of their mirrored labyrinth, they house and refine a vulnerable, curious, and very distinct poetic sentience." [?Tony Hoagland](#)

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"Individually and collectively, the poems in James Franco's *Directing Herbert White* dramatize the fever dream of American celebrity culture while coolly taking that fever's pulse. In a style both direct and elusive, as anguished as it is ironic, Franco shows us what it feels like to be, at one and the same time, looked at and invisible, acting and acted upon. But what makes this book so distinctive and powerful is the disturbing image of ourselves we see reflected back at us from the funhouse mirror of our public fantasies." [?Alan Shapiro](#)

## About the Author

**James Franco** is an actor, director, writer, and artist. He has appeared in numerous films, and has directed and adapted many literary works for the screen, including Frank Bidart's "Herbert White."

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