

Cami Richey

Dr. Nate Kramer

Scandinavian Studies 344R

14 April 2014

Kierkegaard's Aesthetic Life View in Elliott Smith's *Either/Or*

When people write about Elliott Smith's music, they cannot help but delve into the angst, the melancholy, and depression of his deceptively poppy choruses. In an interview with *Rolling Stone*, Elliott was asked if he ever "got tired of being tagged as 'depressing,'" (Dansby); *Well Rounded Entertainment* wondered if he was depressed in real life (Peisner); William Schultz's autobiography *Torment Soul* and Benjamin Nugent's *Elliott Smith and the Big Nothing* focused on Smith's depression, suicidal inclinations, drug use, and alcohol, how they frequently impacted his music, and how they ultimately led to his premature death. It's a tragic story that any Elliott Smith fan is aware of: the musical genius who understood beauty in fragility, but could never cope with societal expectations or overcome his own self-hate. So when it comes to discussing the title of Smith's third album, *Either/Or*, a title lifted straight from Kierkegaard's published work from 150 years earlier, it is no surprise that what mainly gets compared between Smith and Kierkegaard are their melancholic dispositions, once referred to by Kierkegaard as his "faithful mistress" (Schultz, 163). Smith was depressed, read Kierkegaard, who was also depressed, which made Smith even more depressed. What else is there to say? Wikipedia explains away the title by superficially (and understandably—it is Wikipedia) suggesting that Kierkegaard's works "generally deal with themes such as existential despair, angst, death and God" (Wikipedia). *Magnet Magazine* cautions us to remember why Smith alluded to Kierkegaard, because

“Kierkegaard believed life is a cosmic joke and then you die” (Davis), as if that alone sums up the intriguing album title.

However, while these are valid starts, while they do provide a bit more information for why Smith may have drawn the connection to Kierkegaard, they only scratch the surface. By naming the album *Either/Or*, Smith begs us to compare the content and form of both works, to not just see his songs as a diary of his life or Kierkegaard as some vague figure who generally touched on similar ideas, but to deeply examine where his songs mirror, contradict, react to, and are shaped by Kierkegaard’s own words. That is why I argue Smith’s album *Either/Or* very much revolves around Kierkegaard’s aesthetic life view, an issue set up in Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or*. In many of the songs, Smith seems to accept this aesthetic stage as one that is widely felt and generally expected, one classified by the desire for passion, concern with time, and indecision. However, like Author A, Smith is also unsatisfied with this passionless age, leaving us with a frustrated commentary of the individual aesthete in modernity. In *Either/Or* Elliott is not just commenting on some Kierkegaardian concepts; he is at times consumed by them.

Before jumping into characteristics of the aesthete, we need to begin with how that life view is even possible, or where Kierkegaard begins constructing it: in short, with irony. In *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard holds up Socrates as the poster child for irony because he always questions, deconstructs, and ultimately negates strongly held assumptions, as well as--oh yes--“the whole substantial world” (Hong 31). With this unraveling, Socrates, or the ironic subject, comes to the conclusion that he is ignorant, he knows nothing, and in fact “actuality has lost its validity entirely” (28). What he thought was concrete is nothing but artificial constructions. To him, “the whole of existence has become alien” (27). This black abyss wide as eternity is an “infinite absolute negativity” (27), and it assures us that there is no objective reality, only

perceptions; no univocal, authoritative purpose, only subjective decisions. However, instead of only wallowing away at the nothingness of it all (which certainly contributes to the melancholy felt both by this author and Elliott Smith), Kierkegaard posits that becoming conscious of irony actually frees us. It qualifies us to be true subjects (24). In his ignorance, Socrates “genuinely feels quite liberated” (35); he “grasps the nothing,” so he is “free...of earnestness about anything” (35). Irony may negate objective truth, but it gives us the ultimate freedom to choose for ourselves. Because of it, we are no longer bound by “civic commitments and obligations marking normal daily existence” (Khan 71), but only bound by what we want to be. Simply put, irony reveals that there is no inherent meaning to the world, a realization that is both terrifying and liberating, and from this we recognize our own ability and power to create meaning. This ultimately leads us to an aesthetic, ethical, or religious life style.

In Smith’s album, irony certainly rears its negative head, most obviously in “Ballad of Big Nothing.” The song starts with a simple double-tracked guitar riff, a repeating, descending open-fourth slide that immediately introduces us to a yearning, pessimistic emptiness. Yet, Smith manages to fill in some of the loneliness with a catchy bass line, peppy rhythm guitar chords, drums that don’t skimp on cymbals or upbeat snare punches, and a poppy chorus. Unlike some of his completely acoustic haunting numbers, this comes across more as a power ballad, an anthem even. While the upbeat instrumentals may appeal to the audience’s foot-tapping tendencies, they cannot completely overshadow his weighty lyrics about superficiality, subjectivity, and even irony. After building up the melody to a climactic chorus, he confidently sings, “You can do what you want to whenever you want to / You can do what you want to there’s no one to stop you” (Smith). It’s a line that makes Smith into an ironic subject himself, one who understands the arbitrariness of the known world. There is no true authority except our individual selves. We

all are free to make our own decisions. That first line “You can do what you want to whenever you want to” gets sung three more times by the end of the song. He croons the line higher, then lower, then over a different chord until adding, “Though it doesn’t mean a thing,” and ultimately funnels us into his grand and final statement, “Big nothing” (Smith). These last two words are dynamically his loudest lyric, perhaps the one with the most assurance behind it and maybe the most disdain as well. After all the searching, after all the observing, the philosophizing, there is only “infinite absolute negativity.” While Kierkegaard talks about this as a necessary “qualification of subjectivity” (Hong 24), Smith seems less content with the process. Instead of arriving at subjectivity from meaninglessness, he flips it. We start off knowing we are free and active agents and then end up at the black hole of nothingness while the instrumentals couldn’t be more flauntingly final. Smith’s confrontation with the “big nothing” is not one of regret, intimidation, or defeat. Rather, it is a resolute belief, an emphatic acceptance of our existential situation. The only truth we can ever know is that there is no truth. But instead of crying about it, this “anti-anthem or ironic anthem” (Nugent 97) suggests we make the final moment a good one.

This now brings us to the aesthetic life stage, the issue or mood which Smith’s album extensively deals with. The “Ballad of Big Nothing” not only encounters life’s meaninglessness, but it also describes a passionless world. The people are “dragging,” “sitting,” “waiting,” “tired,” “waiting to be taken away,” and “watching” the parade (Smith), which are all rather passive verbs or sedentary situations. Although this song takes place at a parade, usually a lively, crowded, even moving experience, Smith seems somewhat detached or disappointed, and so do all of the other characters for that matter. All the commotion does not amount to any deeply felt purpose or meaning.

This description of apathy is all too familiar to Kierkegaard's aesthetes. Not that they are always disinterested, but that they are continually searching for palpable passion and therefore unsatisfied when they do not find it. For characters like Author A and Johannes the Seducer, passion is clearly the goal in life. Author A complains that "the times...are wretched, for they are without passion" (Hong, 40), and that boredom is in fact "the root of all evil" (51). In "The Rotation of Crops," he advises us to regularly adjust our daily schedules, living situations, and unenthusiastic habits in order to amuse ourselves more. He describes how entertaining a fly can be if there are no other interesting objects available, and how sweat dripping down a boring speaker's nose can turn a potentially terrible moment into a pleasurable one (60). Some of these may seem a little trite, as if the aesthete is only looking for superficial hedonistic fulfillment, but the aesthete may not necessarily be limited to a taste for pleasure. Rather, Evans explains, "Kierkegaard places the emphasis on desire itself. What the aesthete wants is simply to have what he or she wants, whatever that might be" (Evans 71). So, the aesthetes' passion may vary from person to person. Some may want pleasure, others may even want pain (72), but collectively they all want that passion to be fulfilled, and to be fulfilled within time, or immediately. Another aesthete, Johannes the Seducer, has his own specific passion, that is seducing young girls, which he does in a so-called "spiritual" sense. The process of bringing out Cordelia's aesthetic qualities; turning her into a type of interesting, poetic work of art; and causing her to fall in love with him is equivalent to "splash[ing] up and down on a stormy lake. ... It is "enjoyable to be stirred in oneself" (Hannay 37). Although Johannes concerns himself with different desires, there is still that longing to feel strong emotion, and he works towards his moment deliberately, purposefully. While different in their specific interests and personalities,

Author A and Johannes are examples of the aesthetic life view, in which the individual personally and often selfishly satiates their own desires.

Returning once again to Elliott Smith, not only does his “Ballad of Big Nothing” express a kind of aesthetic disappointment with the lack of passion in the world, but other songs in the *Either/Or* album like “Speed Trials,” “Pictures of Me,” and “Rose Parade,” present this sentiment as well. “Speed Trials” begins the album with a quiet, sinister march. His frustrations come out in lyrics that talk about “running back” to a past experience, “running speed trials standing in place,” and a socket that does not give “a shock enough” (Smith). Here is a world where electric jolts can’t make a person care or feel deeply, and where racers only run in the preliminaries without ever getting to the real event. In fact, this character runs the speed trial without actually moving anywhere. If speed trials already felt pointless, surely running one in the same spot makes it even more so. Schultz sums up the song by saying, “Life’s a speed trial--all preparation and qualification, no race” (Schultz 88). In “Pictures of Me,” Elliott complains about his growing fame, a superficial situation that lacks any real meaning or passion for him. The introductory lines “Start, stop, and start / Stupid acting smart / Flirting with the flicks / Say it’s just for kicks” (Smith) immediately articulate his disillusionment with people who only act at a surface level. They act smart, but they are really not. They flirt for fun without it leading to anything substantial. When the chorus comes along, he switches into a higher tonal key, bringing greater tension and more emotion: “So sick and tired of all these pictures of me / Completely wrong / Totally wrong” (Smith). To see his picture around the city, to know that he has gotten more popular, does not by any means fulfill his deep seated desires. Everyone else is “dying just to get the disease,” which Schultz calls “the big blue screen of fame,” but Smith finds it revolting.

In “Rose Parade” we see even more examples of shallowness. At the parade, a metaphor which apparently for Smith exhibited much ado about nothing, he is asked to “march down the street like the Duracell bunny” and “throw...out candy that looks like money.” Like running a speed trial in place, the Duracell bunny has no real point. He uses energy just to use energy. There is no underlying meaning to his existence. And then Elliott’s use of candy (one time here and twice in “Ballad of Big Nothing”) is telling as well. Like the bunny or the parade, candy gets a lot of attention, but it hardly sustains a person. It has all the trappings of a lie, of pretending like it is everything you want while hardly offering anything, at least anything substantial. Interestingly enough, though, while he listens to the “ridiculous marching band,” he finds himself actually “singing along / With some half-hearted victory song” (Smith), and afterwards asks us, “So won’t you follow me down to the Rose Parade?” Here is the dilemma then. Smith complains about a world that lacks real and true emotion, deep purpose and passion, but he still finds himself taking part in that world. He is not only asked to come to the parade, but he asks us to follow him there, fully acknowledging his own involvement. Even though he calls the marching band ridiculous, he still ends up singing with them.

However, rather than going against the aesthetic life style, Smith’s contradictory participation still fits firmly within it. At the beginning of *Either/Or*, Author A tell us, “I don’t feel like doing anything. I don’t feel like riding--the motion is too powerful; I don’t feel like walking--it is too tiring; I don’t feel like lying down... I don’t feel like doing anything” (Hong 38). For someone who complains about others not having passion, he certainly lacks some! Later he laments that there is never any real purpose in his situation, and that it is always the case. “Before me is continually an empty space, and I am propelled by a consequence that lies behind me” (Hong, 39). Like Smith, Author A wishes there were some meaning to grasp onto but is

always only confronted with “big nothing,” which is simply the human condition. He also suggests that maybe frivolity really is the answer. If nothingness is our lot in life, then nothingness is what we should embrace. “Arbitrariness is the whole secret. It is popularly believed that there is no art to being arbitrary, and yet it takes profound study to be arbitrary in such a way that a person does not himself run wild in it but himself has pleasure from it” (60-61). Like Evans points out, the aesthete is not simply a hedonist, but a very complex personality, someone who is often disappointed that there is not more passion, but who sometimes also takes part in passionlessness, or seemingly meaningless activities.

Another characteristic of the aesthete is his concern with time. Since he mainly focuses on immediately satisfying desire, he is also very aware that those fulfilling moments are fleeting. About the aesthete and time, Evans says, “The aesthete lives in and for ‘the moment.’ It is not hard to see why this should be so, for immediate desires have just this momentary character, and to live for the satisfaction of such desires is to seek to make one’s life a series of satisfying moments” (Evans 72). Like living for passion, living for the moment has its problems, and the aesthete is all too aware of this. Author A says, “Pleasure disappoints; possibility does not.” Furthermore, if he made one wish, it would not be “for wealth or power but for the passion as possibility, for the eye, eternally young, eternally ardent, that sees possibility everywhere” (43). In other words, possibility is the fountain of eternity. Unlike pleasure which has an expiration date, possibility never closes, it never limits, it is always available. If Author A could harness that power, he could theoretically reap passion endlessly, but as it is, his passion-filled moments will only be momentary. Johannes the Seducer also understands the transience of time, which is one of the reasons why he writes his journal at all. Author A, the editor who discovers Johannes’ letters on accident, describes the tone of the diary this way: “Although of course the experience

was recorded after it happened--sometimes perhaps even a considerable time after--it was often described as if taking place at the very moment, so dramatically vivid that sometimes it was as though it was all taking place before one's very eyes" ("Diary" 11). Evidently Johannes is not just interested in living his moment in the first place, but he also wants to "savour..his own person aesthetically" in the future. For him, the diary is a way to freeze time. In theory it is the fountain of potentiality. But the problem of temporality surfaces once again because even the secondary experience expires, and like Plato's "mimesis" is still twice removed from the ideal. In the second part of *Either/Or*, Judge Wilhelm talks about the aesthete's life as one of despair, on which Hannay elaborates.

Wilhelm does not mean that the life of the aesthete is especially exposed to disappointment, frustration, and in the end despair [though there certainly is disappointment and frustration, but those qualities can also be found in the other two life stages]; he means that the aesthete is already in despair because he makes so much depend on the moment that life can offer. The aesthete's life is one of despair even when, by the aesthete's lights, everything is going swimmingly. ("Biography" 179)

Wilhelm's point then is what the aesthete already knows. Life is made meaningful by possessing the moment, but even in possessing it, it is already fading. This attitude is perfectly expressed at the end of *Diary of a Seducer* when Johannes asks, "Why can't a night like that be longer?" (184)

This obsession over time, this awareness of our transitory condition, is seen in Smith's songs as well, especially "Speed Trials," "Alameda," and "No Name No. 5." Not only does the chorus of "Speed Trials" talk about meaningless races akin to a hamster spinning in its wheel, he also says, "It's just a brief smile crossing your face." This line is not only sung once, but three

times, and the repetition of the lyric is not so much quaint as it is grinding. His voice is both quiet, but gravelly. Pretty, but coarse. Clearly this supreme moment has a catch to it: it doesn't last. The smile in "No Name No. 5" doesn't either. "A sweet sweet smile" is worth singing about, is worth remembering, but it's "fading fast," and that fading is completely expected. He does not get "upset about it / No, not anymore / There's nothing wrong / That wasn't wrong before." He has become conditioned to accept that things, moments, and even people leave. In fact, at the end of the song he chants, "Everybody's gone at last." For this introvert, evidently the temporality of life also brings respite. The third song "Alameda" makes a point of singing about a girl who liked you "for one or two minutes" but then "the fix is in / You're all pretension." The disappointment behind the bridge is unmistakable. Not only does it contain the lowest notes melodically, but he also incorporates a brief pause where all instruments are silenced for a beat--and just like that the moment is gone. Like the moment-chasing aesthete, Elliott longs for the temporary fulfillment while knowing it will always dissolve.

The last aesthetic characteristic that makes its way into Elliott's album is the lack of real decision making. The namesake for both works is most directly talked about in "Either/Or: An Ecstatic Discourse" located in the literary work *Either/Or*. (Yes, an "Either/Or" within an *Either/Or* which contains many more "eithers" and "ors.") The aesthete also loves the artistic consciousness of frames within frames within frames.) In this discourse, Author A wisely expounds, "Marry, and you will regret it. Do not marry, and you will also regret it. Marry or do not marry, you will regret it either way. Whether you marry or you do not marry, you will regret it either way" (Hong 43-44). This comical logical sequence is not only talked about with marriage, but "laugh[ing] at the stupidities of the world" (43), "trust[ing] a girl," and "hang[ing] yourself" (44). Not a very optimistic view of the world, this passage insists that all decisions will

cause disappointment. There is also no preference for one choice over another. No side is good, none better or worse. They are equal because they will all equally cause regret. Johannes seems to feel the same way. Although he certainly schemes about how to ensnare Cordelia, he is not so specifically concerned with her. Rather, she is one option among many, a means to fulfilling his contorted desire. One of his philosophies about love follows thus: “The trick [to deluding the god of love] is to be as receptive in regard to impressions as possible, to know the impression you are making and the impression each girl makes on you. In this way you can even be in love with many at the same time, because with each particular girl you are differently in love. Loving just one is too little” (“Diary” 84). He admits to maintaining multiple options here, to not actually commit to any one person. His actions towards Cordelia certainly display his belief in keeping the relationship open, distanced, abstract. He makes her “interesting” without fostering a true respect for her as a valuable individual. He says their affiliation “amounts to nothing at all” because “it is purely spiritual” (72), that she is a work of art and a sculpture (151), as well as a “woman [who] is the man’s dream” (165). In other words, to him she is a young virgin ready to be manipulated aesthetically just like any other young virgin is ready to be manipulated. If it were not Cordelia, it would be the actress he met at the theater. Judge Wilhelm will even go so far as to say that the aesthete’s nonchalance equates to not making decisions at all. “The esthetic choice is either altogether immediate, and thus no choice, or it loses itself in a great multiplicity... If one not does not choose absolutely, one chooses only for the moment and for that reason can choose something else the next moment” (Hong 73). So while the aesthete obviously makes some choices, like what he should write in a letter, or how he should talk to his lover’s aunt, he is ultimately ambivalent. Exactly how he gets to the Moment or what happens afterward really holds no concern for him.

Not surprisingly, the aesthete's "either/or" mentality weaves in and out of Elliott's album as well. I have already discussed one aspect of this in regards to his observations of his passionless world, but he also exhibits his own ambivalence, and not just others', most notably in "Alameda," "Pictures of Me," and "Say Yes." "Alameda" may sound the most like Johannes, as Smith reassures himself that "Nobody broke your heart / You broke your own because you can't finish what you start / Nobody broke your heart / If you're alone it must be you that wants to be apart." Just as Johannes decides to distance himself (perhaps also to preserve himself) and insists that dissolving the engagement was his plan all along (175), Elliott here takes full responsibility for the break up. They can be together or they can not; he could choose either way, and in the end he is resolved to accept whatever happens with equal emotion. In "Pictures of Me" Smith asks after seeing his image on television, "I'm not surprised at all and really why should I be? / See nothing wrong / See nothing wrong," then moments later complains, "So sick and tired of all these pictures of me / Completely wrong / Totally wrong." The lyrics reveal his attempt to straddle two different attitudes. On the one hand, fame is not necessarily a bad thing and maybe it is simply to be expected. On the other hand, fame is not the answer to his problems, and he feels very uncomfortable embracing the popularity anyway. In the end, his conclusion remains ambiguous. We are simply presented with an either/or dilemma, one that will most likely cause regret on both sides.

The last song on this list and consequently on the album "Say Yes" also shows his inability to make decisions. Interestingly, the song starts with the lyrics, "I'm in love with the world through the eyes of a girl" (Smith). Instead of saying he is in love with the girl, he sings, both at the beginning and the end, he is in love with the world and she is the one who provides that perspective for him. In a similar vein Johannes writes to Cordelia, "Behind every tree I see a

womanly being that resembles you... Is not loving you to love a world?" ("Diary" 129) And again, "It is my love for you casting its reflection over the whole of life" (138). Being in love is not only a personal experience, but an abstract, aesthetic one as well. Any girl could stir up these thoughts, to turn the whole world into a metaphor. Elliott also clearly sets up a dialectic, the girl will choose to be in a relationship with him or she won't. "It's always been wait and see," "She'll decide what she wants / I'll probably be the last to know / No one says until it shows and you see how it is / They want your or they don't / Say yes" (Smith). He is not begging her, convincing her, or proving which choice is better. Although we assume he genuinely wants this girl (after all, the instrumentals are stripped, revealing, and the melody is optimistic), he is prepared to accept either possibility. In fact, his allusion to "they" instead of a specific girl generalizes the situation, similarly to how Johannes will often discuss girls or women, rather than individuals.

Of course, this all is not to say that Elliott Smith is Johannes. Many people have and can attest that Smith was a likeable figure, an authentic, deeply caring person (Nugent 7), but after pouring over the lyrics of *Either/Or* and the diapsalmata of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, clearly there is quite a lot of philosophical overlap. I would also note that while the three characteristics I have outlined--desire for passion, concern with time, and indecision--are essential to the aesthete, they also show up in other works outside of *Either/Or* as well as outside of the aesthetic life stage. In *The Present Age*, for example, Kierkegaard vents his frustrations about modernity, a "reflecting age, devoid of passion, flaring up in superficial, [and] short-lived enthusiasm" (Hong 252). He says that "ultimately the object of desire is money, but it is in fact token money, an abstraction" (255), which resonates with Elliott's candy, an object of desire that never truly satisfies. Fame and the public approval is also extensively critiqued here. For Kierkegaard, "the public is a kind of colossal something, an abstract void and vacuum that is all and nothing"

(263). He has little respect for the masses because they have no central values. While he concludes at the end that what is needed is to save “every single individual religiously” (268), many of the frustrations in *The Present Age* simply do combine with the aesthetic view. And the life views are in fact allowed to blend into each other. Vanessa Rumble, for example, argues that both the aesthete and the religious person desire to fuse individual autonomy with an Other (Rumble 55). So, the fact that these seemingly aesthetic ideas appear in other sites may not be problematic. What I have tried to argue here is that Elliott *mainly* expresses an aesthetic attitude, but it is certainly possible that he bleeds into other ones as well.

Finally, whether Smith meant to deliberately engage Kierkegaard’s version of the aesthete in this album is questionable. He only mentions in interviews where the title came from and never elaborates on why he chose it, but the philosophical work seems to have deeply resonated with Elliott on multiple levels as seen by the many similarities presented in his songs. Certainly he admired Kierkegaard, so this may simply be a tribute to those angsty, anxiety-laden works. Or perhaps it was more personal. While reading *Either/Or* Smith saw the aesthete in himself. If so, then he was doing exactly what Kierkegaard wanted him to do, to struggle, to find his own meaning, to read himself into the works. Perhaps Elliott not only saw himself in Author A or Johannes but in Kierkegaard, who was after all a literary, poetic writer--in truth, an aesthete. Either way, whether the connections were conscious or not, whether they were deeply personal or not, they are there. And of course, in regards to their shared melancholy, if the poet really is as Author A puts it, “an unhappy person who conceals profound anguish in his heart but whose lips are so formed that as sighs and cries pass over them they sound like beautiful music” (Hong, 38), then maybe, just maybe, the depression really is their deepest similarity.

Works Cited

- Dansby, Andrew. "Smith Comes Up Roses." *Rolling Stone*. Rolling Stone Mag., 1 Oct. 2007. Web. 22 Mar. 2014.
- "Elliott Smith." *Wikipedia*. Web. 22 Mar. 2014.
- Evans, Stephen C. *Kierkegaard, An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Khan, Abraham. "Melancholy, Irony, and Kierkegaard." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 17.1/2 (1985): 67-85.
- Hannay, Alastair. *Diary of a Seducer*. London: Penguin Books, 2009.
- Hannay, Alastair. *Kierkegaard: A Biography*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Hong, Howard and Edna. *The Essential Kierkegaard*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Merrill, Reed. "'Infinite Absolute Negativity': Irony in Socrates, Kierkegaard and Kafka." *Comparative Literature Studies* 16.3 (1979): 222-236.
- Nugent, Benjamin. *Elliott Smith and the Big Nothing*. Cambridge: Da Copa Press, 2004.
- Peisner, David. "Elliott Smith Interview." *Well Rounded Entertainment*. Well Rounded Entertainment Mag., 19 Sep. 2000. Web 22 Mar. 2014.
- Rumble, Vanessa. "Søren Kierkegaard and the Uncanny: The Endangered Moral Agent." *Anthropology and Authority: Essays on Søren Kierkegaard*. Ed. by Poul Houe, Gordon Marino and Sven Rossel. Amsterdam: Rudopi, 1996.
- Schultz, William Todd. *Torment Saint: The Life of Elliott Smith*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013.
- Smith, Elliott. *Either/Or*. Kill Rock Stars, 1995.