

*Here is an excerpt from an essay that I wrote for class entitled "Physical & Emotional Borders Between Individuals & Countries in François Truffaut's, Jules et Jim & Jean Renoir's, La Grande Illusion".*

Jean Renoir's film, *La Grande Illusion*, contains this dialogue in reference to borders: "You can't see borders, they're man-made. Nature could care less" (*La Grande Illusion*). Now juxtapose that dialogue with this quote from François Truffaut's *Jules and Jim*: "You said, 'I love you,' I said, 'Wait.' I was going to say, 'Take me,' you said, 'Go away.'" Both of these quotes address the idea of a border. The first is in reference to that imaginary line between countries which separate them, while the other is about the border between the emotions of the individual.

Flash to this scene: Two figures are out in a field of snow. Trees—evergreens to be exact—frame their movement, as they hobble, step-by-step, struggling towards some destination. A man with a rifle has them in his sights. Finger twitching, their lives are in his hands. He does not shoot. He can't. It is too late; they've reached "the other side". All the man can do is watch these two figures, untouchable now, separated by worlds and cultures and unspoken rules. They've crossed the "border". But what have they really crossed? Some imaginary line running through snow and trees?

Geographical borders draw people, no, whole countries together, providing commonality in cultural, linguistic, and political affiliation. Borders keep people

apart, ensnaring their captive occupants in political and cultural affiliation, pitting person against person. Borders, those divisive imaginary lines in the sky, the earth, the sea, are the agents of inclusion and exclusion employed by countries to create order among man. But how arbitrary are these borders that we care so much about? Can I reach out and touch them? Can they stop the human voice—that of a lover to their significant other, a mother to her child, a general barking orders at his men? Can they stop the retina from viewing what's on the other side, or the foot from crossing from one side to the next? Can they stop the hounds of war from marching, marching, marching onwards, leaving their tracks on everything they touch? Certainly, both Renoir's and Truffaut's films question and explore these questions, and many more, as they explore the borders between France and Germany, the border between person and person, and how these borders both succeed and fail in their task of separation.