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The Representation of the Absurd in The Lighthouse (2019)

Bachelor's Thesis

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Prague, 2022

Statement:

I hereby declare that the following thesis is my independent work and that all sources and literature that I have used have been duly cited. I agree for this thesis to be stored in the electronic database of the Charles University repository, and to be used for study purposes in accordance to copyright. This thesis was not used in order to obtain another or the same degree.

In Prague, 8th of July 2022.

Elizabeth Coughlin

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Abstract

This thesis argues that a connection exists between Robert Eggers' 2019 film *The Lighthouse* and Albert Camus' conception of the absurd. Using semiotic analysis as a framework, this work examines different aspects of the film that relate to Camus' 1942 essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*. This thesis explores established ideas about cinematic artistry, philosophy in film, and viewer interpretation in its examination. This work investigates director Robert Eggers' perspective on his movie, as expressed in interviews, to further understand the themes being communicated to the audience in *The Lighthouse* (2019). Finally, this thesis will look at how the representation of Camus' idea of the absurd in the film fits within a larger context of philosophy and film.

Keywords

existentialism, philosophy of film, semiotics, the Absurd

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I. Introduction

In this thesis, I will argue that a connection exists between the 2019 film *The Lighthouse* and Albert Camus' 1942 essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The various philosophical questions and themes that are expressed in Camus' work will be examined, and how they fit into the scholarly understanding of existentialism. Camus' idea of the absurd, and what it says about human existence, is of particular importance for this work. Additionally, I will use scholarly articles about the presentation of philosophy in film, semiotic analysis, and film artistry as a foundation for highlighting various aspects of *The Lighthouse* (2019) that express elements of the absurd. Contemporary reviews of the film will also be examined in order to understand the film's perception and position within mainstream cinema. Furthermore, I will investigate interviews with director Robert Eggers' to understand his artistic process and what themes and ideas were intended to be found in the film, as well as his opinion on interpretation.

This thesis found inspiration from a number of sources. I have always loved films, including horror films. It has been a tradition for my friends and I to watch horror films together since I was a teenager. There is a special type of thrill that one can only experience by watching a scary movie with friends, clutching each other's hands and shrieking in unison when the "jump-scare" happens. Even the name "jump-scare" reveals its unexpected fun; you startle when the scary thing appears, and simultaneously release the tension you've been holding up to that moment. Part of the appeal of horror is that the genre encompasses a wide variety of films (some involve gore, some involve science fiction, etc.), but the uniting factor among them all is the emotional response they elicit from the audience. Horror films are meant to horrify; to disgust, or shock, or unnerve. Some people, (myself included), enjoy the release of tension that results after experiencing a safe, time-limited form of fear.

There have been a number of "arthouse horror" films released in the past few years that further blur the line between horror and other genres like suspense, psychological drama, or

even comedy.¹ These films go beyond a simple “man vs. monster”² narrative to incorporate complex themes, while still frightening audiences. They address issues like family conflict, cultural differences, or mental health, and often receive critical acclaim that eludes traditional horror films. For example, one film that is credited with starting the arthouse horror wave, *The Babadook* (2014), was praised by critics for its depiction of depression and the difficulties of parenthood.³ Robert Eggers’ first feature film, *The Witch* (2015), was similarly lauded for expressing complicated ideas and artistic cinematography.⁴ After having seen these and other modern horror films, *The Lighthouse* lingered in my mind once I saw it, perhaps because I come from the area that inspired the film’s setting.

The most photographed lighthouse in America, the Portland Headlight, is a 10-minute drive from the house I grew up in. Stephen King, one of the most famous horror authors of the modern era, whose works have inspired a number of classic scary movies and TV shows, is also from Maine. Robert Eggers grew up in New Hampshire, one of the states bordering Maine, and his first film *The Witch* (2015) was aptly subtitled “A New England Fairytale.” There may be something about this area’s rocky coast, lush forests that reveal fiery fall foliage, and changeable weather that evokes eeriness. The severe snow storms that hit New England every year are called Nor’easters, a contraction of the words North East (the area of the U.S. where New England is located). This may have also contributed to my love of horror films, and it is important to keep in mind when watching Eggers’ films. The language and the experience of New England, and Maine in particular, is distinct.

¹ Shorey, E. 2021. “The 10 Best Arthouse Horror Films to Stream This Fall.” *The Manual*.

<https://www.themanual.com/culture/best-arthouse-horror-films/>

² Bordell, D., Thompson, K., & Smith, J. 2020. *Film Art: An Introduction*. 12th ed. Originally published 1950. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education. Pg. 342.

³ Jacobsen, P. 2016. “The Babadook and Maternal Depression.” *The Psychologist* 29, no. 1: 840-841. London, UK: The British Psychological Society. <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-29/november-2016/babadook-and-maternal-depression>

⁴ Kermode, M. 2016. “The Witch Review- Original Sin and Folkloric Terror.” *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/mar/13/the-witch-film-review-robert-eggers>

While I have always loved movies, I was inspired by two bachelor's theses from the Faculty of Humanities to look at the particular themes in *The Lighthouse* through a philosophical lens. One thesis argued that filmmaker Werner Herzog's works express elements of the Kantian Sublime and the Ecstatic.⁵ This thesis showed me how films may be analyzed through a philosophical lens. Another thesis established a connection between the novel *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) and Aristotelian ethics.⁶ This work demonstrated how one specific work or story may be examined with a particular philosophical idea directing the analysis. With these bachelor theses in mind, I watched *The Lighthouse* a second time and was struck by its similarities with Albert Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) and its ideas of the absurd, which I had read recently for a philosophy exam. I then decided to write my thesis based on the possible connection between these two works.

This led me to develop my research question for my thesis- how is Albert Camus' idea of the absurd, as detailed in his 1942 essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, represented in the film *The Lighthouse*? This thesis looks at the specific elements of the film, like dialogue, narrative, cinematography, sound, and other aspects that may communicate meaning to the audience, in order to establish a connection with the philosophical idea of the absurd. I also investigate the specific philosophical questions about existence which emerge from *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and how the actions of the characters in *The Lighthouse* suggest answers to these queries. Additionally, this thesis includes contemporary reviews that provide insight into the mainstream understanding of the film and its themes. Finally, this thesis explores interviews with Robert Eggers about his filmmaking process that reveal how philosophical ideas and themes may be incorporated in different works of art and interpreted by viewers.

⁵ Echevarri, M. 2020. "The Sublime and the Ecstatic in the Works of Werner Herzog." Prague: Bachelor's Thesis. Charles University, Faculty of Humanities. Thesis Supervisor: Váša, O.

⁶ Jelínková, M. 2021. "Selected Motives of the Novel *A Clockwork Orange* in Aristotle's Perspective." Prague: Bachelor's Thesis. Charles University, Faculty of Humanities. Thesis Supervisor: Stanislav, S.

II. Methodology

Film has been considered a medium for communicating philosophical ideas since the development of motion pictures. A prime example of the perceived power of movies is the Hays Code; American authorities worried about the power of cinema spreading immorality in the beginning of the 20th century, and established the Hays Code to try and prevent the depiction of morally dubious actions or themes.⁷ Philosophy, as understood as theories about morality, people, and knowledge, has therefore been connected with movies since its inception. The philosophy of film as understood in the academic sense, however, is slightly more recent, with various branches of scholarship looking at different aspects of cinema in recent years. Some scholars study specific directors, while others look at common philosophical themes that may be present in particular movies or genres. The 21st century has even seen a rise in the use of films to teach traditional philosophical ideas.⁸

This thesis will use multiple scholarly articles which cover the relationship between philosophy and film compiled by Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga (2009) as the foundation of understanding how meaning is communicated in cinema in order to establish a connection between *The Lighthouse* (2019) and Albert Camus' conception of the absurd. This compilation encompasses a wide range of topics within the academic field of philosophy and film, and thus provides context for positioning this work within a certain scholarly field. This thesis will look at some essays that discuss the general connection between philosophy and film as well as works discussing particular methods of interpreting films. Livingston & Plantinga's compilation includes articles about interpreting films through a phenomenological or psychoanalytical lens, but this thesis will use semiotics, as described by Joseph G. Kickasola (2009), as a means of examining the themes and ideas that appear in *The Lighthouse*.

⁷ Dwyer, S. 2009. "Censorship." *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*. Pg. 29-38. Livingston, P. & Plantinga, C. (editors). 1st ed. New York, NY: Routledge. Pg. 31.

⁸ Wartenberg, T. 2009. "Film as Philosophy." *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*. Pg. 549-559. Livingston, P. & Plantinga, C. (editors). 1st ed. New York, NY: Routledge. Pg. 549.

According to Kickasola, the roots of semiotic analysis can be traced back to the turn of the 20th century.⁹ Ferdinand de Saussure posited that language is a communication system which uses signs to exchange information. In general terms, de Saussure found that words are arbitrary signs which indicate meaning- there is no inherent connection between a word and its definition. He also developed certain vocabulary to describe this system of information transfer; denotation, for example, refers to the literal meaning of a sign, while connotation refers to certain implied meanings that may be associated with a specific sign. Different communities may have different sign systems, and people interpret these signs individually in their minds. De Saussure's research has been applied in linguistics, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and other academic fields. The understanding and use of De Saussure's work in the field of philosophy, and particularly of philosophy and film, are relevant for the purposes of this thesis.

Kickasola explains how De Saussure's theories have been interpreted and critiqued by other scholars like philosopher C.S. Pierce, and sociologist Claude Levi-Strauss, who also study signs in communication systems.¹⁰ Levi-Strauss used De Saussure's ideas to develop his hypothesis that human culture is expressed in different sign systems. Pierce criticized De Saussure's work and Levi-Strauss's interpretation for overemphasizing these sign systems- in Pierce's view, De Saussure and Levi-Strauss create a constructivist account of communication. In other words, sign systems are so powerful that they generate meaning themselves, and thus shape the world around them. Pierce counters this by claiming that the real world is interpreted through signs, but is not entirely influenced by them. Semiotic philosophical analysis in film incorporates both De Saussure's theories and Pierce's criticism;¹¹ cinema can be interpreted as a language, or a sign system in itself, with layers of meaning implied within, but that does not

⁹ Kickasola, J. G. 2009. "Semiotics and Semiology." *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*. Pg. 457-469. Livingston, P. & Plantinga, C. (editors). 1st ed. New York, NY: Routledge. Pg. 457.

¹⁰ Ibid, pg. 459.

¹¹ Ibid, pg 459.

mean that watching a movie will entirely determine your view of the world (though it may influence it).

While there have been a number of film scholars who have studied the connection between semiotics and film, this thesis uses Christian Metz's understanding of film as a language in its analysis. In the late 1970s, "Metz concluded that the cinema was not a comprehensive, two-way communication/language system...but that it was a language."¹² While movies can deliver meaning to audiences through various means (dialogue, camera shots, music, etc.), viewers have no way of responding to these messages. Thus, films are not language systems, but are a type of language used by directors to communicate certain ideas, and viewers may interpret this communication individually. Kickasola explains how Metz uses the word "code" to refer to both signs (as understood in the linguistic sense as words), and to other aspects of cinema that may be interpreted (e.g. imagery, editing, etc.).¹³ Additionally, Metz argued that cinema code has meanings that may be specific to film, such quick cuts between shots, and meanings that are shared with general language (e.g. a character swearing in a film).

Kickasola notes that Metz's theories are not without detractors, as some film scholars like Gilles Deleuze believe cinema is not comparable to a language system because languages are more complicated and cinema is only a medium for expressing language.¹⁴ However, for the purpose of this thesis, Metz's conception of cinema as a unique form of communication that has specific codes that other languages do not, is helpful for interpreting various aspects of *The Lighthouse* which express ideas of the absurd. This theory allows us to look not only at the language displayed in the screenplay and dialogue, but also at the various codes which are present in Eggers' cinematic style. This thesis will therefore implement a semiotic analysis

¹² Kickasola, J. G. 2009. "Semiotics and Semiology." *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*. Pg. 457-469. Livingston, P. & Plantinga, C. (editors). 1st ed. New York, NY: Routledge. Pg. 461.

¹³ Ibid, pg. 462.

¹⁴ Ibid, pg. 466.

whose roots are found in De Saussure's language studies, and which was later shaped by scholars like Pierce, Metz, and Kickasola. This work does not take a constructivist approach; the language of cinema does not completely define the way we think, though it may influence our ideas. The goal of this thesis is to examine the various codes in *The Lighthouse* that signify meaning, and how this meaning connects to Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus*.

This analysis will look at both the form and the style of *The Lighthouse*. Film form refers to "the overall pattern of relationships among parts" of a movie.¹⁵ This patterning helps us define what a movie is, and what conventions are usually used in filmmaking. In a semiotic understanding of cinema, we might compare film form to the structure of a language. Throughout the history of film, certain conventions developed that shape audience expectations. For example, a movie's story is generally told chronologically, with one event following another through the course of the film. Some films intentionally reverse this pattern and tell the story backwards. In this way, we can see there are generally some rules that guide the construction of films, though these rules may be broken for artistic reasons. Looking at the standard conventions in cinematic form allows us to see how an individual director made specific choices in their work.

Many of the conventions of cinematic form come directly from the conventions of storytelling and literature.¹⁶ After all, the first step in making a movie is writing a screenplay. Dialogue, descriptions of settings, defining aspects of various characters, and other parts of the film are imagined first in writing before they are displayed on screen. This thesis will therefore examine the screenplay of *The Lighthouse* in order to establish how the codes of this film signify ideas of the absurd. Also of interest is the narrative form of the film, or how the story is told. The plot, or summary of the movie, suggests a connection with Camus' *Myth of*

¹⁵ Bordell, D., Thompson, K., & Smith, J. 2020. *Film Art: An Introduction*. 12th ed. Originally published 1950. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education. Pg. 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 72.

Sisyphus, as does the flow of information. The flow of information in cinema general refers to the audience's perspective within the world of a film, and how they discover new elements of it.¹⁷ These aspects of the film show the choices Eggers made in telling the story, and suggest a possible connection with Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus*.

This thesis will also analyze the style of *The Lighthouse*. Film style encompasses "the use of cinematic techniques"¹⁸ or what might be described as the art of a film (cinematography, sound, and editing). While film form encompasses the language and storytelling aspects of movies, film style involves the visual element of cinema, as well as the musical elements. How filmmakers choose to edit their work, how they direct and arrange their camera shots, are also part of a film's style. If the conventions of film form relate to the conventions of storytelling and literature, then the conventions of film style relate to the conventions of art. The term *mis-en-scene*, for example, refers to the arrangement of people or things in every film shot, and many aspects of *mis-en-scene* overlap with aspects of photography or painting. I argue that Camus' idea of the absurd is represented in various cinematic elements in the film, both in style and form. The film will be the sample that constitutes the main focus of study in this thesis.

Albert Camus' conception of existentialism, as detailed in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, will provide the philosophical lens through which *The Lighthouse* will be examined. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus argues that absurdity in human life results from man's desire to apply rationality to our irrational universe, and only in recognizing this truth can we find freedom in our absurd circumstances. Camus describes the ancient Greek myth of Sisyphus, who must roll a boulder up a hill each day, only for it to roll down again, as the ultimate metaphor for our existence. He argues that fighting against this absurdity makes people miserable. This thesis argues that all of these ideas in Camus' conception of the absurd are represented in both the

¹⁷ Bordell, D., Thompson, K., & Smith, J. 2020. *Film Art: An Introduction*. 12th ed. Originally published 1950. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education. Pg. 97.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pg. 3.

form and style of *The Lighthouse*. Walter Kaufman's (1960) overview of existentialism will also be referenced when discussing Camus, in order to understand how his idea of the absurd fits into a larger context of philosophy,¹⁹ as well as Anthony Rizzuto's (1998) analysis of Camus' views on sexuality.²⁰

Finally, this thesis includes information from contemporary reviews and interviews with director Robert Eggers, in order to establish his perspective, and the perspective of the mainstream media, on the meaning behind the style and form of *The Lighthouse*. Some scholars like Aaron Meskin (2009) question the positioning of directors as the ultimate authors of film, because they are a collaborative effort, but even he acknowledges that "the director is considered the single person most responsible for the look and sound of the finished film."²¹ Though audiences can and do interpret films in any way they choose, investigating the intentions of a director allows for a deeper understanding of the ideas and themes that may be present in a film. That Eggers is also the screenwriter of the film, along with his brother, gives further credence to the notion of Eggers as author, and shows the value in examining his perspective on the meaning of certain aspects of *The Lighthouse*.

Eggers mentions many influences, from 19th century painters to classic works of literature, that inspired the creation and development of *The Lighthouse*. However, it is noteworthy that he has stated that he does "not have a message" in his movies.²² In other words, though Eggers is precise when creating a specific atmosphere for a film,²³ he does not create overarching grand narratives. Animated children's films are typically cited as examples of

¹⁹ Kaufmann, W. 1960. *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre*. 12th ed. Originally published 1956. New York, NY: Meridian Books, Inc.

²⁰ Rizzuto, A. 1998. *Camus: Love and Sexuality*. Florida: University Press of Florida.

²¹ Meskin, A. 2009. "Authorship." *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*. Pg. 12-28. Livingston, P. & Plantinga, C. (editors). 1st ed. New York, NY: Routledge. Pg. 12.

²² Brock, J. & Eggers, R. 2019. "Screenwriters' Lecture Series 2019: Robert Eggers." [transcript]. BAFTA Media Center. Mayfair, London. <https://www.bafta.org/media-centre/transcripts/screenwriters-lecture-series-2019-robert-eggers>

²³ Ibid

media with simple, straightforward messaging (e.g. “be kind to your friends,” “it’s alright to grieve for lost loved ones,” etc), and Eggers’ films stand exist on the opposite end of the cinematic spectrum as works that encourage multiple interpretations. He has also stated that certain interpretations by viewers have initially surprised him, but appear to be valid when he “takes an objective view.”²⁴ Eggers’ perspective therefore gives credence to the central idea of this thesis, that Camus’ conception of the absurd, as described in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, may be read in *The Lighthouse* in both the style and form of the film

²⁴ Brock, J. & Eggers, R. 2019. “Screenwriters’ Lecture Series 2019: Robert Eggers.” [transcript]. BAFTA Media Center. Mayfair, London. <https://www.bafta.org/media-centre/transcripts/screenwriters-lecture-series-2019-robert-eggers>

III. *The Myth of Sisyphus* and the Absurd

Camus is usually associated with the group of philosophers who fall under the umbrella of existentialism. As Kaufman explains, existentialism is difficult to define as one cohesive school of thought, because many of the philosophers connected to it have significant differences in their theories.²⁵ However, we can say generally that existentialism critiques traditional Western philosophy and offers an alternate understanding of human existence. Eighteenth century philosophers like Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche were critical of the metaphysical virtues of religion and most Enlightenment-era philosophy. Nineteenth century philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Camus followed these criticisms with their own ideas about the problems of human life. Philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Karl Jaspers, and others are important figures in existentialism, but Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Sartre are particularly relevant for contextualizing Camus' work, in both their similarities and their differences.

Kaufmann notes that suffering is a common theme in the work of existentialist thinkers, and the understanding of suffering is a significant topic for Sartre and Camus.²⁶ Additionally, Kaufmann points out that Sartre's writing blurs the line between philosophy, literature, and theater.²⁷ Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* similarly defies categorization as a mere philosophical essay; Camus retells this ancient Greek myth in a somewhat lyrical style, and includes many similes and metaphors that would be appropriate in a novel. In this way, it is clear that the line between art and philosophy is not a gaping divide, but rather that elements of one may be included in the other. Both Sartre and Camus claim that human life is absurd, but their explanation of this absurdity differs. Sartre said that a kind of "nausea" may result from the absurdity of life- the fact that life is essentially meaningless- but one may counteract this nausea

²⁵ Kaufmann, W. 1960. *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre*. 12th ed. Originally published 1956. New York, NY: Meridian Books, Inc. Pg. 11.

²⁶ Ibid, pg. 47.

²⁷ Ibid, pg. 40.

by utilizing freedom to make your own choices. Camus' understanding of the absurd focused more on the recognition of this absurdity.

Camus begins *The Myth of Sisyphus* by addressing the issue of suicide, which he believes to be the ultimate dilemma of human life. "Judging whether life is or is not worth living...[is] the fundamental question of philosophy."²⁸ Suicide is not limited to the destruction of one's physical form, however, but may also be applied through modes of thought. Camus argues that certain philosophers and religious devotees commit "philosophical suicide" by believing in supernatural forces that are not real.²⁹ They are ignoring the reality of existence and are therefore not truly participating in it. While Sartre was also skeptical of religion and certain metaphysical philosophy, he did not link the absurdity of life and human consciousness in the way that Camus does. Having awareness of this absurdity, the fact that God does not exist and the universe does not care about our actions, is the only way to truly experience and appreciate our existence.

Camus discusses the ideas of other philosophers who have addressed the issue of existence. He says that the works of Jaspers, Heidegger, Chestov, Kierkegaard, and certain phenomenologists all deal with the absurd in some way, but he critiques their conclusions. "I see that all of them without exception suggest escape"³⁰ he writes. In other words, none of these philosophers face the reality of the world, but focus on ideas that offer "escape." Camus is particularly critical of the religious views of Chestov and Kierkegaard. The struggle of existentialist philosophers to justify human life demonstrates the difficult conflict that man faces when dealing with the absurd. The "state of the absurd...is founded [on] this mind and this world straining against each other without being able to embrace each other."³¹ In this

²⁸ Camus, A. 1942. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Translated by Justin O'Brien. New York: Vintage Books, 1991. Translation originally published by Alfred A. Knopf, 1955. Originally published in France as *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* by Librairie Gallimard, 1942. Pg 1.

²⁹ Ibid, pg. 10.

³⁰ Ibid, pg, 11.

³¹ Ibid, pg. 14.

perspective, human life involves conflict and suffering, because our minds have a hard time accepting the irrational nature of the world. In the following section, this thesis will demonstrate how this idea of conflict, and the significant role that suffering plays in our lives, is apparent in *The Lighthouse*.

Camus describes the unchanging, mundane realities of daily life as a possible catalyst for the realization of the absurd. When one notices that one is getting up, going to work, completing daily tasks that are ultimately meaningless, and then repeating this cycle, one may feel suicidal. “At this point of his effort man stands face to face with the irrational. He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world.”³² In other words, absurdity in human life results from man’s desire to apply rationality to our irrational universe, and in recognizing this truth we may feel despair at our circumstances. Religion and philosophical reason are inadequate responses to this despair. However, suicide is not the only answer to this dilemma- “recovery” is also possible; by realizing the truth of our existence, we may experience it fully.

After examining the question of suicide, and critiquing the attempts of philosophical reason and religion to justify human existence, Camus describes the ancient Greek myth of Sisyphus as the ultimate metaphor for our lives. While there are varying accounts of who Sisyphus was, most versions agree that he somehow scorned the gods in pursuit of life. He was then punished with the task of rolling a boulder up a hill each day, only for it to roll down again in an endless cycle. Camus notes that the specific details of this tale are not as important as the general message of the story, because our minds fill in the blanks; “myths are made for the

³² Camus, A. 1942. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Translated by Justin O'Brien. New York: Vintage Books, 1991. Translation originally published by Alfred A. Knopf, 1955. Originally published in France as *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* by Librairie Gallimard, 1942. Pg. 10.

imagination to breathe life into them.”³³ This idea, that legends and folktales are made real through the power of the human mind, is particularly important for *The Lighthouse*. Camus pays special attention to the instant when Sisyphus turns back toward the bottom of the hill once the boulder has rolled down again. He imagines and describes the small details of this moment of the recognition of the absurd.

Once he has outlined the details of the myth of Sisyphus, Camus posits that “the workman of today works everyday in his life at the same tasks, and his fate is no less absurd.”³⁴ There is no God who is keeping track of our failures and successes, so our actions are as meaningless as pushing a rock up a hill every day. As with Nietzsche, Camus’ atheism is a central tenet of his philosophy. However, recognizing this truth allows us to truly see and appreciate the world- “in the universe suddenly restored to its silence, the myriad wondering little voices of the earth rise up.”³⁵ Instead of committing philosophical suicide by believing in metaphysical or religious ideas that do not exist, one can look at the real world and appreciate even the small parts of it. We can “imagine Sisyphus happy” when he realizes the truth of his circumstances, and we can similarly achieve happiness by recognizing the absurd. We will see in the following part how this particular conception of the absurd, and human existence, is then displayed in *The Lighthouse*.

While *The Myth of Sisyphus* provides the main philosophical lens through which this thesis will analyze *The Lighthouse*, some of Camus’ other work adds additional context for his conception of the absurd and how it relates to the film. Rizzuto (1998) examines Camus’ views on love and sexuality in his writing, including his novels, essays, and personal diary entries. In the chapter “Class, Love, and Sexuality,” Rizzuto argues that Camus’ notion of the absurd, as

³³ Camus, A. 1942. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Translated by Justin O'Brien. New York: Vintage Books, 1991. Translation originally published by Alfred A. Knopf, 1955. Originally published in France as *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* by Librairie Gallimard, 1942. Pg. 23.

³⁴ Ibid, pg. 20.

³⁵ Ibid, pg. 24.

expressed in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, positions love as a metaphysical, bourgeois creation that doesn't exist.³⁶ Sexuality, on the other hand, is a natural phenomenon that should be expressed freely. Rizzuto connects *The Myth of Sisyphus* to *Nuptials* (1958), one of Camus' first collections of essays. Rizzuto posits that both works advocate for the primacy of human sexuality. He says Camus wants to "remove from erotic desire all notions of hierarchy and taboos."³⁷ I will argue in the next part how this aspect of Camus' work is related to certain themes that appear in the form and style of *The Lighthouse*

³⁶ Rizzuto, A. 1998. *Camus: Love and Sexuality*. Florida: University Press of Florida. Pg. 26.

³⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 27.

IV. Analysis of The Lighthouse

i. Summary

The Lighthouse (2019) begins with the arrival of two lighthouse keepers on an isolated stone island, their boat emerging out of a thick fog. We see a couple of other figures on the boat, but their faces are indistinct. After arriving at the island, the two men settle in to their threadbare living quarters and start their work of tending to the light. The work is difficult- the young man sweats profusely when he shovels coal into the furnace of the lighthouse. During their first dinner together, it is revealed that the men are supposed to stay for four weeks on the island. It becomes clear the older man has more experience with this type of work than the younger and has authority over him; “y’do as I say. That’s in yer [manual].”³⁸ Additionally, when the older man proposes a toast, the younger man initially declines it because he is hesitant to drink alcohol. The older man claims it is “bad luck to leave a toast unfinished,”³⁹ so the younger man toasts him with water instead. It is clear in this scene that the older man is superstitious, and the younger man is skeptical of both his beliefs and his authority.

During their dinner, the older man makes it clear that he is the only one who will be directly tending to the light. The young man protests that the two of them are supposed to take turns with that duty, but the older man refuses. Later, the older man is tending to the light, and he takes off his clothes due to the heat of the lens. He toasts the light itself, calling it his “beauty.” The younger man is also drawn to the light, and experiences some suspicious incidents as the old man stays in the lantern room overnight; he sees a dead body in the water near the island’s shore, and a mermaid seems to swim towards him in the ocean. It is unclear if these images are real within the world of the film, or if they are a dream, as it cuts from these events to the young man waking up the next day. The older man makes no mention of any

³⁸ Eggers, R. & Eggers, M. 2018. *The Lighthouse*. [screenplay]. Scriptup. <https://www.scriptupstudio.com/blog/the-lighthouse>. Pg 7.

³⁹ Ibid, pg. 6.

unusual activity the next morning, and merely directs the younger man to clean the cistern and oil the lamp of the lighthouse. Inside of the cistern, the younger man discovers the rotting corpse of a seagull.

The young man continues to have difficulties with his arduous duties on the island, including transporting the coal that is used for the light. He encounters a seagull who blocks his path as he is pushing a wheelbarrow full of coal, and throws a piece at it. The older man claims during their second dinner together that it is “bad luck to kill a sea bird,”⁴⁰ because they are the reincarnated souls of dead sailors. Also during their second dinner, the older man claims that his previous partner in lighthouse keeping went crazy during his stay on the island. He had “[raved] ‘bout sirens, merfolk, bad omens and the like.”⁴¹ The previous lighthouse keeper believed the light of the lighthouse contained magic, as well. That night, the younger man masturbates in the supply shed while holding a small mermaid carving he found under the pillow of his assigned bed. As the younger man walks back to their living quarters, he spies the older man in the lamp room, with his clothes removed. The younger man attempts to duck out of his sightline.

The two men argue again the next morning after the older man accuses the younger of neglecting to properly clean their living quarters. When the younger man protests against this, the older threatens to report his behavior in the “logbook” and reduce his salary. After this fight, the older man drops the younger man from a seat swing as the younger man is adding a fresh coat of paint to the light. We see the younger wake up to a seagull pecking at his wounded leg, and he again chases the bird off. After the young man is injured, we next see the two men eating dinner together, and the young man invites the older to call him by his name, Ephraim Winslow. Winslow says he would like to be known by his name for the last two weeks of his

⁴⁰ Eggers, R. & Eggers, M. 2018. *The Lighthouse*. [screenplay]. Scriptup. <https://www.scriptupstudio.com/blog/the-lighthouse>. Pg 20.

⁴¹ Ibid. Pg. 20.

stay, implying that two weeks have already passed. Winslow also reveals that he used to work as a timber cutter before he became a lighthouse keeper, and the high pay for the job is what attracted him to it. The next day, Winslow experiences another conflict with a seagull. The bird who was pecking at his leg earlier returns and squawks at him, so Winslow kills the bird in a savage fashion.

Almost immediately after, the older man notes that the wind on the island has changed from a “gentle westerly wind” to a stronger “Nor’Easterly wind”⁴² that might delay the replacement lighthouse keeper who is meant to relieve Winslow. This dialogue shows that more time has passed, and now there is one more day until Winslow is meant to leave. That night, purportedly Winslow’s last, the men eat freshly-caught lobster and both drink liquor. This is the first time Winslow has imbibed alcohol since arriving on the island, and both he and the older man become intoxicated. The older man reveals his name is Thomas Wake, and he goes by Tom. The next morning, both are very hungover, and the relief that is meant to come has not arrived due to the severe weather. When Winslow goes to empty the chamber-pots, he sees a beautiful mermaid lying in the seaweed, in the same place where the lobster was caught. Initially, her eyes are closed, but when Winslow touches her, she awakens and frightens him. He runs back into the living quarters, but he cannot explain what he saw to Tom.

In the next scene, Tom tells Winslow that the provisions have rotted, and the two are in danger of starvation as the storm rages on. Winslow, and the audience, assume this is the same day as the previous scene, because it has followed immediately after. However, Tom reveals that it has been weeks since the relief boat was supposed to arrive, and he questions Winslow’s sanity- “I ain’t wantin’ to be stranded here with some damned lunatic.”⁴³ The two men dig up another box of what Tom calls provisions, which turns out to be liquor. In the following scene,

⁴² Eggers, R. & Eggers, M. 2018. *The Lighthouse*. [screenplay]. Scriptup. <https://www.scriptupstudio.com/blog/the-lighthouse>. Pg 39.

⁴³ Ibid, pg. 52

the two men are drinking together and talking the way they did the night before Winslow was supposed to leave. Both Winslow and Tom proceed to get drunk and talk, and their conversation devolves into arguing. Tom is suspicious when Winslow refers to “that damned Winslow,”⁴⁴ a foreman on the timber job he worked at previously. Winslow counters that he hates Tom’s cooking, and Tom seemingly curses Winslow through “the gods of the sea.”⁴⁵

Over the next few days, Winslow attempts to read the logbook in which Tom has been reporting his actions, but cannot seem to find an opportunity. There is a brief scene of Winslow masturbating in the supply shed, in which he imagines the mermaid from earlier, and then the film cuts to another night of drinking between Tom and Winslow. During this night of drinking, both Winslow and Tom become the drunkest they’ve been so far. They sing, dance together, and fist fight, and then Winslow admits he is not actually Winslow, but is named Thomas Howard. Tom Wake, implores Thomas Howard not to “spill his beans,”⁴⁶ or confess his sins, but Tommy tells him anyway. Thomas Howard, or Tommy, stood by as his timber foreman, Ephraim Winslow, fell at the logging site and was crushed by logs. Tommy could have helped Winslow, but he hated the foreman for nagging him constantly, so Tommy took his identity and became a lighthouse keeper.

Tommy wakes the next day and searches around the island for Tom. He makes a series of unsettling discoveries, including his own dead body in the seaweed. Tom appears on the rocks, naked, with a bright light shining from his eyes. The scene cuts to Tommy attempting to take the island’s dory out to sea, but Tom stops him by smashing the small boat with an axe as he cries “don’t leave me!”⁴⁷ Tommy runs back inside the living quarters, and accuses Tom of killing the previous lighthouse keeper after inflicting a supernatural curse on

⁴⁴ Eggers, R. & Eggers, M. 2018. *The Lighthouse*. [screenplay]. Scriptup. <https://www.scriptupstudio.com/blog/the-lighthouse>. Pg. 56.

⁴⁵ Ibid, pg. 61.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pg. 73.

⁴⁷ Ibid, pg. 77.

him. Tom states that it was in fact Tommy himself who destroyed the dory, and says that Tommy has become a crazed maniac. Tom then calms Tommy down from his feverish state, and both decide to keep drinking. Tommy shows Tom how to mix honey into kerosene to create a kind of homemade alcohol. That night, the two don't talk, they only laugh as they drink while the waves from the sea crash through the windows of the living quarters.

The next morning, the storm seems to be over, but the galley and parlor are completely destroyed. Tommy finds the logbook among the detritus, and discovers that Tom has recommended he be fired without pay. This enrages him, and he shouts at Tom about how he hates being trapped in isolation with him. For one moment, Tommy pleads with Tom to give him another chance to work hard, but after Tom insults him they end up physically fighting. As they fight, Tommy overpowers Tom, envisioning him with a long beard and a crown of shells. Tom then cries out for mercy, and is pictured as a normal man again. Tommy then forces Tom to act like a dog, putting a leash on him and taking him outside, where it is clear the weather has vastly improved. Tommy forces Tom to crawl into a grave he has dug, and then lie in it as Tommy drops dirt over him. Once Tom is buried, Tommy takes the key to the lantern room and begins the steep ascent to the light.

There is one final "jumpscare" as Tom attacks Tommy with the axe that he used to smash the dory earlier, but Tommy is again able to overpower him by hitting him with a kettle. Tommy then kills Tom by swinging the axe into his head. Tommy makes himself a drink with the homemade alcohol that is left, and recites the same toast that Tom has been repeating throughout the film during their dinners as he sips it. Tommy then climbs the stairs of the tower and finally makes it into the lantern room, where he sees the large Fresnel lens that is giving off light. The lens seems to slow its rotation and open its doors. Tommy is overcome emotionally by its beauty, and goes to touch it, burning himself in the process. He laughs maniacally as he burns himself on the light, then loses his balance and falls down the tower

stairs. The final shot of the film shows Tommy lying on the rocks of the island, naked and blinded, while seagulls peck at his liver.

ii. Analysis of Form

When discussing his work at a Screenwriters' Lecture Series at the British Academy Film Awards media center, Eggers stated that he writes his screenplays in a unique way, because he is both writer and director; "the way I write my screenplays would be inappropriate if I weren't directing them."⁴⁸ He uses a level of specificity in his writing that reveals his intentions while directing, and allows for a deeper understanding of the world being presented by the film. For this reason, the screenplay of *The Lighthouse* (2019) will be an integral part of this analysis of the film's form. The language of the screenplay is important for understanding the film's themes, even if the directions in the screenplay don't appear onscreen. The film's setting, for example, is said to be "somewhere far off the coast of Maine. Around 1890"⁴⁹ in the screenplay, though it is never explicitly mentioned by any character in the film. The craggy rock, the harsh weather, the men's clothing, their accents and slang, and other elements evoke the general time period and location, but Eggers specifies both in the screenplay.

It is noteworthy that Tommy and Tom are referred to only as "Young" and "Old," respectively, in the screenplay. Eggers stated in another interview that one source of inspiration for the film was the Smalls Lighthouse tragedy that happened in Wales in the early 1800s.⁵⁰ Two men, both named Thomas, were apparently killed in a storm while tending to the Smalls Lighthouse. Eggers said that "because they were both named Thomas, I thought this could be an interesting two-hander about identity."⁵¹ In other words, the self is an important theme in the film, and one possible interpretation of this theme is that Tom and Tommy are the same

⁴⁸ Brock, J. & Eggers, R. 2019. "Screenwriters' Lecture Series 2019: Robert Eggers." [transcript]. BAFTA Media Center. Mayfair, London. <https://www.bafta.org/media-centre/transcripts/screenwriters-lecture-series-2019-robert-eggers>

⁴⁹ Eggers, R. & Eggers, M. 2018. *The Lighthouse*. [screenplay]. Scriptup. <https://www.scriptupstudio.com/blog/the-lighthouse>. Pg. ii.

⁵⁰ "At the Academy: The Lighthouse." 2019. The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts & Sciences. Hosted on Medium. <https://medium.com/@TheAcademy/at-the-academy-the-lighthouse-50185dbd496e>

⁵¹ Ibid

person. In this reading, their titles in the screenplay are meant to suggest that Tom is the older version of Tommy, and the events in the film are an allegory for Tommy turning into Tom. Certain codes, or details, in the story support this interpretation, such as Tommy drinking more throughout his stay, just as Tom drinks heavily, or Tommy finally reciting the same toast at the end of the film that Tom repeats during their dinners.

Jess Joho's review similarly argued that Tom and Tommy could be interpreted as the same person, but posited that perhaps they were different Jungian elements of the same mind. "[Tom] is like the bestial id giving in to all his basest desires and [Tommy] is like the ego, conscientious of social norms and struggling to maintain civility."⁵² This interpretation is supported by certain elements in the story, such as Tom flatulating "about three feet from [Tommy's] face" as a "deliberate display of power"⁵³. It is significant that Eggers' explicitly discusses the power dynamic between the two in the screenplay, even with an act that may seem juvenile or comical to an audience watching the film. Additionally, Tommy's stated insistence on following the lighthouse keeper's manual gives further evidence for the idea that Tommy represents one mind's ego, because it shows his desire to maintain order on an inhospitable island that is beset by uncontrollable weather. In this interpretation, Tommy adopting some of Tom's habits throughout the story could be read as the ego giving in to the mind's base desires.

While these two readings of the characters of Tom and Tommy as one person conflict in some regards, both seem to connect to Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus*. If one interprets Tom as the older version of Tommy, then his reliance on alcohol and belief in the supernatural seems to result from the brutality of his surroundings. The weather is unpredictable and harsh, and the drudgery of his daily tasks is hard to handle. Tom/Tommy's duties as a lighthouse keeper

⁵² Joho, J. 2019. "What the Hell Did 'The Lighthouse' Even Mean?" Mashable. <https://mashable.com/article/the-lighthouse-robert-eggers-meaning-explained-ending>

⁵³ Eggers, R. & Eggers, M. 2018. *The Lighthouse*. [screenplay]. Scriptup. <https://www.scriptupstudio.com/blog/the-lighthouse>. Pg. 4.

on an isolated island are comparable to Camus' understanding of human existence; faced with the monotony and futility of everyday life, one may grasp for supernatural explanations that ultimately don't exist. In Joho's Jungian interpretation, Tommy-the-ego's struggle in the film to uphold civility and social norms is similar to Camus' view of philosophers attempting to develop metaphysical ideals- it is a futile effort that will eventually fail. In this way, these varied readings of Tom and Tommy as one person seem to align with certain ideas in Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus*.

Other details in the story and the screenplay suggest a connection between *The Lighthouse* and Camus. When detailing the interior of the island's living quarters, the Eggers' brothers write that "a CLOCK ticks monotonously" as "the wind blows. It's depressing."⁵⁴ As with the character descriptions, the minutiae of the screenplay are relevant for understanding the themes being presented. Even in the space designated for the lighthouse keepers to live in, away from the toil of their jobs, their living space is unsatisfactory and creates a sense of despair. The noise of the lighthouse is described as "excruciating,"⁵⁵ further implying that living on the island is a punishment. In terms of the story, the overall repetition of the island's daily tasks may be compared to Sisyphus's punishment of rolling a boulder up a hill over and over. Tommy's struggle in particular aligns with Sisyphus, as he is shown many times pushing coal in a cart, shoveling said coal into the furnace of the light, and eventually bemoaning the drudgery and futility of his work in his final fight with Tom.

This connection with Camus is not a definitive explanation of the film, however, as Eggers welcomes multiple interpretations of his films. "What's important to me...is not to have a message, to not have any intention beyond staying true to the world in which I'm trying to

⁵⁴ Eggers, R. & Eggers, M. 2018. *The Lighthouse*. [screenplay]. Scriptup. <https://www.scriptupstudio.com/blog/the-lighthouse>. Pg. 3

⁵⁵ Ibid, pg. 3.

write in.”⁵⁶ In other words, while Eggers creates a particular “atmosphere” for his films, there is no unifying idea that justifies everything. The theme of identity, for example, could also be related to notions of deception and concealment. Tommy initially takes on the identity of Ephraim Winslow in order to hide his past as a poor lumberjack in Canada; he is trying to create a new life, a new self, through his work as a lighthouse keeper. In this interpretation, it makes more sense that Tom and Tommy are separate people, as tension arises from Tommy hiding his identity and Tom eventually discovering the truth. Because Eggers’ leaves his work open to multiple analyses, it is important to investigate different themes, aspects, and sources of inspiration for *The Lighthouse*.

In an interview with *Vox*, Eggers discussed how the dialogue of the film was partially inspired by the works of Herman Melville and Robert Louis Stevenson. Though Eggers states that he read their writing “mostly...for learning how people [talked]”⁵⁷ in the 19th century, there appears to be a connection between the story of the film and the stories of these authors. Melville’s *Moby Dick*, for instance, follows whaling captain Ahab’s quest to hunt a white sperm whale called Moby Dick. Many scholars have examined the various symbolical codes in this novel; John Halverson⁵⁸ looks through a Jungian lens at Ahab as a representation of the darker side of human nature, and the relationships of the characters in the book as examples of how an individual’s psychology is influenced by their social relationships. Tom and Tommy are as driven by their obsession with the light in the lighthouse as Ahab is driven by his obsession with the whale, and their relationship with each other is similarly fraught with “archetypal power”⁵⁹ dynamics as the characters in the novel.

⁵⁶ Brock, J. & Eggers, R. 2019. “Screenwriters’ Lecture Series 2019: Robert Eggers.” [transcript]. BAFTA Media Center. Mayfair, London. <https://www.bafta.org/media-centre/transcripts/screenwriters-lecture-series-2019-robert-eggers>

⁵⁷ Wilkinson, A. 2019. “The Witch Director Robert Eggers Spills His Beans About *The Lighthouse*.” *Vox Media*. <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/10/15/20914097/robert-eggers-lighthouse-interview-witch>

⁵⁸ Halverson, John. 1963. “The Shadow in *Moby-Dick*.” *American Quarterly* 15, no. 3. Pg. 436–46. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pg. 436.

Stevenson's influence is also significant, as he is the author of a number of notable works of English literature, including *Treasure Island* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is particularly relevant in connection to *The Lighthouse*, as it follows a seemingly normal man, Henry Jekyll, who unwittingly transforms into a monstrous alter ego called "Mr. Hyde." This story further advances the theme of identity, both in the interpretation of the character of Tommy as someone hiding their identity from another person, (Tom), and in the interpretation of Tom and Tommy as one person struggling against their malevolent self. Additionally, it is important to note that *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is thought to be one of the most famous books in the "gothic horror" genre, as it shows how Eggers meant for *The Lighthouse* to evoke horror in viewers.

The influence of the works of Melville and Stevenson on the dialogue in *The Lighthouse* is apparent in the specific terms and slang used by Tom and Tommy. For instance, Tom uses the word "doldrums"⁶⁰ to refer to boredom, an outdated term that was used in the 19th century. Additionally, I can personally confirm that the "Nor'easterly wind"⁶¹ that Tom refers to when he states his belief that Tommy's blasphemous killing of the seagull has changed the weather and doomed them both to a harsh storm comes from the term "Nor'easter." As mentioned previously, Nor'easter is a contraction of North Easter, and is used to describe the big storms that hit the coast of New England, and especially Maine, in the fall and winter. It is apparent that Eggers is "staying true to the world" of the film by using these very specific terms to evoke a particular time and place. The contrast between the specificity of this dialogue and the ambiguity of referring to Tom and Tommy as Young and Old further highlights how the film incorporates many particular codes that are open to interpretation.

⁶⁰ Eggers, R. & Eggers, M. 2018. *The Lighthouse*. [screenplay]. Scriptup. <https://www.scriptupstudio.com/blog/the-lighthouse>. Pg. 19

⁶¹ Ibid, pg. 39.

Eggers also claims that certain “folktales and myths...line up” with *The Lighthouse*, including the ancient Greek myths of Proteus and Prometheus.⁶² Proteus is one of the gods of the sea who was known for being able to predict the future, and being capable of changing the state of the ocean, from calm to rough and so on. On the other hand, the myth of Prometheus is notably similar in some ways to the myth of Sisyphus. In most versions of the tale, Prometheus was a Titan who stole fire from the Gods and gave it to humans. His punishment was to be bound to a rock, and to have his liver eaten by an eagle. Each day, his liver is regrown, and eaten again, just as Sisyphus’ boulder rolls down the hill again in a daily cycle. Eggers has suggested that the character of Tom aligns with Proteus, while the character of Tommy aligns with Prometheus.⁶³ This similarity between Prometheus and Sisyphus seems to further the connection between *The Lighthouse* and Camus’ *Myth of Sisyphus*.

There are a number of elements in the screenplay and story that confirm Eggers’ view of Tom as Proteus and Tommy as Prometheus. In Tom’s case, his prediction about the changing of the weather, and consequently the changing of the sea, proves to be true. As he and Tommy are arguing about Tommy killing the seagull, Tom says “it’s the calm afore the storm...She/ were a gentle westerly wind yer/ cursin’ ...Best board up them signal house/ winders.”⁶⁴ Later, he is proven to be right, as the weather gets worse and eventually the rough sea waves blast through the “winders,” or windows, when Tom and Tommy are drinking and laughing hysterically. In this way, Tom appears to have the same prophetic understanding of the sea as Proteus. Tommy, on the other hand, parallels Prometheus in his desire for the light of the lighthouse. Though he reaches it in the end, he is almost immediately punished, and his fate in

⁶² Wilkinson, A. 2019. “The Witch Director Robert Eggers Spills His Beans About *The Lighthouse*.” Vox Media. <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/10/15/20914097/robert-eggers-lighthouse-interview-witch>

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Eggers, R. & Eggers, M. 2018. *The Lighthouse*. [screenplay]. Scriptup. <https://www.scriptupstudio.com/blog/the-lighthouse>. Pg. 39.

the film aligns with Prometheus's. Just as Prometheus had his liver eaten by eagles, Tommy appears to have his abdomen pecked by seagulls in the final moments of the film.

There is one line of dialogue near the end of the film that references both of these mythological figures, and also seems to reflect an important overarching theme. As Tommy attempts to bury Tom after forcing him to dig his own grave, Tom laments the events of the story: "O what Protean forms swim up from/men's minds and melt in hot/Promethean plunder scorching eyes/with divine shames and horrors/and cast them down to Davy Jones./And others, still blind, yet in it/see all divine graces and to/Fiddler's Green sent, where no man/is suffered to want and toil, but/is ancient, mutable, and unchanging as she who girdles 'round the globe./Them's truth. And you'll be punished."⁶⁵ Tom is saying that certain "Protean" forms, or things that may change form, are created by the minds of men, and these forms may horrify them painfully and thereby damn them to hell. Other men interpret these forms as a kind of grace that delivers them to paradise. Crucially, Tom notes that the second type of man is "still blind."

The idea present in this speech seems to parallel Camus' theory of philosophical suicide. Both horrors and divine graces are created through the minds of men- there are no metaphysical or supernatural elements that actually exist outside of people. Although some find peace in the imagined paradise of "Fiddler's Green," they are "still blind" to the reality of the world. This aligns with Camus' view in *Myth of Sisyphus* that people who believe in metaphysics and religion are ignoring the true "silence" of the universe. Tom has another line earlier in the film that seems to reflect this same idea- as he and Tommy fight about what Tom wrote in the lighthouse logbook, Tom taunts Tommy by saying "yer less a man/ than I- and them's the rules of/ nature. Them's truth./ I am truth. I make the truth as I/ see fit. Me. And the

⁶⁵ Eggers, R. & Eggers, M. 2018. *The Lighthouse*. [screenplay]. Scriptup. <https://www.scriptupstudio.com/blog/the-lighthouse>. Pg. 93.

truth is that/ you're a nothin', Tommy-Tom-Tom.”⁶⁶ The line “I make the truth as I see fit” also aligns with Camus’ criticism of religion and metaphysics, which asserts that an idea like “truth” exists outside of the realm of human beings.

There are other interpretations of Tom’s taunt, however, and of Tom’s character in general. One connotation of the line “yer less a man/than I” is that Tommy is less of a person than Tom, because he is consumed by madness. Additionally, this could be read as a hyper-masculine taunt, as Tom has compared Tommy multiple times throughout the film to a woman. In his BAFTA interview, Eggers says that although he didn’t intend to examine “toxic masculinity” during the writing process of the film, he “sees it” now that the film is finished.⁶⁷ Toxic masculinity refers to the association between men and certain harmful ideals.⁶⁸ It does not refer to masculinity itself, but rather to particular stereotypes that men must be stoic, violent, and they must avoid stereotypical feminine qualities (like gentleness, being emotional, and creativity). Tom seems to represent a form of toxic masculinity, as he is aggressive, gruff, and he disparages Tommy for being “pretty as a picture.”⁶⁹

During their final fight, Tom also calls Tommy a “bitch” and compares him to a “painted actress,”⁷⁰ intending to insult him by comparing him to a woman. While this seems to further the theme of toxic masculinity, it also seems to allude to homoeroticism between Tom and Tommy. There is a moment onscreen, during the night when Tom and Tommy dance and then fight after the weather has changed, when they lean towards each other as if they’re about to kiss. It happens quickly, and some viewers may miss it, but in the screenplay it is clearly

⁶⁶ Eggers, R. & Eggers, M. 2018. *The Lighthouse*. [screenplay]. Scriptup. <https://www.scriptupstudio.com/blog/the-lighthouse>. Pg. 89.

⁶⁷ Brock, J. & Eggers, R. 2019. “Screenwriters’ Lecture Series 2019: Robert Eggers.” [transcript]. BAFTA Media Center. Mayfair, London. <https://www.bafta.org/media-centre/transcripts/screenwriters-lecture-series-2019-robert-eggers>

⁶⁸ Sculos, B.W. 2017. “We Are the Beast: On Toxic Masculinity and Social Responsibility in Disney’s Beauty and the Beast.” *Class, Race and Corporate Power* 5, no. 2. FIU Digital Commons.

⁶⁹ Eggers, R. & Eggers, M. 2018. *The Lighthouse*. [screenplay]. Scriptup. <https://www.scriptupstudio.com/blog/the-lighthouse>. Pg. 30.

⁷⁰ Ibid, pg. 88.

written in the directions that “it seems like they might kiss.”⁷¹ According to Eggers, this theme of homoeroticism was important during the development of the cinematography, which will be discussed in the next section. In this way, we can see how an audience could interpret Tom and Tommy’s relationship to be somewhat sexually charged. Tommy’s masturbation in the supply shed is another aspect of the story that relates to homoeroticism and sexuality in general.

The dynamic between Tom and Tommy is an important factor in any interpretation of the film. The homoerotic reading of their relationship, and the theme of sexuality that appears in the scenes of Tommy masturbating, seem to connect to the other themes of deception and guilt. Tom and Tommy rip themselves away from each other after their almost-kiss, and immediately begin to hit each other. They are ashamed of their moment of desire for one another, and they use violence to re-establish their idea of manhood (i.e. heterosexual and aggressive). Tommy is deliberately concealing his identity under the name “Ephraim Winslow” for most of the film, and Tom suggests his guilt over his involuntary killing of the real Winslow has driven him “so mad,/[he] knows not up from down.”⁷² The narrative also seems to suggest that Tommy is involuntarily suppressing his sexuality, and he feels a lot of shame over his occasional homosexual desires.

Camus’ *Myth of Sisyphus* does not explicitly address sexuality, but it does critique the mainstream belief in metaphysical values and morality, which generate shame around natural phenomena like sexuality. Rizzuto argues that another work by Camus, *Nuptials* (1938), advocates for the elimination of guilt surrounding sex and desire. Rizzuto claims that Camus aims to “return sexuality to its primordial purity, set apart from morality [and] guilt.”⁷³ While *The Lighthouse* does not explicitly advocate for the embracing of all taboo sexuality, it does suggest that Tommy’s repression of his desires is harmful, as evidenced by the violence that

⁷¹ Eggers, R. & Eggers, M. 2018. *The Lighthouse*. [screenplay]. Scriptup. <https://www.scriptupstudio.com/blog/the-lighthouse>. Pg. 70.

⁷² Ibid, pg. 80.

⁷³ Rizzuto, A. 1998. *Camus: Love and Sexuality*. Florida: University Press of Florida. Pg. 27.

results immediately after Tom and Tommy's near-kiss. In this way, the movie's themes of repression and shame seem to connect to Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus*. Tom, and especially Tommy, seem to suffer because of metaphysical ideals about sexuality and manhood that don't exist in reality. Tom and Tommy are not punished for almost kissing one another, but they punish themselves for even considering it.

Overall, the film's form incorporates a number of complex themes and ideas, some of which seem to conflict. Eggers himself notes that his works lack a definite "message," and instead he only attempts to create atmosphere when he develops his works. When he stated that he was inspired to create a story about "identity," for example, he did not clarify whether that was the identity of two men, or only one. Compared to the considerable specificity with which the dialogue was crafted, this indicates that *The Lighthouse* leaves much room for interpretation. The view of Tommy as Prometheus, for instance, generally parallels the myth of Sisyphus, but the view of Tom as Proteus does contradict Camus, as it suggests that Tom has a supernatural link to the ocean, and thus nature in general. The homoerotic dynamic between the two, however, and the shame and repression involved, does appear to align with Camus' view of metaphysical morality. Ultimately, the story, dialogue, and screenplay of *The Lighthouse* all include elements that parallel ideas found in Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus*.

iii. Analysis of Style

Film style refers to certain aspects of film, such as cinematography, sound, and editing, that have slightly less structure than film form. Film style is sometimes referred to as the “art”⁷⁴ of a film because it involves imagery, music, and other artistic elements. The style of *The Lighthouse* (2019), as with the film’s form, is rooted in a specific time and place, but involves elements that may have various interpretations. According to various interviews, Eggers’ was especially inspired by art involving mythology, fairytales, and the ocean when developing the cinematography of *The Lighthouse*.⁷⁵ The music and general sound in the film is connected to the mechanics of lighthouses. Additionally, certain editing choices were made to evoke a feeling of claustrophobia and to unsettle the audience. As with the film’s form, Eggers was inspired by a number of sources to create a certain atmosphere in the style of the *Lighthouse*. A number of these codes contradict the ideas of Camus’ *Myth of Sisyphus*, but others seem to parallel his notion of the absurd.

Within the cinematography of *The Lighthouse*, certain images are given considerable weight, either due to their placement in the *mis-en-scene* (i.e. they are in the middle of the frame), or their reoccurrence throughout the film. These images have many connotations and denotations, suggesting that particular ideas are coded through the cinematography. One image that recurs frequently is the lighthouse itself. It dominates the frame in a number of shots, and we see it contrasted with images of the sea, seaweed, and other natural marine life. It has been noted by some reviewers⁷⁶ that the shape and presentation of the lighthouse is similar to a

⁷⁴ Bordell, D., Thompson, K., & Smith, J. 2020. *Film Art: An Introduction*. 12th ed. Originally published 1950. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education. Pg. 3.

⁷⁵ Brock, J. & Eggers, R. 2019. “Screenwriters’ Lecture Series 2019: Robert Eggers.” [transcript]. BAFTA Media Center. Mayfair, London. <https://www.bafta.org/media-centre/transcripts/screenwriters-lecture-series-2019-robert-eggers>

⁷⁶ Abeel, E. 2019. “Film Review: ‘The Lighthouse’-Nothing Good Happens When Two Men Are Left Alone in a Giant Phallus.” *The Arts Fuse*. <https://artsfuse.org/189984/film-review-the-lighthouse-nothing-good-happens-when-two-men-are-left-alone-in-a-giant-phallus/>

phallus. Eggers specifically mentions⁷⁷ Mircea Eliade's "Spirit, Light, and Seed" (1971) as a source of inspiration for the recurring image of the Lighthouse as a phallus. Eliade discusses how various religions all seem to have a concept of a "mystical light"⁷⁸ which correlates light with an act of creation. Eggers said that this paper made him think of the lighthouse "like the phallus, [with] light shooting out of it."⁷⁹

During one scene in which Tommy is masturbating, the film cuts between him and a wide shot of the lighthouse, then to a shot of writhing tentacles, then again to the lighthouse, rotating sideways (fig. 1 and fig. 2). It is clear the lighthouse is meant to evoke a phallus, as well as intercourse. As Eliade describes, many religions involve rituals that equate semen with "light-spirit-god."⁸⁰ The act of orgasm, leading to reproduction, is a sacred moment that allows humans to move from the world of the profane into the light of the divine⁸¹. Eggers' reference to Eliade suggests that the lighthouse is a site of creation, or even a site of enlightenment. Tom jealously guards the light every night and seems to be enthralled by it when he is in the lantern room. Tommy wants to see the light for himself, but is stopped by Tom multiple times, and only reaches the lantern room at the end of the story. If we interpret the film through the lens of Eliade's work, Tommy's narrative arc seems to be a journey towards spiritual enlightenment.

There are other images in the film that seem to denote metaphysical ideas, as well, such as the recurring motif of the mermaid, and the mermaid carving (fig. 1 and fig. 2). Tommy finds the mermaid carving in his bed on the first day he arrives on the island, and later clutches

⁷⁷ Wilkinson, A. 2019. "The Witch Director Robert Eggers Spills His Beans About The Lighthouse." Vox Media. <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/10/15/20914097/robert-eggers-lighthouse-interview-witch>

⁷⁸ Eliade, M. 1971. "Spirit, Light, and Seed." *History of Religions* 11, no. 1: 1–30. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. Pg. 2.

⁷⁹ Wilkinson, A. 2019. "The Witch Director Robert Eggers Spills His Beans About The Lighthouse." Vox Media. <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/10/15/20914097/robert-eggers-lighthouse-interview-witch>

⁸⁰ Eliade, M. 1971. "Spirit, Light, and Seed." *History of Religions* 11, no. 1: 1–30. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. Pg. 30.

⁸¹ Ibid, pg. 2.

it as he masturbates in the supply room. The film cuts between shots of the mermaid carving, and shots of a mermaid who swims toward Tommy. The mermaid later seems to wash up among the island's seaweed, but when Tommy goes to touch her, she shrieks a discordant cry that repels him. Tommy later accuses Tom of planting the mermaid carving in his bed, saying that it was the vessel of a curse. The reading of the mermaid carving as a magical talisman aligns with Eliade's notion of light as a phallic symbol of creation, as it is connected with Tommy's sexuality. The reading of the carving as a talisman suggests that the carving spurred Tommy into his journey of reaching the light of enlightenment, as represented by the lighthouse.

This view of the lighthouse as a place of metaphysical importance contradicts Camus' view that spirituality is a form of philosophical suicide. Camus is skeptical of religious beliefs, and contends that concepts like the light of the divine are fictitious ideas. However, the interpretation of the lighthouse that aligns with Eliade's work is not the only possible interpretation. The lighthouse as a phallic code also connects with the theme of sexuality and homoeroticism that was discussed in the analysis of the film's form. Rizzuto argues that Camus attempts to "jettison all notions of religious or secular utility (sex as procreation)"⁸² in his work, particularly in *Nuptials* (1938). If we therefore separate the image of the lighthouse from Eliade's notion of light as creativity and reproduction, we can read the lighthouse as a code of erotic desire. Michael D. Friedman (2015) discusses how the fraternal aspect of the military is often depicted in films with homoerotic undertones.⁸³ Although lighthouse-keeping is not part of the main military arm of the United States, it is a regimented, male-dominated profession, suggesting that the image of the lighthouse in the film is indeed a code for homoerotic desire.

⁸² Rizzuto, A. 1998. *Camus: Love and Sexuality*. Florida: University Press of Florida. Pg. 27.

⁸³ Friedman, M. D. 2015. "The Hurt Roman: Homoeroticism, Intimacy, and Fratriarchy in Ralph Fiennes's 'Coriolanus.'" *Literature/Film Quarterly* 43, no. 2: 86–103. Salisbury, MD: Salisbury University. Pg. 86.

It is noteworthy that images of writhing tentacles and slimy seaweed are mixed into the shots where Tommy is masturbating. Desire and sexuality seem to be tied to fear and the grotesque. Another example of this is during the final fight between Tom and Tommy. Tom “appears first as the mermaid, then as the god of the sea-Proteus...with large octopus tentacles writhing behind him”⁸⁴ (fig. 3). This cinematography furthers both the theme of homoeroticism that Eggers discussed as he described writing his script, as well as Eggers’ positioning of Tom as Proteus. Dennis P. Slattery (2020) views this moment when “[a] threshold has been crossed, one that separates consciousness from the unconscious so that all the figures and desires of the latter are unleashed.”⁸⁵ In this interpretation, the audience can see how a hidden desire may exist between Tom and Tommy, one that frightens and disgusts them. In a Jungian view of Tom and Tommy as two parts of one mind, this transformation may also represent a “crossing of the threshold” between the ego and the id.

As mentioned previously, Eggers discussed following Stevenson and Melville “into classical mythology.”⁸⁶ From classical mythology, Eggers also “started thinking about symbolist painting from the period...Sascha Schneider and John Delville who are doing mythic paintings in a homoerotic style become perfect candidates as imagery.”⁸⁷ One shot near the end of the film is a direct homage to one of Schneider’s paintings. After one of Tom and Tommy’s nights of heavy drinking, as Tommy stumbles confusedly around the island, Tom appears naked in front of him. Tom grabs Tommy’s shoulder and a bright light shines directly from Tom’s eyes into Tommy’s. This shot, as displayed in fig. 1, references Schneider’s painting titled “Hypnotism,” (displayed in fig. 2). Schneider’s paintings “captured...highly stylized male

⁸⁴ Slattery, D.P. 2020. “Film Review: The Lighthouse (2019).” *Psychological Perspectives* 63, no. 2: 310-314. Los Angeles, CA: C.G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles. Pg. 313.

⁸⁵ Ibid, pg. 313.

⁸⁶ Brock, J. & Eggers, R. 2019. “Screenwriters’ Lecture Series 2019: Robert Eggers.” [transcript]. BAFTA Media Center. Mayfair, London. <https://www.bafta.org/media-centre/transcripts/screenwriters-lecture-series-2019-robert-eggers>

⁸⁷ Ibid

figures, projecting not only a new image, but a brand of unabashed homoeroticism and desire into the public sphere.”⁸⁸ This homage highlights the homoerotic connection between Tom and Tommy.

The final shot of the film is a reference both to the general myth of Prometheus, as well as to a specific drawing by Delville. While many paintings of Prometheus usually show only one eagle eating Prometheus’ liver, Delville’s 1888 drawing shows a flock of black crows swarming a male figure within a desolate, rocky landscape. The final shot of the Lighthouse similarly shows a group of seagulls surrounding Tommy, his nude body splayed on the scraggly gray rocks of the island. This image further cements Eggers’ positioning of Tommy as Prometheus within the story. This reading also connects with Eliade’s view of light a symbol of enlightenment and creation, as Tommy’s fate is a direct result of him finally reaching the bright, beautiful lens within the lighthouse. He was shown to be in ecstatic pleasure as he touched the light for a moment, but he was then cast down the tower stairs. This interpretation of the light is perhaps the strongest rebuttal against an absurdist understanding of the film, as it implies Tommy fulfilled a sort of spiritual journey.

However, this image is one of many within the film, and is only part of the overall style of the film. While the symbol of the mermaid also suggests a supernatural element within the story, it remains unclear within the narrative whether it is metaphysically true within the world of the film. The previously mentioned dialogue supposes that the supernatural events are only happening within the men’s imaginations. Eggers’ assertion that he does not “have a message”⁸⁹ allows room for multiple interpretations. Katherine Connell critiques Eggers’ deliberate obfuscation, arguing that “formal peacocking sacrifices conceptual clarity, and The

⁸⁸ Brooks, K. 2013. “Artist Sascha Schneider Depicts Homoeroticism at the Turn of the 20th Century.” The Huffington Post. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/sascha-schneider_n_3956505

⁸⁹ Brock, J. & Eggers, R. 2019. “Screenwriters’ Lecture Series 2019: Robert Eggers.” [transcript]. BAFTA Media Center. Mayfair, London. <https://www.bafta.org/media-centre/transcripts/screenwriters-lecture-series-2019-robert-eggers>

Lighthouse contains many missed opportunities to make its visual phantasmagoria both coherent and meaningful.”⁹⁰ Though she criticizes Eggers’ lack of message, Connell does note that the soundtrack is “genuinely eerie,” saying it contains “crashing waves, thunder, and high-pitched strings.”⁹¹ It is clear that at least in terms of creating style to evoke a response in the audience, Eggers succeeds in using sound to unsettle viewers.

The black and white color scheme is another aspect of the film’s style that communicates meaning. In an interview with the Academy⁹², Eggers details how he created the specific black and white color tone of the film. “What colors do you extract to make your black-white image?...I was trying to find a filter that could just eliminate all the red light and as much of the green...Ultimately [we used] a custom filter that emulated...orthochromatic film. It just sees some blue and some green, and that’s it.” It is clear that much thought was put into creating a specific color scheme for the film, and the results merit an examination. Coates (2008) posited that within the medium of film, there is an established binary between “monochrome as male and ‘color’ as female,” with red in particular coded as feminine.⁹³ While Coates acknowledges that many films challenge this binary, this traditional coding aligns with the film’s exploration of toxic masculinity and homoeroticism, as Tom and Tommy exist in a world totally devoid of women and femininity.

Another interpretation of the film comes from Coates’ assertion that in the language of colors, monochrome is usually associated with death and desolation⁹⁴. Looking at *The Lighthouse* (2019) through this lens gives credence to one reviewer’s hypothesis that Tom and

⁹⁰ Connell, K. 2019. “Review: *The Lighthouse*.” *Cinéaste* 45, no. 1: 48-49. New York, NY: Cineaste Publishers, Inc. Pg 48.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, pg. 48.

⁹² “At the Academy: *The Lighthouse*.” 2019. The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts & Sciences. Hosted on Medium. <https://medium.com/@TheAcademy/at-the-academy-the-lighthouse-50185dbd496e>

⁹³ Coates, Paul. 2008. “On the Dialectics of Filmic Colors (in General) and Red (in Particular): ‘Three Colors: Red, Red Desert, Cries and Whispers’, and ‘The Double Life of Véronique.’” *Film Criticism* 32, no. 3: 2–23. Meadville, PA: Allegheny College. Pg. 3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, pg. 3.

Tommy are dead men stuck in purgatory⁹⁵, or that they are one man stuck in a cycle of torment. This reading aligns with the original myth of Sisyphus, as he is punished in the underworld with an arduous, monotonous task that repeats every day. Other elements of the film's style add to the hellish atmosphere of the world of the film, and suggest an element of unreality. Reviewer Anish Tamhaney writes that the "squarish [sic] 1.19:1 aspect ratio as well as a black-and-white lens...is obviously claustrophobic," creating a "deteriorating sense of personal space" which "[leaves] a viewer squeamish and discomfited."⁹⁶ In this way, we can see how particular elements of film's style deliberately create an atmosphere of discomfort and bleakness, implying that Tom/Tommy are not in the land of the living.

Eggers' work deliberately avoids explicit messaging in its symbols, both in his films' form and style. While some, like Connell, criticize this obfuscation as a lack of focus, the careful attention paid to the details of the film, like the direct homages to 19th century Romantic art, allows the audience to discover multiple interpretations within the world of the film. The phallic imagery relates both to the homoerotic undertones in the social dynamics between Tom and Tommy, and also to the allegory of Tommy as Prometheus. Other elements, like the film's soundscape, unsettle the audience and evoke a sense of danger and unreality. The 35-mm aspect ratio creates a deliberate sense of claustrophobia⁹⁷ that highlights the discomfort of the setting. All of these aspects of the film's style are part of Eggers' personal cinematic language, according to Metz's notion of film as language.⁹⁸ While Eggers may not be "saying" anything

⁹⁵ Newby, R. 2019. "'The Lighthouse,' 'The Witch,' and the Horror of Robert Eggers." *The Hollywood Reporter*. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/lighthouse-explained-how-it-connects-witch-1250507/>

⁹⁶ Tamhaney, A. 2019. "'The Lighthouse' is a Horror Fan's Paradise." *The Michigan Daily*. <https://www.michigandaily.com/arts/the-lighthouse-is-a-horror-fans-paradise/>

⁹⁷ Brock, J. & Eggers, R. 2019. "Screenwriters' Lecture Series 2019: Robert Eggers." [transcript]. BAFTA Media Center. Mayfair, London. <https://www.bafta.org/media-centre/transcripts/screenwriters-lecture-series-2019-robert-eggers>

⁹⁸ Kickasola, J. G. 2009. "Semiotics and Semiology." *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*. Pg. 457-469. Livingston, P. & Plantinga, C (editors). 1st ed. New York, NY: Routledge. Pg. 461.

directly in his cinematic language, his film style implies various complex ideas, many of which seem to parallel Camus' conception of the absurd.



fig. 1, still from The Lighthouse



fig. 2, still from The Lighthouse



fig. 3, still from The Lighthouse



fig. 4, still from The Lighthouse



fig. 5, still from The Lighthouse



fig.6, still from The Lighthouse



fig. 7, "Hypnotism," Sascha Schneider, 1888

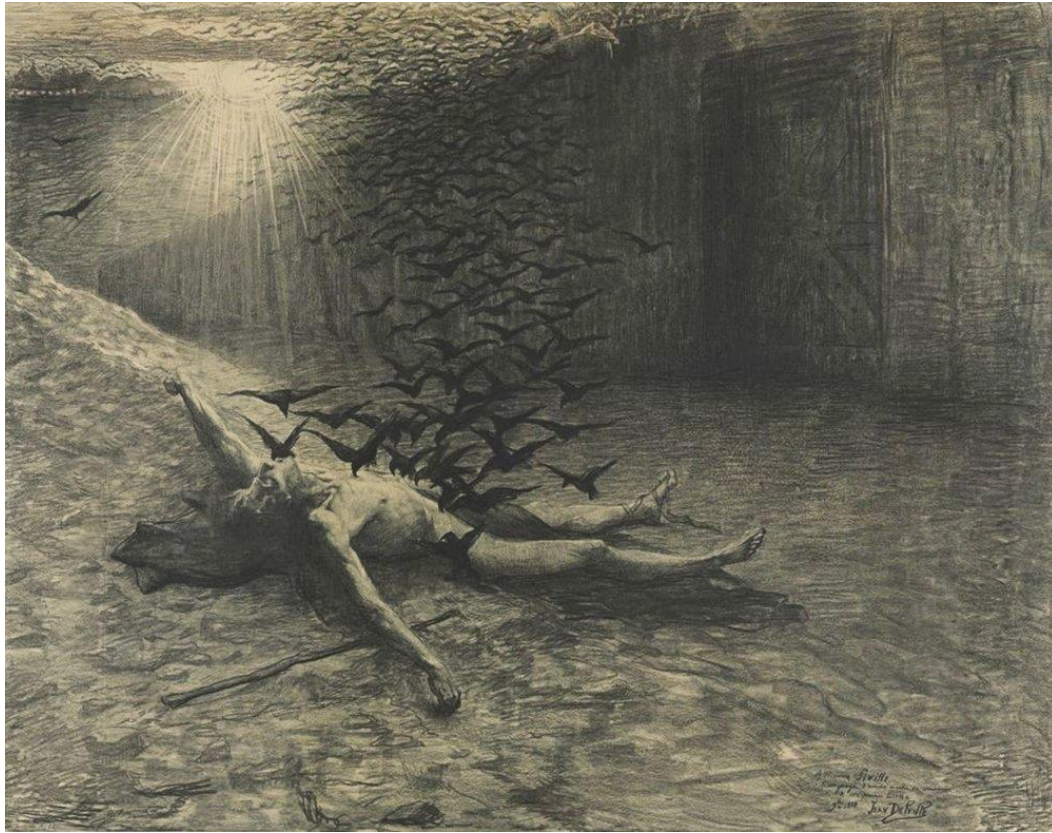


fig. 8, Untitled, Jean Deville, 1888



fig. 9, Final Shot of the Lighthouse (2019)

V. Conclusion

The Lighthouse (2019) presents many codes in various elements of both its form and style that may have multiple interpretations. Certain interviews with Robert Eggers reveal that he uses a multiplicity of sources as inspiration in order to incorporate specific details in his work. While these finely-tuned details create a particular atmosphere, Eggers has made it clear that his films do not have an overarching message. This allows audiences to read the codes in the movie in various ways, sometimes in ways that conflict. These interpretations have also surprised Eggers himself, who has said there are some themes that he did not intend to present in the film that do seem to appear there.⁹⁹ While some reviewers like Connell may criticize this type of filmmaking as incoherent and lacking meaning, there is no denying that films like *The Lighthouse* (2019) provoke discussion. This thesis exists in that open space of discussion, attempting to reveal a possible connection between the film and Albert Camus' conception of the absurd, as outlined in *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

Within the story, Tom and Tommy's difficult daily lives on the island appear to parallel Camus' description of modern human life as a struggle against the indifferent forces of the natural world. Their attempts to impose meaning on the senseless reality around them through superstition seems to align with Camus' idea of philosophical suicide as a futile effort to provide a metaphysical explanation for existence. Other elements of the film's style, such as the black and white filter, 1.19:1 aspect ratio, and discordant soundscape, all appear to suggest that Tom and Tommy are trapped in a kind of purgatory, just like Sisyphus. The homoerotic undertone of their relationship, as coded into the narrative and the imagery of the film, also seems to connect with Camus' critique of metaphysical morality. Rizzuto discusses how Camus' writing advances an idea of sexuality that is free from taboos, and The

⁹⁹ Brock, J. & Eggers, R. 2019. "Screenwriters' Lecture Series 2019: Robert Eggers." [transcript]. BAFTA Media Center. Mayfair, London. <https://www.bafta.org/media-centre/transcripts/screenwriters-lecture-series-2019-robert-eggers>

Lighthouse seems to show how repressing one's sexuality can lead to violence and discontentment.

While some aspects of the film's story and style do not align with Camus' conception of the absurd, such as the supernatural implication of Tom-as-Proteus, there seem to be more elements of the film that do support a connection with *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Additionally, Eggers' own perception of his work as inviting multiple interpretations leaves room for ostensibly contradictory themes. Audiences may therefore read absurd themes in various aspects of *The Lighthouse* (2019). This connection with existential philosophy cements the position of *The Lighthouse* (2019) among the group of "arthouse" horror movies that have been released in the past few years. While the film is certainly in the horror genre, due to its unsettling atmosphere and occasional jump scares, its complex ideas and evocative stylistic elements elevate it beyond a simple narrative to become something worthy of study. Furthermore, that *The Lighthouse* (2019) is only Eggers' second feature film shows how he is becoming one of the most distinct voices in independent cinema today.

As a horror fan, *The Lighthouse* (2019) is an exciting film in many different ways. On a basic level, it is enjoyable to watch for the first time, and remains enjoyable on further watches because there are many small details that a viewer can discover. On a deeper level, it is gratifying to watch because it incorporates complex philosophical ideas in its story and style. Camus' critique of metaphysical ideals compels us to examine our beliefs and question whether they really deserve our reverence. *The Lighthouse* (2019) similarly invites viewers to consider the power of superstition, and the dangers of sexual repression and toxic masculinity. These ideas are prevalent in our modern life, and they can cause real harm when followed unquestioningly. Films cannot totally determine one's thinking, but they may influence our perspective, and the absurdity in *The Lighthouse* (2019) encourages viewers to examine deep-

seated ideas in a different light. This light of recognition may not be a divine act of creation, but it does allow for the possibility of change.

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