

SUPERVISOR'S REVIEW OF ELISABETH COUGHLIN'S BACHELOR THESIS THE REPRESENTATION OF THE ABSURD IN THE LIGHTHOUSE (2019)

It is difficult for me to write this review because I know how personally hard a time the author experienced and how difficult it was for her to find time for concentrated study and writing. Her work stems from a personal passion for films, which should be appreciated. On the other hand, it seems that the passion - probably also due to her personal situation - could not always be transformed into a scholarly convincing, and well-argued text.

Elizabeth Coughlin came up with the idea that one could follow Eggers' film through the lens of Camus' idea of the absurd and that this text could serve as an explicative tool for the film. For this reason, her question is "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." (p. 4) Personally, neither after watching the film, nor after reading several versions of Elizabeth Coughlin's text, did I get the impression that there was any significant connection between Camus' work and the film. I found no clear allusions to the Sisyphian myth in the film, nor does the work provide enough convincing evidence. While the work on the lighthouse is physically exhausting, the meaning of the activity is not questioned in the film: on the contrary, it implicitly has a maritime or social meaning, a meaning for Tommy (both economic and personal) and, presumably, for Tom, who can be the master who can exercise his despotic power on the lighthouse. What, then, is the absurdity that one must accept in order to experience happiness without reference to metaphysical supports?

My understanding is that metaphysics and religion are instruments of power in the tradition of Nietzsche, which perhaps Camus also follows. And in this sense, Tom uses Tommy's superstitions, fantasies, desires, and fears to exercise and consolidate his power. The situation is reversed when Tommy breaks the statue that enslaves his mind. But this line of interpretation is not developed, and the emphasis is repetitively on vague references to the similarity of life on the lighthouse to the absurdity of the duties of Sisyphus. But there are allusions to a number of other ancient motifs in the film - notably the figure of Prometheus and Proteus - that are not fully developed in the interpretation. There may be different paths of interpretation, and Coughlin has chosen that one;

this is not necessarily wrong, but the argument is finally not entirely convincing. I could be wrong, but I can hardly imagine a serious analysis of the film without interpreting the similarities and allusions to Hermann Melville's *Moby Dick*. Although the book is mentioned in the bachelor thesis, it is not used further.

Overall, I think the author and the thesis would benefit from a reworking. Abandoning a hypothesis that doesn't prove out, or abandoning an interpretive perspective that doesn't fully prove out, should be part of the virtues of an undergraduate thesis. I have seen that Elizabeth Coughlin has made great progress from lay enthusiasm for the film to film analysis and I am sure she has the potential to write a brilliant and persuasively argued paper, if only she had more time and focus. A number of themes are laid out in interesting ways (homoeroticism, dual personalities, lighthouse as phallus), but overall the work remains only halfway there.

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