

On Derek Cianfrance
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Derek Cianfrance is an American film director I recommend you check out. I have seen three of his films in the last couple of weeks in the order of their release and have been enriched by the experience: “Blue Valentine” (2010); “The Place Beyond the Pines” (2013); and “The Light Between Oceans” (2016). Of the three, “The Light Between Oceans,” which I saw a couple nights ago, most engaged and touched me and stayed with me, and is the one I most recommend. You might want to see the three films in the order I did. Having seen the first two made “The Light Between Oceans” a richer experience for me, as I noted the continuity and progression of Cianfrance’s work.

Cianfrance wrote the screenplay for “The Light Between Oceans” basing it on the best selling book with the same title. I haven’t read the book, so I don’t know what departures he made from the book, I only know that I found the film artful, moving, and thought provoking. It’s set off the coast of western Australia shortly after World War I and centers on the moral choices of Tom, a personally damaged veteran of the war and now a lighthouse keeper (the light between oceans), and his wife Isabel, beautifully portrayed by Michael Fassbender and Alicia Vikander.

One choice in particular Tom makes forever diminishes Isabel; it dims if not extinguishes her light (to me, Isabel, so alive, so vibrant, is the light in the film’s title). When you see the film you’ll know what I’m referring to. As I look at it, Tom breaks his wedding vows (Isabel holds to hers) when keeping them should have been his first priority:

I, Thomas, take you Isabel, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; from this day forward until death do us part.

What Isabel goes through as a consequence of Tom's actions was heartbreaking for me. Tom is a good person, but his personal issues distort his priorities and obscure what is at stake for Isabel in what he does. Some decisions made in a moment are life altering and everlasting for the person we have pledged to have and to hold. We have to learn to keep vigilant to that reality and get ourselves healthy and clear enough to act with sound judgment when it is time to do so. I wish I had seen this film when I was young.