

An Alternative Auteurist Approach to Sidney Lumet's Films

In Search of a Transgressive Cinema

Ali Aydın

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Stockholms
universitet

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Abstract

This essay examines an alternative way of approaching *auteur* arguments with the help of the American director Sidney Lumet's personal view on the issue of *auteurism*, and in relation to that, my individual analyses of his three films from the 1970s, *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Network* and *Equus*, with references to the French philosopher Georges Bataille's observations on the instances of Evil in literature which is reified through transgressive deed. What this essay shows is the significance of Evil/transgression in cinema similar to Bataille's way of locating the notion at the center of literature as its essential quality. This Bataillean transgressive character is utilized as a support to find an alternative way of problematizing the notion of *auteur* and thus opens the doors to the facilities of a more essential cinema.

The three Lumet films mentioned above are shown in this essay as proper instances that embody such a transgressive character. As I argue in this essay, thanks to the fact that he somehow knew what he really wanted to adapt, Lumet's practice of adapting literary works does not interrupt his constant tendency of presenting a transgressive character in his films; and therefore I suggest that such an awareness is what makes those films his very own.

Keywords

Auteur theory, *auteurism*, Sidney Lumet, *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Network*, *Equus*, Georges Bataille, Evil, transgression, hypermorality, puerility, transgressive cinema.

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1. INTRODUCTION

All those inexhaustible debates over the issue of *auteurism* in cinema starts with this well-known argument: the scriptwriter's necessity of ceasing to exist and yielding for the director. This, for Alexander Astruc as well, was a precondition for his famous thesis suggesting that "the filmmaker/author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen."¹ This thesis has obtained many adherents starting with the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics who both aimed to nourish it with their original ideas and made their own films as practice of their arguments. But at the same time, taking one of those *Cahiers* authors and probably the most popular one, Jean-Luc Godard: where are we going to put his first feature, *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*, 1960), a canonical model for an *auteur* film based on the fragmentary writings of two other *Cahiers* authors, François Truffaut and Claude Chabrol? An *auteur* film that owes its being to several different creators. Or is the presence of the two other *Cahier* authors what explains the whole situation? What about another well-known Godard film, *Masculin féminin* (*Masculine Feminine: 15 Specific Events*, 1962) which is based on several stories of Guy de Maupassant? I am of course aware that Godard's adaptation of any literary source is still a Godard film since he does not really adapt the whole story but only what he conceives of it. Therefore, when one talks about a Godard film based on a literary source, the word "based" may need to be shown in a quotation mark. However, since literature and cinema are two different art forms, concerning a director who even sticks firmly to the literary source that he adapts for his/her film, there is, as it seems to me, always something s/he contributes to the story. Moreover, I believe that even just his/her mere interest in a particular story demonstrates an affinity between him/her and the story; and such an affinity – if there really is one – is what makes the story the director's very own.

My concern here is not those mainstream directors who make movies out of ordered scenarios but rather the ones who adapt literary sources gratuitously and with a reason of their own. Roland Barthes' famous thesis suggesting that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author"², can also be taken as a practical explanation of a director's primary relationship with a literary source first as an active reader and hence as an active adopter long before adapting it for his/her film. I am inclined to locate the American director Sidney Lumet (1924-2011), who is the case of this essay, into the second category (with a reason of his own

¹ Alexander Astruc, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo", in *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. Peter Graham with Ginette Vincendeau (London: BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 35.

² Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author", in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 148.

when adapting a particular literary source) in which one can find the Barthesian type of reader whose existence depends on his/her own activeness, not only in reading but also in appreciating the ones that intrigues him/her – which is what ensures his/her selectiveness at his/her choices of what literary sources s/he has to adapt. Through this Barthesian relationship between the director and the adapted text, in this manner, adopting predates adapting.

Lumet was a director who usually adapted literary sources for his films, and this alone has been enough reason for some critics – even before considering his *signature-less* style – to exclude his name from authorship. However, no matter that he never wrote his own scripts, it seems obvious to me that he demonstrated a particular interest of his own through his relationship with those literary sources in most of his films in various ways. I aim to demonstrate, in this essay, this very particular interest of Lumet with the help of the French philosopher Georges Bataille's (1897-1962) work *Literature and Evil* in which he suggests that literature and Evil are/should be inseparable.³ As it appears to me, the very particular issue that Lumet was always interested in and the way he handled it in his films may be revealed with an elaborate approach to the Bataillean notion of Evil.

1.1. The Purpose of the Essay and the Question at Issue

In this essay, I want to search for an aspect of Bataillean Evil in cinema through an analysis of Lumet's films and his personal approach to *auteur* theory. I believe that what distinguishes a film director from the rest is first of all hidden in his/her way of dealing with the strict rules of both mainstream cinema and the world itself instead of his/her tendency of repeating himself/herself for the sake of style. And once s/he goes against them, an evil deed in Bataillean terms is at work. In this case, my question is whether or not the Bataillean Evil, as an act of transgression, can provide first an alternative reading of Lumet's films, and hence second, a new perspective on the endless debates on *auteurism*.

However, my purpose in this essay is not something like providing an evidence for Lumet's authorship. For, such an aim would not only be utterly meaningless but also the uncertainty of the notion of *auteur* itself would leave such an attempt inconclusive. Plus, as I will demonstrate later, Lumet was a filmmaker who did not hide his low esteem for *auteur* arguments. My aim in this essay is instead to find an alternative way of bringing in another dimension to *auteur*

³ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, trans. Alastair Hamilton (London: Penguin Classics, 2012), 3.

theory by which one may find the very possibility of establishing, at some degree, a kind of pattern for, what I would call, a more essential cinema. And I want to do that with the help of Lumet – a director standing somewhere between the titles of being an *auteur* and a major director – and of Bataille – a philosopher who points out an essential literature through challenging moral laws by subverting the conventional definitions of Evil.

1.2. Material and Method

In this essay I use Bataille's theses suggested in his *Literature and Evil* as my reference point, that is, I use his ideas as a theoretical approach in order to guide as well as shape my analysis. But first of all I need to pave the way for this work through a discussion of *auteur* theory together with Lumet's contrasting ideas about it. And in order to problematize the notion of *auteur*, I will begin with André Bazin's understanding of the notion and then aim to search for its applicability on Lumet's way of practicing his work.

Lumet was a director who was abundantly nourished by literary sources and plays. As it seems to me, there was a considerable intimacy between Lumet and the literary sources that he adapted. In this context, Bazin's emphasis on the *auteur's* routine moral judgments in his essay "On the *politique des auteurs*"⁴ has a critical significance, because it helps me to explain how this intimacy was established between Lumet and the literary sources that he adapted for his works. In my argumentation I also use Lumet's book *Making Movies*.⁵ In this work Lumet not only shares his personal ideas and experiences about filmmaking but also drastically criticises the *auteur* theory. Accordingly, his ideas presented in this book are quite decisive for my discussion as I incorporate them with my own analysis.

In his book, Bataille, examining eight different authors' works, approaches the intimate relationship between Evil and literature. However, I intend to refer only to the chapters where he discusses Emily Brontë and Franz Kafka's works because of their relevance for the three Lumet films that I want to examine: *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974), *Network* (1976) and *Equus* (1977). I save the inquiry of the films for the last part since it would not be possible to locate them in a context without a discussion on what makes Lumet's films of his own and then Bataille's comprehension of Evil.

⁴ André Bazin, "On the *politique des auteurs*", in *Cahiers du Cinéma: Vol. 1, The 1950s: Neo-realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

⁵ Sidney Lumet, *Making Movies* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1995).

In my film analyses, I occasionally make use of some particular texts that deal with Lumet's films and also of the interviews made with him by different interviewers, but these analyses mostly depend on my own interpretations of the films. However, those interpretations get their sources out of an argumentation of Bataille's notion of Evil. Secondly, I should remark that my film analyses do not depend much on cinematic techniques such as camera angles and movements, lighting, visual effects or sound but mostly on inferences out of the dialogues/monologues and meanings of the characters' acts. That I do not entirely focus on cinematic techniques is not a random choice of me since Lumet himself rejects to be celebrated as an *auteur* with a signature. And when he says "signature", it is more likely an implication of something that can be extracted out of a visual style. In this manner, I examine his works without an aim of seeking a personal visual style.

1.3. Previous Research

Perhaps the most elaborated academic work on Lumet is Frank R. Cunningham's book titled *Sidney Lumet: Film and Literary Vision*.⁶ In this comprehensive work, Cunningham explores over thirty Lumet films at length and discusses their artistic importance. A specific chapter, in the book, named "A Major American Director" where he questions Lumet's authorship with references to the American film critics Andrew Sarris and Pauline Kael, in this essay, is shortly introduced and then problematized. Another source I use is Jay Boyer's work called *Sidney Lumet*.⁷ In this book, Boyer, dividing Lumet's career into three sections (his early, middle and later works), examines some of his most considerable films. Two of the films that I analyse are examined by him under the chapter "Lumet's Middle Work". I refer, in my film analyses, to only one of them, *Murder on the Orient Express*.

There are several other works in which Lumet is the subject of some sections such as David Desser and Lester D. Friedman's *American-Jewish Filmmakers: Traditions and Trends*⁸, Fredric Jameson's *Signatures of the Visible*⁹ and Phillip Lopate's *Totally, Tenderly, Tragically: Essays and Criticism from a Lifelong Love Affair with the Movies*¹⁰. In Desser and

⁶ Frank R. Cunningham, *Sidney Lumet: Film and Literary Vision* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, cop. 2001).

⁷ Jay Boyer, *Sidney Lumet* (New York: Twayne, cop. 1993).

⁸ David Desser and Lester D. Friedman, *American-Jewish Filmmakers: Traditions and Trends* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, cop. 1993).

⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁰ Phillip Lopate, *Totally, Tenderly, Tragically: Essays and Criticism from a Lifelong Love Affair with the Movies* (New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, cop. 1998).

Friedman's book, some of Lumet's films with Jewish themes are examined under the title of "Sidney Lumet: The Memory of Guilt". Jameson, on the other hand, examines, in a chapter, another Lumet film *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975) in a political context. And finally Lopate devotes a chapter named "Sidney Lumet, or the Necessity for Compromise" to Lumet in his book, in which, as in the first two, I could not find any material relevant enough for my thesis.

Concerning cinema's flirt with Evil, there is a seemingly comprehensive academic work, *Cinema and Evil: Moral Complexities and the "Dangerous" Film*, written by Dara Waldron.¹¹ Unfortunately, during my writing period I could not reach this work. If that had been the case, I believe that the content of the book, i.e. the discussions in it, might have been fruitful for my own analysis.

¹¹ Dara Waldron, *Cinema and Evil: Moral Complexities and the "Dangerous" Film* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2013).

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. *Auteur* Arguments and Sidney Lumet

To a certain extent at least, the *auteur* is a subject to himself; whatever the scenario, he always tells the same story, or, in case the word ‘story’ is confusing, let’s say he has the same attitude and passes the same moral judgments on the action and on the characters. Jacques Rivette has said that an *auteur* is someone who speaks in the first person. It’s a good definition; let’s adopt it.¹²

Let us be more cautious than André Bazin and hesitate for a second before adopting Rivette’s definition. First of all, can a film director speak in the first person? In his book *Making Movies*, Sidney Lumet, with a direct implication to one of the most distinctive features of cinema from other arts, seems to be negating such a possibility even though he was known for his full control over final cut.¹³ According to him, “[y]ou can always recognize a Matisse”, for instance, because “it’s the work of one person *working alone!*”¹⁴ One could then suggest that such a difference from other arts, i.e. the filmmaker’s necessity to cooperate with a great number of people, obviously prevents him/her from speaking in the first person. This is, I believe, the same for any director even whose authorship is “proved”. On the other hand, directors such as “Hitchcock, Renoir, Rossellini, Lang, Hawks and Nicholas Ray”, for instance, are all considered by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics “as almost infallible directors who could never make a bad film”¹⁵ – which in itself was enough to entitle them as *auteur*. And this alone, in my opinion, proves that a director’s cooperation in a crew does not necessarily connote his/her absence on the work. Take Hitchcock: He worked with many different screenwriters and his films are usually based on literary works; but still, he had the skill of transforming even the most indistinguishable materials into something highly recognizable. Bazin’s words “whatever the scenario” is a direct implication of this.

The suggestion of adopting Rivette’s statement is then not entirely a precarious one. Nevertheless, it is adoptable only in the case where the director “always tells the same story”, i.e. s/he “has the same attitude and passes the same moral judgments on the action and on the characters”. I say “only in the case...” because only such an aspect of *auteur* theory provides, as far as I am concerned, a common place wherein all types of arguments about it may coalesce.

¹² Bazin, 255.

¹³ Lumet, 44.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁵ Bazin, 248.

In his book *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, Peter Wollen adverts the two different *auteur* criticisms that thrived in time due to the absence of a well-organized original theory: The first is a subject-oriented one with an interest for motives about themes whereas the second is a formalist one with a focus on *mise-en-scène*. With the latter, Wollen simply implies the notion of *metteur-en-scène* – a contrast to the notion of *auteur*. On the one hand, an *auteur* film is not wholly about style and its meaning is built *a posteriori*, i.e. its semantic structure is a multidimensional one. On the other hand, *metteur-en-scène* is the one who is talented at handling *mise-en-scènes*¹⁶ which has less to do with semantic and does not require its director to be able to “speak in the first person”. However, antinomy between these two notions, *metteur-en-scène* and *auteur*, has to be avoided from an exaggeration, since such a distinction may not always be very clear. An *auteur* does not necessarily have to be deprived of being talented at dealing with *mise-en-scènes*, and parallel to this, meanings may be extracted out of the way the scenes are designed in a *metteur-en-scène* film.

Sidney Lumet is a director whose name is, more often than not, mentioned in *auteur/metteur-en-scène* arguments, without naming them so, by multiple critics in the USA. For many, he is a great director who is deprived of having the qualities of an *auteur*. Frank R. Cunningham is apparently one of them:

While working below the artistic level of Kurosawa or Bergman, who usually create the written bases for their films, Lumet is crucially important to an increasingly decadent culture as a major director who frequently transmutes literature, or infuses literary seriousness, into cinematic art.¹⁷

What Cunningham connotes with these words is quite obvious: first, comparing Sidney Lumet with the filmmakers whose *auteur* status are “proven”, he implies that Lumet is not one of them; and thereby, “degrades” him down to the status of a major director. Cunningham’s comparison of Sidney Lumet with Kurosawa and Bergman is grounded on the fact that Lumet, unlike those directors, was depended on literary sources. Accordingly, he was simply a *metteur-en-scène* – and a very talented one. Nevertheless, Cunningham is not the arch-critic of Lumet concerning his authorship. He just achieves such a conclusion through an examination of the two most influential American critics who questioned from distinctive perspectives the value of Lumet’s works with severe criticism: Andrew Sarris and Pauline Kael.

Sarris was the pioneer of the *auteur* theory of criticism in the USA and in his famous essay “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962” he aimed to ground *auteur* debates on a theoretical

¹⁶ Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing, 1998), 51.

¹⁷ Cunningham, 244.

level.¹⁸ What he aimed by establishing an *auteur* theory was an almost scientific classification of filmmakers and he plainly declares it in another article by which he defences his theory against severe critiques that he has received for his effort – especially the one from Kael. In his book *The American Cinema*, Sarris even classifies American directors and in this classification places Lumet in the seventh category named “Strained Seriousness”.¹⁹ Such a choice of Sarris is simply derived from the director’s deprivation from a “personal vision of the world” which is a major standard to be accepted in his first category “Pantheon Directors”.²⁰ According to Sarris, Lumet is a director who is adequately instrumental but sorely impersonal.²¹ This alone connotes again a categorization of Lumet as *metteur-en-scène* – a highly talented one at staging, for instance, the works that he has not written; but nothing beyond that.

On the other hand, as the most merciless opponent of Sarris’ *auteur* theory, Kael had her own motives to attack Lumet in regard to his work’s artistic value. She considered him, for instance, a “television-trained” employee who, for this reason, was “no dangerous artist” at all. And this of course meant whatever he makes would not worry producers.²² His films, for Kael, are too conventional, too familiar and thus presents nothing new.²³

Concerning Sarris’ attack on Lumet, it should be said again that Lumet himself, in every opportunity, declared his antipathy for *auteur* argument. Therefore, he expresses in an interview his discomfort for Sarris’ effort of categorizing directors on an *auteur/non-auteur* scale: “He would like to sit in a room, see forty pictures of which four are mine, and without knowing who directed them be able to say, ‘Those four were Lumet’s pictures.’”²⁴ Such an effort, according to him, is not only a vacuous one but also effects young filmmakers and even film critics unfavourably.²⁵ And furthermore the issue is, as Sarris was also well aware, that Lumet did not have that personal style which was essential for Sarris to predict “those four”. “I’m accused of not having a signature” repines Lumet as Cunningham quotes elsewhere: “I don’t want to have a signature.”²⁶

¹⁸ Andrew Sarris, “The Auteur Theory and Perils of Pauline”, *Film Quarterly* 16, No. 4 (summer, 1963): 28.

¹⁹ Andrew Sarris, *The American Directors: Directors and Directions, 1929-1968* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 189.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 198.

²² Pauline Kael, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, cop. 1968), 71.

²³ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁴ Don Shewey, “Sidney Lumet: Reluctant Auteur”, in *Sidney Lumet: Interviews*, ed. Joanna E. Rapf (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 119.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁶ Cunningham, 236.

The motivation of this essay, as already mentioned, is not something like providing an evidence to Lumet's authorship. Nobody would like to be forced to be something s/he does not appreciate. And, if Lumet says that he does not want to have a signature, it means that he did not want to make the same kind of films. He makes no secret of that: "I've tried to work" he writes in his book, "in as many genres as possible."²⁷ Therefore, he never wanted to adopt, for instance, a particular visual style, either. This is apparently why he enjoyed working with many different cinematographers. On the other hand, the *auteur* theory in general seems to be attaching much importance to the technical style of a particular director. It seems like reputation of a director can only be provided by a stable personal style and any director who violates it is excluded from authorship. In this manner, my concern is more likely to find an alternative way to make sure of reputation in cinema through providing the well-deserved prestige of a filmmaker who – like Lumet – underestimates the notion of *auteur* rather than forcing him/her to put the vesture of authorship on himself/herself. And this, too, may only be ensured by demonstrating an alternative way of the director's very ownership of his/her works.

In his book, Wollen suggests that Howard Hawks' films provides good material for *auteur* theory and one of the most important reasons for this, according to him, is that he worked in almost every genre: westerns, gangster films, war films, thrillers, science-fictions, musicals, comedies and even Biblical epic stories. Howbeit, according to Wollen, Hawks almost always had the same kind of thematic interest and repeating motives and events in those films.²⁸ In this manner, I believe that, similar to Wollen's choice of Hawks as a test case, Lumet's interest in diverse genres may also possess in itself a particular thematic interest, repeating motives and events; and such an interest of the director may be displayed when scrutinized enough. In this context, I suggest that Lumet, no matter what genre he worked in, was almost always interested in a particular theme by which he passed – referring back to Bazin again – "the same moral judgments on the action and on the characters." However, this is not to confirm, for instance, Sarris' second premise of the *auteur* theory, i.e. "the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value", since this premise depends upon a director's "certain recurrent characteristics of style", i.e. his/her signature, which discloses itself "through the visual treatment of material rather than through the literary content of material."²⁹ As it appears to me, in Lumet's case, since he already declares his interest in "as many genres as possible", this

²⁷ Lumet, 52.

²⁸ Wollen, 53.

²⁹ Andrew Sarris, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962", in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, cop. 1999), 562.

“personal” style reveals itself in his close attention for literary sources that deals with a particular theme in various ways rather than in “the visual treatment of material”.

It would be quite fair, I believe, to suggest that a society surrounded by a warped judicial system became, for instance, one of Lumet’s primary concerns in his works. In these stories, we usually find a protagonist who tries to rebel against the system, but Lumet’s protagonists usually leave the spectator uncertain about whether they act right or wrong and whether they are good or bad. A fine literary piece playing with such elements in one way or another, it appears to me, always attracted Lumet’s attention. Hence, from his first picture *12 Angry Men* (1957) till his last *Before the Devil Knows You’re Dead* (2007), with a very few exceptions, I believe, one can easily see this very tendency. However, rather than *what* he deals with in his works, what I am more interested in, in this essay, is *how* he deals with these particular elements. In an interview, he is asked what made him choose certain scripts among many others and his answer, in my opinion, is quite significant:

It all had to do with an emotional connection with me. When I read a script, I am a blank page. I let it wash over me; it’s a totally instinctive reaction. I don’t visualize it at all. I don’t start work on it at all. I just sit back and if at the end I feel connected to it, very often for reasons I don’t know at the time, then I am going to work on it.³⁰

An artist does not work with the principles of a scientist. “I feel connected to it, very often for reasons I don’t know at the time” is not a statement a scientist is supposed to make to inform people about a particular study of himself/herself; but an artist, on the other hand, is more than free to explain his/her interest in a particular subject with such terms. Lumet, in the same manner, already knew what he was mostly concerned with, but the origin of this concern does not have to be explained in a scientific manner. In this sense, his thematic interest which can be noticed by everyone on the very surface of his films would not be a sufficient help in finding Lumet’s special way of dealing with moral questions. For this reason, more than *what* he was interested in, then, *how* he dealt with the ethical issues that emerges out of his adaptations would be a better way to approach his films with an aim to unveil a latent common character – a precondition for the notion of *oeuvre* – by which one can demonstrate what makes his adapted films his very own.

Then the question is: what is this specific moral judgment, if any, that ensures a common feature in Lumet’s films and hence makes them his very own? First of all, one should be heedful when

³⁰ Henry Tischler, “Sidney Lumet: Making Movies”, in *Sidney Lumet: Interviews*, ed. Joanna E. Rapf (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 153-154.

using the word “moral”. When Bazin speaks of “the same moral judgments”, what he implies is not a particular godlike person’s imposing voice saying “this is how you must deal with this and that”. Rather, the implication by moral judgments is a specific way of dealing with the world. If Bazin said just “moral”, then it would be an implication to a prophetic discourse, since without “judgment”, a particular kind of doctrine would be at work. And a doctrine simply implies a belief system which is meant to be accepted as such. At this point, I want to suggest that Lumet’s moral judgments appearing in most of his films can be related to a kind of moral by which one can find the ways of refusing or even of violating any kind of moral doctrine or fundamental taboo rather than adopting it as granted. Such a moral in Lumet’s films, as it appears to me, reveals itself with the emergence of a transgressive attitude. And I think that such a transgressive attitude present in Lumet’s films bears a strong resemblance to Georges Bataille’s understanding of Evil presented in his work *Literature and Evil*.

2.2. Bataillean Hypermorality Revealed by Literature

In the preface for his *Literature and Evil*, Bataille points out that his purpose of inditing his work is “to extract the essence of literature.” Such an attempt, I believe, is quite noteworthy, since, as Bataille also immediately clarifies, literature has either to be the essence of everything or it has to be nothing.³¹ Such a dichotomy, i.e. to be essential or nothing, can obviously be seen as the very origin of *auteur* arguments in cinema as well. The general implication of *auteurist* approaches is simply the artistic value of cinema; and accordingly, if cinema does not connote anything artistic, then it has to be nothing. At this point, as something never so explicitly uttered in film criticism, what makes literature essential, as I will demonstrate below with references to Bataille’s arguments, is its conversance with Evil. Yet, it should be remarked already now that the Bataillean Evil is not a notion that lacks morality: “on the contrary, it demands a ‘hypermorality’.”³² What Bataille means by hypermorality will spontaneously be revealed with the references to Bataille’s individual analyses first on Brontë and then Kafka’s works.

³¹ Bataille, 3.

³² Ibid.

2.2.1. Emily Brontë's Thorough Transgression

In Bataille's notion of Evil, puerility plays a very significant role. Therefore, Brontë's only novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847), according to Bataille, is one of the greatest literary works written precisely by virtue of its ability of describing the nature of Good and Evil through the love affair between the main protagonists Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff that flames in their childhood. The whole novel, in Bataille's point of view, is woven with the tension arisen from a contradiction between the notions of childhood and adulthood. Bataille suggests that Brontë's novel is idiosyncratically close to Greek tragedies since, like them, it is about a tragic annulment of law. The author of Greek tragedy, as Bataille points out, always sympathised the characters who transgress the law and in this manner what he divulged with his tragedy was the excitement of such transgression. But transgression, in both cases, has a price. For this very reason, whoever violates the law by facing up the atonement ascends the grade of hypermorality, a notion with a connotation of something beyond morality.³³

It has already been said that Heathcliff and Catherine's attachment starts in their childhood. Heathcliff as a homeless boy is adopted and brought home by Mr. Earnshaw, Catherine's father, and that is how their friendship begins and endures as they grow up together at the same house. There is not so much to tell about their childhood except their day-to-day plays on the moors for hours on end. The breaking moment that puts an end to Heathcliff and Catherine's blissful days, on the other hand, is the day Mr. Earnshaw dies. After his father's death, the only son Hindley, who has all along been jealous of Heathcliff, comes back to *Wuthering Heights* and becomes the new master of the house. As a result of the new master's ancient grudge against him, Heathcliff is now excluded from the family as a true member but is allowed to live in the house only as a servant. This dramatic change of Heathcliff's position in the house does not foremost affect the relationship between him and Catherine. What disrupts the affair is Catherine's acquaintance with Edgar Linton, a real gentleman with eminence. Overhearing Catherine's conversation where she tells her servant Nelly that she has accepted Edgar's marriage proposal because of his social status even though her love for Heathcliff is much greater than for him, Heathcliff disappears with frustration and anger. Years later, when Edgar and Catherine are now married, he shows up again, this time as a well situated gentleman. Not going into much detail hereon, it would be enough to remark for now that all his existence aches

³³ Ibid., 14-15.

for revenge, for destroying the lives of everybody connected in one way or another to Catherine, including his own.

“Sadism” writes Bataille “is Evil.”³⁴ And that can to some extent be the explanation for Heathcliff’s desire for destroying the lives of others. But, how can a person first of all insanely ache for destroying the life of the one s/he desperately loves? Brontë’s motive in *Wuthering Heights*, according to Bataille, is to demonstrate “the most powerful means of exposing passion.”³⁵ And this powerful means is nothing else than Evil. At this point, what makes Heathcliff’s passion grow pernicious can be found, I think, in the tension between childhood and adulthood already mentioned above. Catherine’s motive to prefer Edgar as husband instead of Heathcliff is obviously based on her sudden interest in the artificiality of noble lifestyle. This very attribute of Catherine is also Heathcliff’s very motive for his unbridled desire of revenge. As Bataille puts it, “Catherine [...] denies her wild childhood: she allows herself to be seduced by the easy life personified by a young, rich and sensitive man.”³⁶ Here, Bataille considers childhood again as the counterpart of adulthood – which is the very implication of society as the realm of reason:

[S]ociety contrasts the free play of innocence with reason, reason based on the calculations of interest. Society is governed by its will to survive. It could not survive if these childish instincts, which bound the children in a feeling of complicity, were allowed to triumph. Social constraint would have required the young savages to give up their innocent sovereignty; it would have required them to comply with those reasonable adult conventions which are advantageous to the community.³⁷

Heathcliff’s revolt, in this manner, is against society which imposes the rational rules of adulthood to which he has lost his former puerile lover. He conflicts with the rational rules of society because he is very well aware that “the underlying principle of the real world is not really reason, but reason which has come to terms with that arbitrary element born of the violence and puerile instincts of the past.”³⁸ What Heathcliff aims to retain by being on the side of Evil is then – even at the expense of an absolute sorrow – nothing but this real world which is already irreversibly gone.

Bataille points out that it might seem contradictory that such a character wholly devoted to Evil is created by a young moral girl. And Catherine, too, like her creator, is a monument of moral.

³⁴ Ibid., 11.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 12.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 13.

“She is so moral” writes Bataille “that she dies of not being able to detach herself from the man she loved when she was a child.” However, no matter she is bitterly aware of Heathcliff’s wickedness, she loves him so much that she determinedly says “*I am Heathcliff.*” At this point, Bataille suggests that Evil “is not only the dream of the wicked: it is to some extent the dream of Good.”³⁹ Catherine, through an inner unification with Heathcliff; and Brontë herself, through an identification with her protagonist Catherine, become the dreamers of Evil. One could say, Heathcliff as a fictional person might seem extremely “artificial and contrived”, but as Bataille also emphasizes, he is created out of the dreams of Brontë rather than by her logic.⁴⁰ And to hold on to dreams rather than complying with the logical rules is the only way of achieving a hypermorality in Bataillean terms and hence of transgressing the fundamental taboos of society. This is the primary task of literature.

2.2.2. Franz Kafka’s Perfect Puerility

It would be quite fair to begin Bataille’s Kafka analysis with a question like this: what makes Kafka damnable by any ideology? According to Bataille, it is not totally irrelevant to read Kafka’s *The Castle* (1926) as the epic of the vagabond or of the agonized Jew, and *The Trial* (1925) as the epic of the culprit in the absurdity of bureaucratic age, but his works can nevertheless be grasped much better when approached in a broader context.⁴¹ In this sense, such a generality of Kafka’s works, I believe, is what allows them to be read in a more universal context. For this very reason, concerning his stories, the notion of “bureaucratic age”, for instance, may be not only an implication of a capitalist modern world but of Communism as well. However, especially his counter-revolutionary manner induces Bataille to ask whether or not Kafka should be burnt. This, of course, is a question emerging out of a Communist mentality precisely because Kafka’s already mentioned counter-revolutionary attitude. But we also know that Kafka himself decisively willed everything left behind him to be incinerated. What is even more curious, on the other hand, is Bataille’s seditious suggestion. According to him, “imaginary flames” may help us to conceive his works, since they are already “doomed to the flames: they are there, but they are there in order to disappear, as though they have already been annihilated.”⁴²

³⁹ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁴¹ Ibid., 141.

⁴² Ibid., 129.

But, what exactly makes Kafka doomed to the flames? Why are his books destined to be already-annihilated so desperately? First of all, it should be said that Bataille's consideration of Kafka as a true author is bound up with his childish manner.⁴³ At this point, we see Bataille locating once again the notion of childhood against adulthood. In the world of adulthood, the notions of "action" and "goal" are indispensable. On the other hand, it would be a futile struggle to look for such notions in the world of a child. A child does not act for a specific goal. Or actually s/he does not even act, but rather plays. And a child's game does include its own purpose in itself, not outside. The world we live in has simply underestimated this natural ability of the child. Therefore, one of the most salient weaknesses of humanity, according to Bataille, is that childhood has always been considered as a separate sphere. Due to such a weakness of humanity, the propositions such as "it's childish" and "it's not serious" happens to be equivalent.⁴⁴ In this sense, what Kafka's father and the people in his father's business world despised, by considering his interest in literature as snobbery⁴⁵, is nothing else than Kafka's playful and joyous world which, according to them, does not suit an adult.

Speaking in terms of adulthood, its aimlessness is what makes childhood thoroughly frivolous. In this context, literature for Kafka, as Bataille remarks, was something what the Promised Land was for Moses, since an expectance such as the Promised Land may come true as something that lasts "indefinitely without ever appearing to be more than an instant." In this sense, any endeavour is doomed to be pointless in the extent of time. "The aim is postponed in time and time is limited" writes Bataille: "this alone leads Kafka to regard the goal in itself as a lure."⁴⁶ And precisely because goal in itself is a lure, any kind of action that attaches more importance to "the future over the present moment", as the implication of the goal, is absurd, too.

As Bataille also emphasizes, Kafka wanted his father to be understanding about his childish passion for literature and in this manner he even wrote a letter to him which he did not send and which was in the first instance entitled *Attempts to Escape from the Paternal Sphere*. However, according to Bataille, he virtually never really attempted to escape it. What he really wanted was to live in that sphere "as an exile": "he wanted to remain" as he puts it, "within the puerility of a dream."⁴⁷ And this dream world of himself was accessible only by literature.

⁴³ Ibid., 133.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 131.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 134.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 130f.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 134.

Now, in the light of his unfortunate affair with the notions of endeavour and action, Kafka's puerile relationship with literature may hopefully be grasped better, and hence, the question asked above may be properly responded. Kafka's reluctance to escape the sphere of adulthood and his eagerness to create his own puerile world through writing, I believe, is what makes him doomed to the flames, since his simultaneous reluctance and eagerness in two different worlds dramatically abrogates each other. On the one hand, he finds himself in exile in this world; and on the other hand, he consolidates his alienation by the means of literature by which he can divulge his childish attitude out of which one can extract no attempt for remedy at all but only an explicit desire for death (consider, for instance, Gregor Samsa's tragic end in *The Metamorphosis* [1915]). "He wanted to be miserable" writes Bataille, "for his own satisfaction."⁴⁸ And this alone implies something very opposite of any ideology, say, such as Communism which would lose all its meaning without a concrete goal. Kafka, eliminating any kind of concrete endeavour in his both worlds (he rejected, for instance, to establish a family which in itself carries more than enough the concept of goal), does not offer any solution to the reader, a reader who would not have been the subject of his writings if his close friend Max Brod had obeyed his will and burned his writings. Even in his will, in this manner, one can find his childish engagement with writing which has no sense of teleological duty at all. Such an impossible relationship with the reader, as it appears to me, is what makes literature for Kafka something like Moses' expectance of the Promised Land.

At this point, one should also add that it is quite noteworthy that Bataille never utters the word "Evil" in the chapter devoted to Kafka. In fact, Kafka is the only author whose name is not mentioned together with Evil in Bataille's entire book. Yet his decisiveness for preserving his puerile manner in a world of adulthood is on its own an evil deed in Bataillean terms. And that is what makes him an unlovable subject to any ideology. In this sense, for anyone like Kafka who "gives a major sense to childishness" and who is engaged with writing "with the feeling that he is touching a sovereign value", as Bataille puts it, there is no room in, say, a Communist society.⁴⁹

As a final note, it should also be said that the word "Evil" is not the only one that Bataille never mentions in his Kafka analysis. Notions such as "moral" and "hypermorality" that he frequently mentions in his Brontë analysis, for example, are also never used. However, I believe that the absence of these notions in Kafka analysis is not based on a random attitude of the writer.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 137.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 142.

Rather, Bataille's preference of not mentioning them can somehow be read as a direct emphasis to Kafka's perfect puerility which is quite difficult to be found in any other literary personality and which in itself inherently contains the very elements of the Bataillean notion of hypermorality.

3. ANALYSIS

In this chapter, Lumet's three films *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Network* and *Equus* are examined in the light of Bataille's theses. In my film analyses, I aim to demonstrate an evil character similar to the one Bataille finds in Brontë and Kafka's works. As will be noticed, the films are examined in chronological order, but incidentally. However, my real concern in this order is to demonstrate film by film the gradually increasing appearance of the Bataillean Evil in each of them.

3.1. *Murder on the Orient Express*: Whodunit? Who Hasn't?

In his book *Making Movies*, *Murder on the Orient Express* is perhaps the most frequently mentioned one by Lumet among his films. In his words, what attracted him to adapt Agatha Christie's detective novel with the same name was above all her sense of nostalgia: "everything about her work represents a time and a place that I never knew existed, and indeed, I wonder if they ever did." On the other hand, the question "what happens next?" which, according to Lumet, represents "one of the delights that's carried over from childhood" appears to have attracted his attention to the story.⁵⁰ However, this marvellous story of Christie acquires its elegance from a quite different feature of its own that subverts a major element of *whodunit*. Lumet does not seem to have overlooked it: "I remember, when I first read the script, shrieking with joy when it was finally revealed that they *all* dun it."⁵¹ This exceptional final for a whodunit alone is of course a ground-breaking one, but what really concerns me in such an end is the unique solution found by Christie's famous protagonist Detective Hercule Poirot (Albert Finney).

In the prologue of the film, we are briefly informed about a terrible event that occurred five years earlier than the present moment of the narrative. Out of the selected newspaper clippings and laconically animated flashback scenes, we get to know that a child named Daisy who belonged to the wealthy Armstrong family had been kidnapped and found in the end slain even though her family was ready to pay the ransom. Later on in the narrative we also get to know that the mourning mother Sonia Armstrong died together with her stillborn child. Before long, the father Colonel Hamish Armstrong, who could not bear his grief also died. And the last

⁵⁰ Lumet, 10f.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

victim was a maid who succumbs to the false accusations against her in the kidnapping and therefore committed suicide.

After this three-minute summary of what happened back then, we find ourselves in Istanbul where all our protagonists' journey on the Orient Express begins. The significance of the tragedy of the Armstrong family for the narrative, on the other hand, emerges only when a murder is committed on the train and hence Detective Poirot, who happens to be on the train with an awkward coincidence, naturally starts to interrogate all the suspects. He soon realizes with his well-known alertness that every single person in the car hides a secret in their statements. As the identity of the man who got murdered in his compartment comes into the open (he was the man known as Cassetti who was responsible for the kidnapping of Armstrongs' baby and who somehow wriggled out of the authorities), Poirot finally finds out that everyone in the car is equally guilty of the crime, since each of them is in one way or another connected to the Armstrongs. The whole journey, as he discovers, is arranged for a revenge which is accomplished by twelve knife wounds by twelve different avengers.

As Jay Boyer also remarks, once he solves the mystery of the murder, Poirot is not anymore the same Poirot who always acts with his steadfast logic: "What has been for Poirot an intellectual exercise, now becomes a matter for metaphysicians" writes Boyer, and asks: "In which alternative does the greater good rest?"⁵² Should he tell the authorities the truth when they all return to the civilisation; or just consider the justice, which is left incomplete by the authorities, is now fulfilled by a group of aggrieved people and thence give the authorities the false version – that Cassetti, who himself was a mafia kingpin, has been assassinated by another mafia?

Poirot, reconsidering the consequences in a long sequence, opts for the second alternative – the false version. At this point, no need to say that such a choice alone functions as an obvious assistance to an evil plan. However, it is also obvious that this evil plan is a harvest of a justice system whose function is far from being satisfactory. I am well aware that neither Poirot's nor the Armstrong avengers' action possesses one of the main characteristics of the Greek tragedy in which one can find the elements of atonement, but still, they contain another important quality of it: the transgression of law. Such an impulse for transgression is what gives Poirot's logical side a hard time because anything rational in his head has its instructions to be followed. But when it comes to making a decision on what those instructions led him to, he finds himself in an odd position in which he may have to brush away the concluding instruction, i.e. to deliver

⁵² Boyer, 40.

the guilty parties into the hands of the authorities. In this sense, what is ensured by Poirot's transgressive attitude is nothing but the justice that is ignored by the very means of law. In order to ensure the justice, he carries out an individual act by which he resembles, with some aspects, Brontë's Heathcliff who also violated the strict rules of society with his insurgent attitude. Poirot realizes "the greater good" does not rest in Good. To deliver the guilty parties into the hands of the authorities is no "good" to anyone. Therefore, he gives up his steadfast logic, which had always helped him to solve mysteries, and chooses the side of violence in this special case, because he, too, like Heathcliff, understands that the main principle of the world is far from being reason. And to tolerate the puerile instincts of the past revealed in an evil act, i.e. the act of murder, becomes the only way to subvert the rational principles of society. Poirot's introductory words in a long sequence where he explains for everyone in the car the solution of the Cassetti murder seems to be supporting such a subversive deed already at the beginning: "Ladies and gentlemen" says Poirot, "you are all aware that a repulsive murderer has himself been repulsively and perhaps *deservedly* murdered." Afterwards, we watch the murder scene as Poirot himself reconstructs it. Cunningham's description of the very same scene through the phrases such as "Shakespearean" and "an ambiance of fantastic lyricism and sophistication"⁵³ demonstrates also the director's eagerness to praise this evil deed, the transgression.

In the end we see Poirot saying "now I must go and wrestle with my report to the police and with my conscience", since he knows very well what he opposes is Good itself. But as we already know, "Evil is not only the dream of the wicked. It is to some extent the dream of Good" as well. Therefore, as Poirot, before leaving the car, takes a look at the avengers' peaceful toasting ceremony by which the victory is celebrated, we can see on his face that his "conscience" already there loses ground. The tranquil victorious score of the sequence also seems to be justifying the unnecessary of such a conscience.

3.2. *Network*: A Requiem for the Individual

The last words we hear in *Network* in a voice-over (Lee Richardson) are: "This was the story of Howard Beale, the first known instance of a man who was killed because he had lousy ratings." But, it would also be quite fair to suggest that *Network* is the story of the American society formed by the television industry. "TV is used" declares Lumet in an interview, "as a

⁵³ Cunningham, 255.

babysitter and a pacifier”, and this is what the picture is about.⁵⁴ In this context, besides its powerful references to the Bataillean Evil, such a damning view from the director who worked within television for many years in his career and who was accused by Kael precisely for being an ordinary television-trained employee is another reason for me to choose it as one of the films to be examined.

Howard Beale (Peter Finch) is a network anchorman of UBS (Union Broadcasting System) who is well-aware that he has run out of steam on TV because of his dramatically declining ratings. At the very beginning, we see him drunk with his friend from the company, Max Schumacher (William Holden), jokingly telling him that he’s going to kill himself on the air. Keeping the joke up, Max confirms him by saying that it would hit the jackpot: “Great Sunday night show for the whole family.” Subsequently we see Beale anchoring his 7.00 news where he “all of a sudden” tells his suicide plan for the viewers. “I’m gonna blow my brains out right on this program” he announces, “a week from today.” After immediately being fired due to his unacceptable behaviour, he asks his friend Max to be on the air for one last time to have the opportunity of quitting the business dignified by apologizing the viewers. Being accepted, once he gets on the air, he bursts out this time that life is “bullshit”. Noticing rapidly growing ratings, UBS however decides to go on with Beale in his new format. Next time, he makes his viewers open their windows and shout out “I’m as mad as hell, and I’m not going to take this anymore!”

On the other side, we have Diana Christensen (Faye Dunaway), the head of company’s programming department, who is after a hit program. While having a contract for a docudrama with a radical communist-terrorist group who call themselves Ecumenical Liberation Army and who film themselves as they rob banks all over the nation, Beale’s recent success arouses her appetite. With the result of her initiative, Beale starts to host a new program called *The Howard Beale Show* in which he is introduced as “the mad prophet”. This program becomes a real hit and the company increases its profit by it. Everything goes perfectly fine until our “mad prophet” washes the company’s dirty linen in public and wants his viewers to voice their dissatisfactions by sending telegrams to the White House. Getting furious, the chairman Arthur Jensen (Ned Beatty) calls him to his office and convinces him through his godlike sermon to give up his messianic messages. In his next program, he just talks about the decline of the notions such as democracy, freedom and individualism. “This is” he says desperately, “no longer a nation of independent individuals.” But, since the viewers this time finds his discourse

⁵⁴ David Sterritt, “Lumet: Endlessly Energetic”, in *Sidney Lumet: Interviews*, ed. Joanna E. Rapf (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 71.

depressing, the ratings go down and the executives decides to get rid of him. In the end, we see Beale getting assassinated on the air by Ecumenical Liberation Army, hired by the executives of the company since Jensen would not have him fired.

With a closer look, one could find some substantial similarities between Kafka and Beale's situations. Let us remember Bataille's suggestion that Kafka is doomed to the flames since his writings functioned as a consolidation of his estrangement in this world. He knew that he was in exile but any kind of attempt to overcome it was a lure. Precisely for this reason, he, without doubt, enjoyed Gregor Samsa's tragic fate in his *The Metamorphosis*. Bataille's rhetorical question should be quoted here: "Is there anything unexpected in this complicity between death and pleasure?"⁵⁵ In the very same manner, Kafka would also have loved to kill Beale in the end, had he written a story like *Network*. However, I should also add that Beale is not wholly a Kafkaesque character but he becomes one, in my opinion, after having Jensen's godlike sermon.

Now, what really changes with Beale after having Jensen's sermon? First of all, his announcement of suicide on TV, to me, is only the result of Beale's ongoing joke by which he aims to throw his anger off. But things fall into disorder when he is unable to slow down and burst out on the air that life is "bullshit". Once he finds himself approved, he now keeps going with his populist sermons. The viewers hear what they want to hear and they feel now safely motivated for certain goals such as shouting their anger from their windows and writing to the White House. The company, on the other hand, is contented, too. Even the fact that Beale tells his viewers to turn their TVs off and instead go back to reality does not bother the executives. As a matter of fact, what really bothers them is nothing else than low ratings. And what leads Beale to low ratings is his "nihilistic" attitude by which he implies that their action (sending telegrams to the White House, for instance) does not mean anything at all precisely because democracy and freedom are nothing but empty concepts with no space for the individual in them. Since they now feel being deprived of the man telling them what to do and how to do, the viewers little by little abandon him, and the executers decide immediately to have him killed.

The way Beale is murdered, I believe, is also very significant. Remembering Bataille's instant comparison of Kafka's attitude with revolutionary ideologies, it is not very surprising that the executives of the company hire the radical terrorist group Ecumenical Liberation Army to have him shot. What they want to replace *The Howard Beale Show* with, on the other hand, is the

⁵⁵ Bataille, 139.

second season of the docudrama called *The Mao Tse-Tung Hour* in which they show “authentic film footage of [Ecumenical Liberation Army’s] revolutionary activities”, as Christensen puts it in a scene. In this manner, similar to the Communists’ desire to burn Kafka as the monument of individual aimlessness and hence of Evil, once Beale is transformed into a Kafkaesque character, he becomes “doomed to the flames” as well. Ironically enough, the revolutionary is the one that fulfills this sacred duty in the film, i.e. to burn the counter-revolutionary, the Evil.

3.3. *Equus*: Certified for Killing the Puerile

If such a thing as a psycho-analysis of today’s prototypical culture were possible; if the absolute predominance of the economy did not beggar all attempts at explaining conditions by the psychic life of their victims; and if the psycho-analysts had not long sworn allegiance to those conditions – such an investigation would need to show sickness proper to the time to consist precisely in normality.⁵⁶

These are Adorno’s introductory words to his 36th section named “The Health unto Death” in his *Minima Moralia*. Such a title and what follows it, as far as I am concerned, designates somehow the very leitmotif of *Equus*. In this film, we witness the story of psychiatrist Martin Dysart (Richard Burton) who finds himself at some point as the manufacturer of “normality”, of the sickness of our time, in Adornian terms – which can also be read as Adorno’s way of comprehending “the world of adulthood”. Such a discovery of Dr. Dysart may of course be considered as an awakening, albeit an agonizing one.

Everything begins with Dysart’s reluctant encounter with a quite humble 17-year-old boy named Alan Strang (Peter Firth) who has blinded six horses with a spike at an extreme moment. Interviewing Alan for a while in his provincial clinic and also Alan’s parents and his employer, Dysart eventually accomplishes to get into the boy’s inwardness. Admitting that his crime was brutal, he also finds his “religious” relationship with horses admirable. Alan’s routine secret ecstatic rides with the horses that he grooms and his almost sexual embracement with them at those trysts amazes Dysart.

“The normal is the indispensable, murderous God of health” says Dysart in one of those scenes where he addresses the spectator through his monologues: “And I am his priest.” What he is aware of is that his help for young people becomes in fact nothing but their “deaths”. This constant awareness of himself becomes even stronger once he meets Alan. In one of the most

⁵⁶ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 58.

remarkable scenes, Dysart, addressing again the spectator, tells about a dream he recently had. In this dream, he finds himself as a chief priest in Homeric Greece in a specific scene in which he executes an immolation of a huge herd of children. It is obvious to him that he is a real professional at slicing them with his knife. “It’s this unique talent for carving that’s got me where I am” he says: “The only thing is, unknown to the others, I’m beginning to feel distinctly nauseous. And with each victim, it’s getting worse.” What is even more remarkable with this scene is that we see, at regular intervals, some sections from Dysart’s own daily morning routine while he is talking to us: shaving, getting ready for work, having breakfast and then finally getting into his car. But we also see Dysart’s wife who is lying wide-awake in their bed with an unhappy look on her face as he is taking his pyjamas off before putting his clothes on. Dysart, comparing his seemingly boring and meaningless life with Alan’s passionate attachment to “something”, simply envies the boy. But he also pities him because he himself, due to his “oath of allegiance” to his profession, will have to kill this passion by taking his pain away.

Can’t we suggest in that case that Alan’s passion bears some sharp resemblances to that of Brontë’s Heathcliff and Kafka’s very self? Heathcliff was the victim of the adults’ rational world to which he had irreversibly lost his puerile felicity. His rebellion, in this manner, was against society who bereaved his puerility which is in nature the very sphere of innocence. Not being allowed to remain in this sphere, his response became the voice of the genuine Evil: *You do not let me stay a child? Then I become much wickeder than you can ever imagine!* Such a puerile aspect was even more perfectly present in Kafka’s world. His immediate relationship with literature did not take its source from an effort for an external goal. His love for literature, as the saying goes, was without expectance. Therefore, he engaged in writing as a child engages in a play – but a passionate play in all its seriousness. Alan, too, like Heathcliff and Kafka, is not interested in the world of adulthood and therefore plays passionately his own game in his own world.

In a scene where he explains the reasons for his affection for horses, Alan says: “They could stamp us into bits anytime they wanted, and they don’t. They just let themselves be turned on a string all day, absolutely humble. They give us all their strength, and we just give them stripes for it.” Alan knows whatever horses do for people is without expectance. And his attachment to them is just the same. If his is a religion, then it in no way resembles the Abrahamic religions from which people seek, for instance, for a fine afterlife. Such teleological discourses are based only on adults’ constant esteem “for the future over the present”. Even in their religions, one can find their eager attachment to the notion of goal. They are attached to it insomuch as any

action for them would lose its meaning without a goal. And someone who wants to live in the present time, i.e. without a goal, should be cured.

In the long final sequence, where Alan starts to tell Dr. Dysart in detail about what happened the night he blinded the horses, we hear from him while watching in flashbacks that Jill (Jenny Agutter), the girl who found the job for him in the stables, asks him to take her to a porn movie. There in the movie theater, they run into Alan's father who forcefully takes them out. But when they are out, Alan realizes that his father lies to him about his presence in there. "I came here tonight to see the manager" says the father timidly in order to justify his excuse. Realizing that his father was scared of him at that moment since his little secret was revealed, Alan wakes to the fact that every man on the street is the same as his father. "They're all people with pricks" but they pretend as if they are not. The world of adulthood, he realizes, is full of lies, all fake and dishonest. They make the rules and watch their children whether or not they obey them, but they themselves become the ones ridiculously ending up with breaking those rules. What is even more ridiculous, recalling Bataille's argument, is that it becomes the puerile that should not be taken seriously in this world.

However, one should not expect a revolutionary final from this story, either. Dr. Dysart, obeying his oath, apparently accomplishes to "cure" Alan in the end and thus reintegrates him into the society as a "normal" person. He in epitome "slices" him as he does to the children in his dream. And that is what kills him inside, too. By obeying his oath to allegiance in his profession, he now is on the side of Good; but since this side requires a neglect of the notion of hypermorality, the side he is forced to pick does not feel right at all. Now he can sit in his dark room with a certificate in his hand for killing the puerile and listen to the unbearable "evil" voice of Equus, the God of horses: "Why me? Why me? First, account for me!" But, how can he? Is there any space left for an individual act in our society? Haven't we already seen what happened to Mr. Beale in *Network*?

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

All the three Lumet films I have chosen for my analysis, albeit made in the same short period of time, i.e. between 1974 and 1977, are, in style and genre, distinctly different from each other. Two of them are based on literary sources which belongs to two quite different authors: *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) is a detective novel written by one of the most celebrated writers of the genre, Agatha Christie; and *Equus* (1973) is a famous play, a psychological drama, written by Peter Shaffer who also created the screenplay for the film. The screenplay of *Network*, a satirical drama, on the other hand, is originally written by Paddy Chayefsky, only one of many scriptwriters Lumet worked with in his entire career. However, as I have demonstrated in this paper, all of these films disclose, in one way or another, the same moral argumentative character of the director and this is what makes all these films Lumet's own. In this context, what I aimed to do was to "decipher" Lumet's personal moral judgments by applying the Bataillean notion of hypermorality. Such a notion becomes comprehensible only by a transgressive deed as demonstrated in Bataille's individual Brontë and Kafka analyses. What these authors accomplished through their writings, according to Bataille, was an obvious violation of moral laws, and such an infringement of them is what makes literature dangerous.⁵⁷ In other words, it is dangerous, because it does not replace what it destroys with something new. However, it is this dangerousness that makes literature essential, because its task is far from designing new moral laws.

Such a dangerous character of literature which reveals itself in the form of hypermorality, as already demonstrated, is eminently present in Lumet's films, too. Due to the length of this essay, I could examine only three films of Lumet from his *oeuvre* with an aim to find the Bataillean hypermorality which emerges out of Evil; and in order to prove the intensity of such a tendency in Lumet's *oeuvre*, I have specifically approached three films made temporally close to each other; but I believe that one could observe this very tendency of Lumet, more or less, in his many other films as well. On the other hand, Lumet's embracement of the notion of hypermorality as the very implication of dangerousness, then, may make Kael's consideration of Lumet as a "television-trained employee who is no dangerous artist at all" highly questionable.

In film criticism, there has been infinitely various ways of approaching the issue of *auteurism*. One of these approaches, one could say, is to emphasize the director's distinguishing tendency

⁵⁷ Bataille, 17.

to a particular thematic interest which, as I have already suggested, is also possessed by Lumet in most of his films. What this *auteurist* approach lacks, on the other hand, is the director's very obsession of representing the means of a transgression in his films – whatever the theme may be. There might be many different ways of exposing this tendency such as Hitchcock's routine practices in which the spectator is belied about what is going to happen next on the screen. This Hitchcockian practice has of course some transgressive character, but a transgressive character which challenges *only* the customary ways of filmmaking and watching-habits. (This does not of course mean that one might never find the very same character in the stories he tells.) Lumet, on the other hand, through his personal choices of literary sources to adapt, exposed repeatedly his very interest in transgression at the very heart of his narratives. His thematic interest, in other words, was embedded in transgression itself. Parallel to what Bataille embraces as essential literature, in this sense, Lumet seems to have established an essential cinema through his recurrent interest in transgression. And at this point, it is important to specify that such a recurrent interest in transgression could not have been identified by the means of Sarris' *auteur* theory since the primary endeavour of this theory, as Lumet himself criticizes him, was only an unnecessary classification of directors as per their personal signatures. Seeking for the elements of transgression in cinema, on the other hand, would not require such a classification. On the contrary, transgression as an important element would only guide film criticism to come closer to an essential cinema without an endeavour of accomplishing the ways of recognizing specific directors out of their works, since it is an important quality dealing with something beyond style.

Lumet's transgressive attitude evinces itself *not only* in his tendency of sympathizing wicked protagonists with their subversive deeds, but also in his comprehension of filmmaking. As I have already mentioned, he was tired of arrogant *auteurist* chattering with a purpose of categorizing directors on an *auteur/non-auteur* scale. He had a puerile relationship with cinema by which he enjoyed, for instance, trying different genres. His motive for adapting *Murder on the Orient Express*, as I have already mentioned, was also based on his puerile relationship with cinema. And such a relationship is what led him to name his book "*Making Movies* as opposed to *Making Films*."⁵⁸ Here, this intentional choice of word represents his unpretentiousness concerning the artistic value of cinema and also stresses its entertaining side, but by no means implies that it is not an art. On the contrary, it is this unpretentiousness that dismisses the

⁵⁸ Tischler, 152.

artificial seriousness imposing itself on cinema. Lumet, through a simple modest word, demonstrates his transgressive attitude towards the general understanding of *film as art* as well.

I am well-aware that literature and cinema are two very different art forms; and precisely for this reason, one may oppose the very endeavour of taking Bataille's struggle of determining an essential literature as a reference point for establishing an alternative way of seeking for the notion of *auteur* and thus a more essential cinema. However, notions such as transgression and Evil are in no way possessions of literature or any specific art form. I have demonstrated three different ways of transgression in three different films and such a difference between them alone proves the universality of the notions. Besides, Bataille's theses are by no means based upon stylistic or formal details of the works he examines and precisely for this reason they are exceptionally free to go beyond the sphere of literature, just as they do not have to remain in the sphere of Lumet's films. Secondly, I have only presented Bataille's Brontë and Kafka analyses due to their ostensible relevance with Lumet's films examined in this paper, but his individual analyses of other writers such as Charles Baudelaire, Jules Michelet, William Blake, Marquis de Sade, Marcel Proust and Jean Genet also reveal their transgressive attitudes in their special manner. Bataille's list could definitely go further. Similarly, such a transgressive attitude is certainly present in films of many other directors as well, in one way or another, whatever the genre and the theme.

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Stockholm University
SE-106 91 Stockholm
Phone: 08 – 16 20 00
www.su.se



Stockholms
universitet