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Functions of Death and Sacrifice in the Artistic Event:

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Functions of Death and Sacrifice in the *Artistic Event*: Forming a Theory of Art in E. Sabato's *The Tunnel* (1948), D. Hatzēs' "The killing of Elizabeth Molnar" (1976) and D. Aronofsky's *mother!* (2017)

No artist has ethical sympathies.
An ethical sympathy in an artist
is an unpardonable mannerism of style.
[…] The artist can express everything.
Oscar Wilde

1. The Basis for the Analysis

1.1. Introductory remarks about the Art Phenomenon

"From all the mysteries of the world, creation was by far the most mysterious; thus, all nations and religions without exception linked the process of creation with the essence of the divine" (Zweig 15). This was the opening statement of Stefan Zweig during his lecture in the USA in 1938 and it underlines a major question in Aesthetics concerning the nature of the Art Phenomenon. Besides artistic views during the age of late capitalism,[1] art remains a vital component of the society, because Art is created *(re)presentationally*[2] to the sensical world. Nevertheless, the key-question remains: how an artwork is created? Undoubtedly, this is not a new question in the history of Art, but a rather old. If we accept Beardsley's (22-24) premise that the Ancient Greeks were the first who understood the essence of *pulchrum*, the question derives from Homer,[3] where we can

[1] I use the term in accordance with F. Jameson (1991).

[2] I use though the term as it is defined by Angelatos (*Literature* 23-56) and Marin, having in mind the approach of Stuart Hall (1-45). But Jürgen Habermas' approach could be considered an important threshold to this paper, because it brings to view the link between the public sphere and the representation. He identifies "representational" culture as corresponding to the feudal stage of development according to Marxist theory, arguing that the coming of the capitalist stage of development marked the appearance of *Öffentlichkeit* ('the public sphere').

[3] Homer *Iliad* Σ 541-549 and *Odyssey* τ 221-231; the reader ought to focus on the phrases "τὸ δὴ περὶ θαῦμα τέτυκτο" and "τὸ δὲ θαυμάζεσκον ἅπαντες" from the works cited above respectively. Extensively:

Iliad Σ 541-549:
ἐν δ' ἐτίθει νειὸν μαλακὴν πίειραν ἄρουραν
εὐρεῖαν τρίπολον· πολλοὶ δ' ἀροτῆρες ἐν αὐτῇ
ζεύγεα δινεύοντες ἐλάστρεον ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα.
οἳ δ' ὁπότε στρέψαντες ἱκοίατο τέλσον ἀρούρης,
τοῖσι δ' ἔπειτ' ἐν χερσὶ δέπας μελιηδέος οἴνου
δόσκεν ἀνὴρ ἐπιών· τοὶ δὲ στρέψασκον ἀν' ὄγμους,
ἱέμενοι νειοῖο βαθείης τέλσον ἱκέσθαι.
ἣ δὲ μελαίνετ' ὄπισθεν, ἀρηρομένῃ δὲ ἐώκει,
χρυσείη περ ἐοῦσα· τὸ δὴ περὶ θαῦμα τέτυκτο.

Odyssey τ 221-231
ὦ γύναι, ἀργαλέον τόσσον χρόνον ἀμφὶς ἑόντα
εἰπέμεν· ἤδη γάρ οἱ ἐεικοστὸν ἔτος ἐστὶν
ἐξ οὗ κεῖθεν ἔβη καὶ ἐμῆς ἀπελήλυθε πάτρης·

find the earliest aesthetic judgment, and the Platonic dialogues (*Republic* and *Hippias Major*) and remains quite turbulent till this day.

Evidently, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the idea of the *event* at the moment of artistic creation in the works cited, i.e., the novel *The Tunel* (1948; 2012) of E. Sabato, the short story "The Killing of Elizabeth Molnar" in *Spoudes* (1976) by D. Hatzis and the film *mother!* (2017) by D. Aronofsky. For this purpose, this approach begins with the remarks of S. Zweig on the *mystery of artistic creation*, in order to make prominent a few key-questions that enable each subject to approach artistic creation. Then, I attempt to define the *artistic event*, before examining it on the works cited.

1.2. Preliminary questions to the Art Phenomenon

Stefan Zweig's approach towards the creation of artworks is intricately linked to the primordial concept of the creation of the world. He states that this act violates the law of nature, because it has created an essence that defies the ephemeral (19). Nonetheless, at the same time he suggests the proper way of proceeding artworks: with humility accepting that Art is obscure and incomprehensible and simultaneously with vigilance trying to understand how the artwork was created (21-22). As it concerns the conception of an artwork, he suggests that it is an internal procedure, and we can only articulate a set of fundamental laws that underpin the manifestations of such phenomena (22-23). Nevertheless, he believes that we cannot share that moment with the artist, so what remains to us is trying to relive that moment; we could say that this proposes a process of *(re)presentation* (Angelatos *Literature* 32-35).

The intriguing part of Zweig's speech concerns his idealistic approach towards the moment of artistic creation. By presenting a narrative of a criminal who claims that he was a different person, out of his mind, at the moment of the crime, Zweig creates an analogy to the artistic creation. For him, the artist is not 'present' at that moment, i.e., he is in a state of ecstasy, using the ancient Greek term (ἔκστασις > ἐξίστημι) that literally means 'out of a place' (29). The *non-presence* of the artist is perceived as a condition of distancing or disassociation of the subject from the artistic act, so that the artist is not "in the room, where he works, in the four walls" (30); the space of creation is considered therefore as a 'hyperspace' and the artist is *absens in praesentia*.

Nevertheless, Zweig remarks that for an artwork to be perceived by us, it needs to disassociate itself from the soul of the creator and be surrounded by an earthly form, to transit through a material means (36). That leads him to deduce that the act of artistic creation is but an act of translation that permits it to pass through the spiritual world to the world of senses (37). So, for the author the origin of an artwork is the mix of the conscious and unconscious, the inebriation

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αὐτὰρ τοι ἐρέω ὥς μοι ἰνδάλλεται ἦτορ.
χλαῖναν πορφυρέην οὔλην ἔχε δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς,
διπλῆν· αὐτάρ οἱ περόνη χρυσοῖο τέτυκτο
αὐλοῖσιν διδύμοισι· πάροιθε δὲ δαίδαλον ἦεν·
ἐν προτέροισι πόδεσσι κύων ἔχε ποικίλον ἔλλόν,
ἀσπαίροντα λάων· τὸ δὲ θαυμάζεσκον ἅπαντες,
ὡς οἱ χρύσεοι ἐόντες ὁ μὲν λάε νεβρὸν ἀπάγχων,
αὐτὰρ ὁ ἐκφυγέειν μεμαὼς ἴσπαιρε πόδεσσι.

and sobriety (55). Consequently, it becomes evident that his approach is idealistic and derives from the ideal of the artist of the Romantic era in Europe, a key element for understanding Zweig's thought and his novels (Turner 1979 and Botstein 1982). This understanding enables us to comprehend more effectively the appearance of the essence of a deity in the conscientious process of the moment of artistic creation, a notion that usually (re)appears until nowadays.

2. Theoretical Assumptions

2.1. Understanding event as a concept

Besides Zweig's efforts to portray a fraction of the moment of artistic creation, he unintentionally lapses the crucial understanding of the *event* of that kind of creation. To understand that concept,[4] we need to present the primordial proposition with a deductive reasoning: 'the artist creates an artwork in a given timeframe'; so, the event is $[(\mathrm{X}_n, t)P]$ where X is the artist, P is the artwork in creation, and t is the moment of creation. To that effect, I accept the premise of Jaegwon Kim (9) about the two principles of a unique event:

a. the *existence condition*: [X, P, t] exists if and only an object X exemplifies the n-adic P at the time t;
b. the *identity condition*: [X, P, t] is [γ, t', Q] if and only if $\mathrm{X} = \gamma, t = t', P = Q$;

This constructs a frame in which we can understand the *artistic event* firstly as a series of requirements that only when these are met, a unique event exists and also the identity of this "monadic events". For that, Kim provides a useful example: "Thus, Socrates' drinking hemlock at this t is the same event as Xantippe's husband's drinking hemlock at t, and this liquid's turning blue at t is the same event as its turning the color of the sky at t" (9). According to Kim's theory we can approach this proposition proportionally; of that we can deduce that the *artistic event* is unique unless another event presents the same variables in that particular order. To that extent, this notion can be correlated with the *aura* as it was introduced by W. Benjamin, for whom:

> Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was a subject throughout the time of its existence. (220)

Evidently, the uniqueness of the artistic event[5] suggested by Zweig is reinforced by the Kim's theory about events in general. Even though there has been criticism about Kim's views on events (Lombard and Bennett), they provide a theoretical narrative that can be implemented to the artistic phenomenon and that is able at the same time to differentiate the *event* from the *fact* (Wilson). In addition, an auxiliary component of events is the consideration of these with the con-

[4] For a brief mapping on the subject, see Lombard (235-240).
[5] Due to the specific focus of this paper, an in length the subject of the uniqueness of artworks in general is not possible. For that purpose, I propose the articles of R. Meager (1958-1959) and P.N. Humble (1983) and the chapter "1. Feeling and Nature: 1a. Originality and Genius" (Harrison 11-100).

cept of *spatio-temporal location* (Quine), because space is also compounded in the formula given above.

2.2. Introducing metamateriality

Materiality is an aesthetic concept, whose source can be tracked down to formalistic approaches of the absolute visual effectiveness. This uncompromising definition of the concept restricts immensely the potential of an artwork. This notion has already been highlighted by Alois Riegl[6] in his work *Stilfragen. Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* [= Problems of Style: Foundations for a history of ornament[7]] published in 1893. He speaks of a "materialistic interpretation of the origin of art that developed in the 1860s" (Harrison et al. 731) and he attributes this prevailing movement to Gottfried Semper, even though he clearly states that the absolute relationship between material and art (as cause and effect) was a result of Semper's followers.

To express the immense restrictions imposed by this idea he creates an analogy between the pairs: 'materialistic interpretation to the origin of art' and 'Darwinism to an intellectual discipline'. However, he reaches a point where he describes a condition that 'technique' (in adherence to materiality) was used interchangeably with 'art', because the term became popular among the academic experts; in his own words "only naive talked about 'art' [whereas] experts spoke in terms of 'technique'" (Harrison et al. 732). In reality, he locates a typical phenomenon concerning the academic *discourse* in accordance with the Foucauldian[8] theory: means of power impose the usage of a specific term acting like experts, implementing their authority on cognitive thinking.[9] He points out that the "creative artistic impulse {was replaced by} an essentially mechanical and materialist drive to imitate" (Harrison et al. 732). By this argument he suggests that complete devotion to materialistic origins of Art would eliminate the actual impulse to create in favor of mere imitation. So, having that in mind one would argue: if two subjects create the same artwork using the exact same materials, would these artworks be the same?

Evidently, understanding materiality only literarily would pose problems, since contradictory elements can be found in the creation of an artwork and in its interpretative. To that extent, I argue that we can deduce a different aspect of materiality; one that does not concern the actual materials of the artworks but their usage as means of building a story, because its functions could in fact distinguish one artwork from another that would be physically the same. For that, I suggest the conceptual idea of a *materiality of second degree*, the *metamateriality*, providing an additional definition of the term materiality. The intrinsic materiality that concerns a natural state of the components of an artwork, such as the book itself, alongside the manifestations of materiality within the artwork, such as the materiality of words of a literary text, constitute a physical condition of

[6] For an extensive approach to Riegl's views, see Olin (39-66).
[7] In English: Riegl (1893/1993). All references to this book come from Harrison et al. (730-732).
[8] For more information on Foucault's definition of *discourse* and the systems of thought, see the *Archeology of Knowledge* (1969), *The Order of Things* (1970), *The Order of Discourse* (1971), and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1978-1979). For the extent on educational circumstances, see Niesche and Gowlett (2019), Burton (1988) and Doherty (2007).
[9] For better understanding the subject in discourse I suggest the chapter "The Free Field" (pp. 38-53) in Foucault (2003).

materiality in-text or otherwise, the first degree. Besides that, I see a second degree emerging that concerns the condition, when for the purpose of creating art in-text the materials used are non-materials by the literal meaning of the term. Thus, my focus turns not to the materialistic discourse of literature or film but to the functions of materiality related to the theme of each artwork, or in simple words, how can people be used as materials (in an extended view of the term) so that Art will be created.

To understand this better, we could draw (from the beginning) the thematic line that links all three works cited. They form a pattern of interesting connections as follow: the novel *The Tunnel* discusses the case of a painter; the short story "The killing of Elizabeth Molnar" the case of a sculpturer; and the film *mother!* the case of an author. This demonstrates the bizarre link between these works; none of them uses the theme of its real material. Therefore, these conflicting essences between actual material and conceptual material in artworks that thematize it, force us (in my point of view) to observe materiality in a unique way, in the two close but distinctive degrees aforementioned. In summation, the first degree is the actual material of the works: either a book or a film. But it can also concern the artistic approach that each work presents, i.e., painting, sculpture, and writing, because this approach has to do with the intrinsically materiality. Thus, the second degree, the *metamateriality* that concerns us can be found in all three works: death and/or sacrifice of (literary) a human being for the sake or because of Art.

3. Analysis

3.1. Understanding death and sacrifice

In order to expose the degrees prominently, we can also correlate them with the narrative levels.[10] The first degree is the *out of the text*, meaning that it describes the actual act of writing or directing (and the different media where they manifest) corresponding to the intrinsically materiality. The second, which is the focus of this paper, is the *extradiegetic*; it describes the lives (or instances of them) of the artists. In this level we can locate the thematization of death and/or sacrifice for creating Art. Nevertheless, a third level can be pointed out: the *intradiegetic*, a metadiegetic narrative by which the artworks of the literary artists take form, e.g., the description of the painting 'Maternidad' [= maternity] in the novel.

The main similarity between these works is death. In each one of them people die (voluntarily or not) and the killer or the abettor is an artist and to an extent he/she is somehow in a condition of creating art. It may not strike as weird to an experienced reader that the main subject is death, since in classic literature and especially at the Victorian era the prose focused on descriptions of dying people. One might even argue that death as a theme of a literary work succumbs to banality. If anything, no one can deny that death, as one of the greatest mysteries, continues to fascinate artists of all times. Indicative is *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, a novella by Leo Tolstoy, where a dying man is trying to grasp the idea of death that is inevitably coming, until the moment he finally wins over him and dies (91).

[10] For the narrative levels see Genette (228-229), Bal (35) and Rimmon-Kenan (92-93).

Nevertheless, in the 20th century death has become a theme that must not be named (Gorer 50-51). Literature and by extension other artistic forms do not approach death anymore as Tolstoy did, or in general as in the 19th century. However, there has been an increase in screen violence in television programs or in the cinema (e.g., thrillers and horror films).[11] So, even though violence is more accessible, the actual portrayal of the procedure of dying is difficult to be found and in the rare occasions that it is, the narrative (literary or cinematographic) focuses on the result; "death has become more and more 'unmentionable' *as a natural process*" (Gorer 50). For that Norbert Elias argus that "the social problem of death is especially difficult to solve because the living find it hard to identify with the dying" (3).

Moreover, the artworks that interest us in this paper thematize death as a key component of the narration that is either stated from the very first words (*The Tunnel*) or it emerges at the climax ("The killing of Elizabeth Molnar" and *mother!*). Even though death is the major similarity of these three, its nature is completely different. In the novel we can argue that the killing is a crime of passion, a manslaughter[12] at the heat of the passion that Castel feels about María ("I was desperately in love": 57) after the revelations he has come to in chapter XXXII (121-124). His solitude drives him to a condition where he cannot think clearly any longer. Both the realization that, despite María's marriage to a blind man, she continues their relationship and the unfulfilled romantic anticipations at the train station (109) make him believe that María is a whore who was mocking him. More specifically, the sequence whilst he is lurking in the trees (chapter XXXVII: 135-137) and his intrusion to María's bedroom and her subsequent killing (chapter XXXVIII: 137-139), underlines that state of mind of Castel, which is textually evident by the quick chapter changes.

In the short story it is not that easy to assess the mental state of Elizabeth Molnar, the sculpturer who kills her husband, because of the *narrative voice*, in accordance with G. Genette's term (244-245). In more detail, the narrator of the story is a man who first of all is an admirer of Molnar's work. So, the narration of the killing is given by his point of view: "She killed him. Six months after our meeting. With a single, well-balanced blow to the forehead with a hammer"[13] (Hatzēs 52). She was tested by psychiatrists upon request of the jury since her lawyer invoked schizophrenia as the underlying cause. Nonetheless, the jury denied the version of temporary insanity and sentenced her for her "abominable"

[11] For the proliferation of screen violence see Meyer (1972), Slocum (2000), Schultz and Huet (2001), Coulthard (2009). For an extensive approach see Grønstad (2008).

[12] The major difference between *murder* and *manslaughter* as legal terms is the intention to commit the act or not. *Murder* usually describes a homicide, i.e., the illegal killing of another person with malice aforethought, where malice is the knowledge and intention or desire to kill. It can either be categorized as *first* (premeditated killing) or *second-degree murder* (intentional killing without any premeditation). On the contrary, *manslaughter* is a form of homicide in which the person committing the act has no malice or murder intent (not intentional killing or killing as a result of specific circumstances under which any reasonable individual would be compromised mentally or emotionally to a point of killing). It is often recognized as *voluntary* (intentional but unpremeditated: a result of disturbed state of mind in a specific moment at the heat of the passion, a crime of passion) and involuntary due to recklessness or negligent act. It is said that this distinction was firstly defined by Draco in Ancient Athens at the 7th century. For more information see Andrewes (1970: 370-371), MacDowell (1963), Stroud (1968).

[13] The Greek texts are translated to English by the author unless it is stated otherwise.

(54) crime. Given all that, we can presume that her act was premeditated and thus it can be described as a murder.

Finally, the film introduces an entirely different function of death; death comes as a sacrifice in a twisted ritual. In the film, firstly the newborn baby and then its mother are sacrificially killed; the first death is caused by the growing mass of admirers of the man, who is a poet, and the second, that of the mother, comes by her own hand as an inevitable ending to the suffering of having to witness the sacrifice of her own child, and, thus, she sets herself and the house on fire. In general, sacrifice is an intricate subject in Art because it is thematically connected to religion. For that, sacrificial practices can be found in most ancient civilizations, from Ancient Greeks[14] to Jews[15] and Aztecs,[16] but mostly in correlation with religious practices.

Nevertheless, in Western civilization traces of a genealogy of sacrifice can be found "in the increasing interiorization, spiritualization, and dialecticization of sacrifice, understood as a necessary passage thought suffering and/or death on the way to a supreme moment of transcendental truth" (Kirwan 216). The problem emerges when we consider the person that is sacrificed. In many societies of the past, people would reach this transcendental state via sacrificing an innocent victim, a *scapegoat* (Janowitz 15). Here, I must mention that this theoretical field can be approached with a more broaden view, arguing that the role of a scapegoat[17] can be found in each society besides religious correlation, as Girard has shown in the example of Oedipus (*Violence and the Sacred* 68).

In the film *mother!* we do not find a scapegoat with the literal meaning of the term. But its thematic allegory[18] provides us with the scapegoat. In more detail, even though the film seems somewhat weird, its plot line is quite banal, because it is yet another biblical allegory. The director's interest in these allegories had appeared before (*Noah*, 2014) but they never concerned the essence of creation. At this point, the film is undoubtedly an allegory of major themes from the *Old* and *New Testament*, as the director has affirmed it[19] or others[20] or the critiques[21] that the director has proclaimed that they have approached the film correctly.[22]

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[14] For sacrifice in Ancient Greece see Hughes D.D. (1991).
[15] For sacrifice in Hebrew culture see Sales (1957).
[16] For sacrifice in Aztecs see Clendinnen (1995) and Carrasco (2000).
[17] For an extensive discussion see Girard (1982/1986).
[18] Among the approach of the elements that can be extrapolated by this narrative and the biblical allegory, perhaps a larger comment concerning the allegory itself it should have been made. For that, I believe that the most influential book about allegory, which has provoked a large number of scholars, is F. Jameson's *Allegory and Ideology*.
[19] See Dockterman (2017) and Thompson (2017).
[20] See White (2017).
[21] See Wilkinson (2017).
[22] At this moment, a crucial acknowledgement is of the essence. There is no doubt that each artist's beliefs on his/her artwork is important, must be mentioned, and studied closely. Inspite of this, I believe that an artist is not capable of grasping completely the entirety of the impact of his product in the sense neither of how the public will respond to it nor of the amplitude of its importance. Thus, artists' beliefs can be helpful, but they do not comprise the absolute truth concerning each artwork produced. So, interpretation is needed. Understandably, this notion derives from *German Idealism* and especially Kant's account of *genius* (Bowie 344) as long as from Schelling correlation of art and unconscious (Bowie 343-344) in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*.

But even though the connotations of the allegory are easy to perceive, understanding *metamateriality* is not. That is why more explanation is needed. The main characters are a female ("She") and her husband, a male ("He"). These two live in a house in the middle of field surrounded by trees, which creates the impression of an Edenic scenery (*Gen*. 2: 8-9). The film starts with the burn-out remains of the house, which is transformed to its previous glory, when He places a crystal object on a pedestal in his study. Then, She wakes up and starts looking for him, while fantasizes that the house has a heartbeat. She represents a transcendent form of a divine feminine and He is a creator, a poet by profession. We can assume that Her husband is God himself, the one who creates. This notion is supported by Aronofsky's comments about the lowercase 'm' in the title; he specifies that all characters' identification in the closing credits is written with a lowercase, except of one: only for Him an uppercase is used, alluding to the common practice of post Christian era to use an uppercase letter when referring to God (White).

The plot thickens when a Man arrives and the following day his wife ("Woman") arrives as well. A critical point in the Bible allegory[23] is the moment when She notices a scar on the Man's back, just before the Woman arrived. This could be regarded as a reference to Adam's rib being taken by God to create the woman (*Gen*. 2: 21-23). Also, the breaking of the crystal by the couple (Man and Woman), recognized now as Adam and Eve, and the subsequent prohibition by Him to enter his study remind us of the expulsion from the Garden of Even (*Gen*. 3: 6-24). After this event, the two sons of Man and Woman arrive as well and after a dispute they struggle resulting to the Older Brother killing the Younger. The killing of the Younger Brother and the marking of the Older by Him, represent the story of Cain and Abel (*Gen*. 4: 7-16). Of course, the timing is not a mere progressive narration; the two Brothers arrive at the house after the scene of their parents' sexual intercourse, which marks their birth. The mourning over the death of the Younger son is celebrated by a large number of relatives (alluding to the descendants of Adam and Eve who populated the Earth after the death of Abel) who arrive at the Edenic house. Their negligence and disrespect climaxes when they partially flood the house, signifying yet another allegorical point: the Great Flood (*Gen*. 7: 11 – 8: 14).

I ought to mark here that time progression is not correspondent to the natural time, that of human senses, because all these happen progressively without severe time lapses (*ellipsis* according to Genette's theory). This is in coherence with the Biblical narrated time: an extensive use of "and" that contributes to the creation of rhythm in the text (Angelatos *Inconspicuous Poem* 197-205) and "organizes the facts of a narrative as a series of successive points in time, connecting them to one another like the links of a chain and […] creating the sense of continuity and cohesion in biblical narrative" (Bar-Efrat 166). I must clarify though that a narratological approach of time in the *Old Testament* is not easy, due to the problematic that tenses in Hebrew pose: whereas they express time[24]

[23] All references to the Bible are made according to the *New International Version* (NIV) published by Biblica in 1984. I used the revision of 2011 accessible on https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/new-international-version-niv-bible/.

[24] The Hebrew language can only express three tenses: simple present, simple past and simple future. Denoting progressives and perfect tenses other linguistic means need to be used. For the

or *aspects* (Bar-Efrat 144). In spite of these, my point is not to discuss the narrative time in the Bible, but to give prominence to the link between the film's narrative time to the narrative time in the Bible, i.e., to the film with the Bible.

The last part of the film, which constitutes the summa epitasis of the film and portrays the double sacrifice, begins when She gets pregnant. This realization brings Him inspiration and thus he drafts a poem and shows it to Her. When She reads it, She has a vision of a rejuvenated world and admits that it is beautiful. Progressively, an increasing number of fans of the poet arrive, and He gets flattered by the adulation of the crowds who are there to worship him. He even expresses his joy saying: "They love it. They understand all of it, but it affects everyone in a different way. It is remarkable" (*mother!*). Not long after, the poet's publicist arrives as well, leading a large group of reporters to transmit the event. Her name is Herald, an intricate and ironic name, because it simultaneously alludes to being the herald of God, charged with the transmission of His word, or in this instance, the poem of Him. This permits us to conceive the poem as the word of God and since she wants to frame the original text and memorize it, we can safely suppose that she is a manifestation of Moses, and the poem represents the ten commandments (*Exod*. 20: 1-17). Another interesting point is the fight between the editor and the publicist that can be seen as the battle of the archangels, a scene resembling *Revelation* (12: 7-9). There is also a man, a zealot as the end credits inform us, who baptizes people, such as John the Baptist did in the *New Testament* (*Matt*. 3: 1-17; *Mark* 1: 4-11; *Luke* 3: 2-22; *John* 1: 19-34).

Since then, the situation has derailed and the crowd that has gathered in the house commits all kind of crimes (a.k.a. sins) in His name. The on-screen description is rather vivid portraying the mass of believers who (in their mind) are trying to help by doing whatever they want, without paying any attention to Her. This gives us a second degree of the allegory which relates to the biblical reading. For that, the wife of Him, the poet, is in fact Mother Earth[25] (Thompson; Dockterman), who provides a living space, and hence the house's heartbeat, because the house is a residential manifestation of Her, a topological expression of Her ontology. This gives us the impression that the constant endeavors of the poet's followers is to do to the house what they think is right (e.g., painting it) but without respecting the wishes of Her. This alludes us to understanding these as people, who presumably act for the planet Earth but in the end, they hurt her. The interesting part is that the well-known biblical story is presented not from the perspective of the chosen people (as it is in the gospels) but from the perspective of Mother Earth (Jarrard) and that is the reason that the cinematographic focus is on Her. Obviously, this allegory opens the academic spectrum of approaches to *ecocriticism*[26] too, but I will not elaborate further on that since it is not my focus here.

What is of interest in the last part of the film is the scene of the infant, which constitutes the ultimate climax of the film. According to the biblical allego-

Biblical Hebrew see Christo H.J. van der Merwe et al. (67-72), whereas for modern Hebrew see Glinert (33-40).

[25] For this conception's link to *ecocriticism* and femininity see Plumwood (1993).

[26] Literary theorists using the terms of "*growth*, *energy*, *balance* and *imbalance*, *symbiosis* and *mutuality*, *sustainable* and *unsustainable* uses of energy and resources" (Barry 254) could help in approaching the film in multiple ways, in accordance with the preliminary message that the director wanted to portray (Dockterman). For *ecocriticism* see Barry (239-261) Bate (1991, 2000), Buell (1995), Egan (2006), Garrard (2004), Kroeber (1994) and Soper (1995).

ry, the newborn is the Messiah (*Matt*. 1: 18-25; *Luke* 2: 1-21), Jesus Christ, who according to the Christian doctrine came in flesh and blood to assume all the sins of mankind and complete the divine dispensation. Then, by necessity the infant has to be sacrificed, as Jesus (Sales 114-117) did on the cross (*Matt*. 27: 32-56; *Mark* 15: 21-41; *Luke* 23: 26-49; *John* 19: 16-37). Therefore, I can now suggest that for the Christians Jesus is the scapegoat, the innocent who will bear all the sins and die for them (*1 Cor.* 15: 3), even though he is without sins (*Rom*. 3: 10). His parallel in the film is the infant, a being who has just been born and has no sins. Thus, the subsequent mutilation and devour by the mass of followers represent the holy communion, the *eucharist*, which is the body and blood of Jesus;[27] this is especially evident in the rituals where they drink wine and eat bread as a symbol of the blood and the flesh.

In conclusion, I have shown sufficiently (in my point of view at least) the thematization of death in the works of interest in this paper. Besides, the focus remains on the method of portraying death in these works. An inevitable end of life is not presented in that way (even if it does not come naturally but because of other's actions: either killing or sacrifice), i.e., not as a common condition but in an unfamiliar and strange way, as a form of *defamiliarization* (*ostranenie*[28] or *unheimlich*[29]). This uncanny method is the stimulus of my approach, the interpretation of death and sacrifice differently that its lexical meaning indicates.

3.2. Conceptualizing the Theory of Art via metamateriality

One might argue that in the short story and in the film the *metamateriality* is or becomes obvious in one way or another. However, Sabato's novel defines an intricate path, which should be followed in order to conceive the *metamateriality*. Firstly, I must clarify, that the story of *The Tunnel* is developed in a *metadiegetic* level, because the main hero, Castel, as a *homodiegetic narrator*, recounts what happened from the day he met María, to the murder and his subsequent incarceration. The novel describes his obsession with María Iribarne after meeting her in one of his exhibitions and his manic behavior towards her that drives him to kill her. So, we need to focus on the following paragraph:

> In the annual spring art show I had exhibited a painting called *Matherhood*. It was painted in the style typical of many of my earlier works; as the critics say with their insufferable jargon, it was solid, soundly architectural. In short, it had all the qualities those charlatans always saw in my canvases, including "profoundly cerebral *je ne sais quoi*". In the upper left corner of the canvas was a remote scene framed in a tiny window: an empty beach and a solitary wom-

[27] For the understanding of the *eucharist* as the body and blood of Jesus for the Christian doctrine see for example the no. 271 ("What is the Eucharist") from the *Compendium* of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Assessed 16 March 2023 on: https://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html#The%20sacraments%20of%20Christian%20initiation.

[28] For the use of the term by Russian Formalists see Crawford (209-219), Rivkin and Ryan (8-14) and Berlina (79-96 and 334-341).

[29] This is a Freudian term. But the question for the *uncanny* had been raised by F.W.J. Schelling in 1837, by Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and by Jentsch in *On the Psychology of the Uncanny* (1906). For Freud see the essay "The Uncanny". In general, see Royle (2003).

> an looking at the sea. She was staring into the distance as if expecting something, perhaps some faint and faraway summons. In my mind that scene suggested the most wistful and absolute loneliness. (6)

What is interesting here is the existence of this painting and more importantly the woman figure that captures the look of María. I believe that the whole narration revolves around the sentence for the painting's description. The death of María is the needed component to understand the painting; the character constitutes the continuation and the incarnation of the painting. The importance of the painting in the novel is evident by the references and the revelation that she remembered it "constantly": their relationship is built around the shared experience of art. Even his later behavior towards María is his attempt to "defend himself from the friends of painting". Then the utter connection is formed because he thinks that María is the only one who can understand his work. Finally, I have to point out that the killing takes place not only after all the revelations about her way of living but after she starts mocking his painting. In order to continue his work, the antagonistic spirit, the one that offered him such loneliness, had to be eliminated. The ending of the novel is characteristic while the confinement of the narrator resembles a frame of a painting:

> At least I can paint, although I suspect that the doctors are laughing behind my back, as I suspect that they laughed during the trial when I told them about the scene with the window. There was only one person who understood my painting. Meanwhile, these paintings must be confirming their stupid point of view more every day. And day by day the walls of this hell will become more and more hermetic. (140)

The short story is more complicated. The *homodiegetic narrator* is a fan of Isabela Molnar, a sculpturer of significant importance as an artist but –according to him– of no substance as a human. The narrator admires sculpting, and the first part of the text describes his attempt to theorize the art form concluding that sculpting is "the rational organization in the irrational space" (36). The plot revolves around Isabela and the changes she endures during her marriage to a well-respected and reputable mechanic who incorporates the stereotypical etiquette of everyday life. The narrator sympathizes with him, whereas he despises the behavior of the sculpturer, whom he finds vulgar, as it comes to her human 'form'. The story concludes with the brutal murder of the husband by the sculpturer, after a meeting she has with the narrator, where she shows him her last works (those created while being married) and his realization that she does not create beautiful sculptures anymore. The narrative alludes to that her realization of what she had become, forced her to terminate the abeyance that did not let her be who she was. She was an artist as long as she worked and lived in her manner, the unconventional way, which was frowned upon by the society. It is understandable that the short story could and should be approached regarding its sculptural connotations, but this paper cannot proceed to this due to its specific focus and the fact that another paper of mine is undergoing, specializing to precisely that subject.

The film is quite different. Aronofsky's *mother!* was indeed intriguing to watch due to the difficulty of understanding its social message (a commentary on society), an inspiration by Buñuel's *El ángel exterminador* (1962) [= The Exterminating Angel] (Thompson). I suggest rethinking the whole allegorical concept discussed above as a symbolism of producing an artwork. To avoid misunderstandings, I do not mean the concept of an artist and his muse, which is patriarchal and phallocentric, but I want to point out the special liaison between the artist and his followers, the way he and his artworks become products that the crowds devour and demand for more. Most importantly, I believe that the film portrays the symbolic ritual of the birth of an artwork and the precious moment that it stops being property of the artist and becomes property of the Phenomenon of Art (not legally, of course). In that sense, the film's Mother is the artistic self of the human, the creative part, and He is the human form who performs the actual deed of writing, painting, sculpting etc. Hence, the baby is the artwork that needs to be ritualistically offered and consumed by people.

Finally, ontologically speaking, for the artwork to become what it is, meaning to take its identity and subsequently its position in people's minds, it has to correspond or broaden the *horizon of expectations* [Erwartungshorizont] as Jauss defined. For this reason, I accept the hypothesis that the artistic identity is culturally provided and even the term *classic* corresponds to the collective acceptance. Furthermore, we can understand that materiality can be approached by different ways and that a necessity for art, at least as it is portrayed by artworks, is the ritualistic sacrifice or just death of a human, so that something great may arise.

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Περίληψη

Ιωάννης Δ. Σκουρής

Λειτουργίες του θανάτου και της θυσίας στο *καλλιτεχνικό έργο*: Διαμορφώνοντας μια θεωρία της τέχνης στο *Τούνελ* του E. Sabato (1948), στο «Φονικό της Ιζαμπέλλας Μόλναρ» του Δ. Χατζή (1976) και στην ταινία *mother!* του D. Aronofsky (2017)

Στόχος της παρούσας εργασίας είναι να προτείνει έναν νέο τρόπο προσέγγισης της έννοιας της *υλικότητας* σε δύο λογοτεχνικά έργα κι ένα κινηματογραφικό. Παράλληλα, η εργασία προσδιορίζει τις δύο βασικές θεματικές κατηγορίες, τον θάνατο και τη θυσία, η λειτουργία των οποίων στα προαναφερθέντα έργα επιτρέπει την παρούσα ερευνητική προσπάθεια. Γι' αυτό, παρουσιάζονται αφενός κάποιες βασικές σκέψεις καλλιτεχνών αναφορικά με την καθαυτή καλλιτεχνική δημιουργία και αφετέρου γίνεται μία σύντομη θεωρητική αναφορά στην έννοια του *συμβάντος-γεγονότος*, έτσι που να αναδεικνύεται το *καλλιτεχνικό γεγονός*. Επίσης, στην εργασία προτείνεται ο όρος *μεταϋλικότητα* (δηλ. υλικότητα δευτέρου βαθμού), ο οποίος αναφέρεται στη μη κυριολεκτική αντίληψη της έννοιας "υλικότητα"· δεν εστιάζει ούτε στα υλικά που χρησιμοποιήθηκαν για την κατασκευή του έργου τέχνης ούτε στα υλικά που θεματοποιούνται σ' αυτά. Αντίθετα, αναφέρεται στις διηγητικές πραγματώσεις του οποιουδήποτε στοιχείου –εν προκειμένω του θανάτου ή/και της θυσίας ενός ανθρώπου– που χρησιμοποιείται κάθε φορά ως υλικότητα για τη δημιουργία τέχνης. Τέλος, υπό το πρίσμα της συγκεκριμένης θεωρητικής πρότασης, επιχειρείται μία παραδειγματική ερμηνευτική προσέγγιση στο *Τούνελ* (1948) του Sabato, στο «Φονικό της Ιζαμπέλλας Μόλναρ» (1976) και στην ταινία *mother!* (2017) του D. Aronofsky.