

**JOURNEY TO THE SOUL OF THE PROVINCES:
SEMIH KAPLANOĞLU'S FILM THE EGG**

Prof. Dr. Seçil BÜKER

Gazi University Faculty of Communication
Department of Radio, TV and Cinema
Ankara

Prof. Dr. Hasan AKBULUT

Kocaeli University Faculty of Communication
Department of Radio, TV and Cinema
Istanbul

ABSTRACT

The study focuses on Semih Kaplanoglu's film *Egg* (2007) which is the first film of his trilogy (*Milk*, 2008 and *Honey*, 2009) from Turkey. The authors' aim is to demonstrate the re-construction of the Provinces as a space of consciousness (or mindfulness) of the hero Yusuf. So the film refers to the "story" of Joseph in the Quran. Yusuf's "story" and the religious rituals such as to sacrifice an animal become guides to read the film. By textual analysis the authors attempt to map connections between Deleuze's *time image*, Kracauer's *found story*, Bonitzer's conception of *off screen*, Maurois's *cinéma pur* and Gürbilek's conceptions of the *Turkish provinces*. The "found story" of the film which extends from embryonic story patterns and transforms itself into a well-contoured story (egg). The pupa state of the story is temporary; the flow of the story leads the spectator and the hero to the "Egg".

Keywords: Semih Kaplanoğlu, *Egg*, provinces, found story, cinema pur.

Kasabanın Ruhuna Yolculuk: Semih Kaplanoğlu'nun Yumurta Filmi

ÖZET

Semih Kaplanoğlu'nun, Yusuf üçlemesinin (*Süt*, 2008 ve *Bal*, 2009) ilki olan *Yumurta* (2007) filmine odaklanan bu çalışmada yazarların amacı, filmin kahramanı Yusuf'un ruhsal yolculuğunda taşrayı bir farkındalık alanı olarak nasıl yeniden kurduğunu ortaya koymaktır. Kuran'daki Yusuf öyküsüne gönderme yapan filmde Yusuf'un öyküsü ve kurban kesme gibi dinsel ritüeller, filmi okuma konusunda kılavuzluğu üstlenirler. Metin analizi aracılığı ile yazarlar, Deleuze'ün *zaman imge*, Kracauer'ın *bulunmuş öykü*, Bonitzer'in *ekran-dışı*, Maurois'in *saf sinema* ve Gürbilek'in *taşra* kavramlarını ilişkilendirerek filmi okurlar. Filmdeki "bulunmuş öykü", embiryonik öykü örüntülerinden çıkar ve kendisini iyi tasarlanmış bir öyküye (yumurtaya) dönüştürür. Öykü kozanın içinde geçici bir süre kalır, akış izleyiciyi ve kahramanı "Yumurta"ya ulaştırır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Semih Kaplanoğlu, *Yumurta*, taşra, bulunmuş öykü, saf sinema.

Journey to the Soul of the Provinces: Semih Kaplanoğlu's Film the Egg

The real was no longer represented or reproduced but "aimed at"

Deleuze

(2000)

Introduction

Yumurta/ Egg (Kaplanoğlu, 2007), the first film of the Yusuf Trilogy directed by Semih Kaplanoğlu, is about Yusuf's inner journey after going back to his home town Tire following his mother's death. Despite his hasty attitude towards finalizing the funeral procedures in order to get back to Istanbul as soon as possible, his wish to go back is postponed continuously by Ayla, who reminds him of his mother's wish concerning a sacrifice and all the effort paid to fulfil that wish. He unconsciously started a journey to get closer to self by digging deeper into himself. However, unlike previous films where the provinces are regarded as repressive spaces where the protagonists feel oppressed, here Tire is coded as a space for awakening and reaching inner self. This study claims that both the retelling of the provinces as spaces for awakening and the journey of the protagonist make the film *Yumurta* different. Additionally the film not only refers to Western philosophical concepts but also Eastern and Islamic concepts and rituals. In this study the journey made into the protagonist's inner self is evaluated through the concepts of time, space, off-space, narrative and provinces as formulated by Deleuze (2000), Kracauer (1960), Bonitzer (2007), and Gürbilek (2005).

At this point certain concepts need to be addressed closely. Bazin (1951) in his essay "Theater and Cinema" (p. 86) claims that the most important feature of the cinema is the special relationship it creates between on-screen and off-screen. Off-screen is always accessible in cinema even when it is not shown. What Bonitzer (p. 13) means by off-screen is that what we cannot see is also an active part of the system and always at the verge of being brought out. Narrative, a term in common usage specifies narrative discourse of figurative character (protagonist) and also his\her actions. The found story covers all the material that can be found in actual physical reality (p.13). But it is "discovered rather than contrived" and "it cannot possibly develop into a self-contained whole" (Kracauer, 1960 p. 246). If the protagonist or the other characters caught in certain "pure and optical situation in a film narrative "it is no longer time that depends on movement, it is aberrant movement that depends on time" (Deleuze, 2000,

p. 41). Time image is not an indirect image of time deriving from movement. Provinces, “the term refers to an experience of exclusion, restriction or enclosure that could take place in a city as well and those lives spent that way” (Gürbilek, 2005, pp. 55-56).

The film is analysed on the basis of the above mentioned concepts. The starting point is intertextuality which “involves the components of a *textual system* such as the novel [film], for instance. It is defined [...] as the transposition of one or more *systems* of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative denotative position” (Kristeva, 1982, p.15) and also connotative position. Thus by textual analysis film exhibits various signifying systems that undergo such a transposition. The signifying processes are analyzed through the features of the text (myths, concepts, ideas, etc.) which are functioning within the film. The method carries a greater likelihood of practical application for the analysers.

The Story Found in the Slow Moving Time of Nature

The film starts with a long symmetrical shot displaying the walk of an old lady (Yusuf’s mother) in nature. Sheep dogs are heard but we don’t see the source of the barking. Through metonymy we are ensured of the existence of dogs, herds and birds by hearing their voices. The old woman walks towards the spectator and the road she walks on divides the space of the image into two. She pauses just in front of the camera and looks around, first to the left and to the right. Walking and then pausing; Karaucer (1960) claims creates a shock effect.

Alexander Dovzhenko in both *Arsenal* and *Earth* frequently stops the action to resume it after a short lull. The first phase of this procedure [...] produces a shock effect, as if all of a sudden we found ourselves in a vacuum. (p.44)

In *Yumurta/Egg*, immobility is temporary and mobility starts again when the woman looks coincidentally around and proceeds to the cypress trees. As the cypress trees are generally seen in graveyards and symbolising the link between life and death, they become a symbol of death.

The mother’s long take reminds us of Deleuze’s views on the relationship between cinema and time. The scene that has been left empty with a long silence and the mother’s departure invites the spectator to meditate. This rather slow start in the film builds up the contrast between life and death and prepares the audience for the slow

passing of time. The spectator should watch the “story” of Yusuf patiently. In this case s/he will have much more responsibility.

Another responsibility could be not looking for a “story” in the film. Let us refer to the “excess” issue that Kracauer (1960) mentions elsewhere; “In stripping the events of their excess of common sense, one relieves the spectator from the necessity of judging, bringing him closer to poetic emotion. In consequence, there is a conflict in film between intrigue and poetry” (p. 175). This view proves to be true for *Yumurta/Egg* as well. According to Maurois (1927) “if the spectator is caught by the intrigue, we might get further from *cinema pur*” (Quoted in Kracauer, 1960, p. 176). Hence, “story-telling” could be built upon one long shot because cinema “enriches the eye less than it does the conceptualizing and verbalising mind” (Sève quoted in Kracauer, 1960, p. 177).

Then the old woman pauses, looks left and right, then she goes off- screen. The audience is now left in nature. The director invites us to meditate. Although the old woman disappears in the cypress trees, she is in fact in the frame of the camera; not off-screen. However we know that she will be. Off-screen is “nothing else than the real which bears continuity when the screen opens like a window” (Bonitzer, 2007, p. 13). The old woman does not disappear; the camera finds her in a short while. But where is the story? The audience has not encountered an example of pure cinema which Kracauer (1960) calls the “formations of crystals” (p. 180) yet, but if the camera speeds up a bit they will. The camera makes way for Yusuf: at the end of the scurry when quail egg cracks in Yusuf’s hand, crystals are formed and birds flutter in the sky. The physical existence of birds is crystallized. What Kracauer calls crystal image reminds us of Deleuze’s (2000) crystal image. In his two-volume-book where Deleuze (2000) explores cinema by dividing it into two, namely movement-image and time-image, he says that Italian neo-realism develops a new story telling style different from its predecessors. The organic story telling of movement image cinema relying on cause and effect is replaced by crystal story telling created by pure sound situations and pure optical situations in the time-image cinema. “Crystalline narration is quite different... sensory-motor situations have given away to pure optical and sound situations, to which characters have become seers, cannot or will not react. So great is their need to “see” properly what there is in the situation (Deleuze, 2000, p. 128). And *Yumurta* makes it all clear from the beginning that it depends on crystal story telling by starting with completely audio and visual elements. Yusuf of *Yumurta* certainly acts but his action

takes place in the crystal story telling which does not destroy the flow of life. The flow of life has been captured but a story needs to be told as well. Kracauer (1960) mentions a binary situation:

How is it possible for the film maker to follow this tendency – to tell a story, that is- and yet try to capture the flow of life? Or to put it this way, how can he do justice to the two conflicting principles according to which the story both obstructs and stimulates camera explorations? (p. 213)

What should the camera do in such a situation? It should be such a story that the flow of life will not be interrupted. The story should not make the flow of life impossible. In such a case the story should not be made up or woven, it should be there. It should be a story that Kracauer (1960) would describe as a “found story.”

When you have watched for long enough the surface of a river or a lake you will detect certain patterns in the water which may have been produced by a breeze or some current. Found stories are in the nature of such patterns. Being discovered rather than contrived. Due to its symbiosis with documentary, it tends to render incidents typical of the world around us.... They may be arranged along a continuum which extends from embryonic story patterns at one pole to fairly well-contoured stories, often packed with dramatic action, at the other. (pp. 245-246)

A found story narrates the ordinary events around us. Some of those found stories are in the *embryonic* (formation phase of an egg) phase and some have well contoured lines. In *Yumurta* Yusuf and Ayla do not meet coincidentally. That is why the story of *Yumurta* is not *embryonic*, it has already been formed. Furthermore, *Yumurta* is the last film of the trilogy, so the egg has already been boiled. There is an egg in the nesting box at the end of the film and Ayla finds it. If *Yumurta* were *embryonic* there shouldn't have been a fictionally made up story. In a found story the camera's intervention in the flow of life is out of question. In a story stemming from people's lives, not their actions, there is not a protagonist either. How can a character, silently watching the situation he is in without any reaction be a protagonist? He is only a witness, by not acting but just watching.

In fact Ayla reveals the story, in the name of the director by interrupting Yusuf's trajectory continuously with her warnings about the sacrifice. Before the chick hatches how should one keep the egg as an egg? Let us see how.

There are found stories observed in the course of life and suggested by the camera (Kracauer, 1960, p. 251). Apart from those, there are also stories, which have chosen to

be eggs if not embryos, predetermined ones that leave the predetermination to fluctuation. They pretend to be found stories but their plots are well woven. Script writer Orçun Köksal¹ states that the director has a poet in his mind. *Yumurta* is about the experience poet Yusuf Köksal lives through with a distant relative Ayla within the ethos of provincial boredom when he comes to Tire from Istanbul on his mother's death. This experience includes many *motifs* in it. Those *motifs* revolve around Yusuf's fears and his past through the images of the well and the dog and his confrontation with them through Tire, his relatives, friends and of course Ayla in Tire. Just like Kracauer's (1960) description, these *motifs* are "pervasive and penetrant" and they spread all over the film without losing their cinematographic features/ qualities. Such visual motifs can only exist in one way: "Among the cinematic motifs one occupies a unique position-the flow of life" (Kracauer, 1960, p. 273). Later on when those *motifs* are combined, they form the theme of the film; the journey Yusuf makes to his soul. In other words, the fact that Yusuf finds the provinces of his soul in Tire and Birgi (provinces), in Canetti's terms, is the *theme* of the film. This *theme* is visualised through the journeys made to Birgi and Gölcük. However, the story is based upon the protagonist and the space as Orçun Köksal says.²

Yusuf's Journey as a Protagonist: How to Beat Provincial Boredom?

This film is a variation of Yusuf's story in The Quran. Yusuf goes to the provinces (Tire) after a very long time, on his mother's death. Yusuf had escaped to Istanbul but he had to go back there before getting rid of the "so called provincial boredom" in Gürbilek's (2005) terms. This involves:

not only mentioning a provinces with its spatial meaning and considering a village or a small town but also referring to an experience of exclusion, restriction or enclosure that could take place in a city as well and those lives spent that way. Boredom of staying at home, a life that has to be shared with an aged mother... and the boredom of dinners eaten without uttering any words but only accompanied by cutlery noise, under the supervision of an authoritarian father. (pp. 55-56)

Patience could remove this boredom. Moreover, boredom is important as far as individual existence is considered and the protagonist could well have peace after such boredom. "If, however, one has the patience, the sort of patience specific to legitimate boredom, then one experiences a kind of bliss that is almost unearthly" (Kracauer, 1995, p. 334). Yusuf, who is just a beginner, takes his boredom to the provinces. Unaware of

the fact that he will get rid of it very soon, he sits next to his mother's dead body wrapped in white sheet. Next to her dead body, the clock on the bed-side table keeps tick-tacking. Her towel hanging over the bed, her rosary and her clothes spreading over the chair all give the impression that she will wake up soon. Maybe she has not finished the things she is supposed to do. What could they be? Most probably getting her son married. But that would not suffice for mother Zehra. She also wants her son to get purified, spiritually cleaned and that's why her influence is felt during the rest of the film. The mother left this world after having arranged everything. The provinces (Tire and Birgi) are peaceful places and have not lost their connections with the past. Contagious peace highly exists in the provinces however our protagonist doesn't know the fact yet, so he is getting bored.

We can easily claim that the name of the film and its space are closely related. Because an egg reminds us of the provinces because of small scale poultry coops. Furthermore, quietness and heat are vital for the embryo to develop, incubate and hatch. An egg is the symbol of the world, it unfolds life and the world, standing for life, the world is created from an egg too because an egg has everything in it to bear life. With its wide spaces, meadows and quietness, the provinces could well be the host of the egg. An egg could be the home for Yusuf as well as the chick. The egg is the sign of Yusuf's self, his search for his inner self. As stated in the Joseph (Yusuf) sura in the Quran:

Joseph (Yusuf)

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

1. Alif. Lám. Rá. These are the Verses of the Perspicuous Book.
2. We have sent it down as an Arabic Qurán, in order that ye may learn wisdom.
3. We do relate unto thee the most beautiful of stories, in that We reveal to thee this (portion of the) Qurán: before this, thou too was among those who knew it not.³

Upon this religious connotation we might ask what Yusuf in *Yumurta* does not know. This question is also the answer Yusuf searching for; being mentally and physically aware and completing the journey he is going to make into his soul.

Ayla as the Complementary of the Missing Part

A distant relative Ayla, a girl who accompanied Yusuf's mother in her last years, is the only person to know about her wishes (her will in other words) and she says that he should go to Birgi to sacrifice an animal according to her will. She tries to convince

Yusuf, who says he does not believe in such things and looks quite reluctant, to see the issue as a kind of debt he has to pay off. Yusuf has just “attached” himself to the house where he was born and raised because of his mother’s death so he wants to postpone the sacrifice issue until the summer months. Yusuf’s room, the tick tacking of the clock, Yusuf wakes up, Ayla is looking at the mirror in the shape of a heart, braiding her hair. When the audience is ready to ask if love will knock on the door, the milkman yells: MIIIIILK. The milkman pours the milk into the jug, Ayla opens the door and says that she would buy *two* litres of milk and the milkman fills the jug again. Now that Ayla has bought *two* litres of milk. From then on they will be two at home and when the neighbour’s kid comes along the family portrait is completed “When “a little madness” is mentioned in photography and cinema we can expect “a little truth” in them. Milk is really poured in cinema or television. It creates a cheap effect created on purpose; it has always impressed the art lovers” (Bonitzer, 2006, pp. 125-126). Bonitzer claims that the spectator enjoys the discovery of an actor pouring milk in the film. He says it is not the same pleasure taken upon watching Vermeer’s woman pouring milk. In Vermeer’s painting elements of design (line, colour, texture) are used to produce sensations of space but not movement. However in the film the milkman blocks the milk can, so the spectator can only hear the sound of the pouring milk so s/he feels the movement, and faces the reality and finds “a little truth” in the image.

In the morning, Yusuf sees the toothbrush left for him when he is washing his face but he does not look at the mirror. The kid looks at the photographs of mother Zehra and Yusuf taken when Yusuf was circumcised. Both photographs are in metal frames and it makes a lot of sense to see them next to each other. First of all, this photograph is a trace related to Yusuf and this trace is related to his mother through the metal ornamentations. As for the mother Zehra, she looks at the audience in the photograph displaying her old age. She makes her existence visible through the photograph as it is the proof of what was lived, experienced in the past. Yusuf lived in that house, was circumcised there, but now he does not know any of his relatives. So he is just a trace from the past now. In this respect, he meets his mother’s image looking at us now from the past. They are both traces now.

Circumcision symbolizes the transition from childhood to adolescence and is celebrated with rituals in the Islamic culture. As a ritual of transition, circumcision is seen as a step into “puberty”. Boys who have been circumcised are considered to have taken a step towards manhood. So it must not be a coincidence that Yusuf was

photographed in circumcision costumes and his photo was put next to his mother's. Yusuf's circumcision photo was recorded in mother Zehra's memory as the time for puberty because Yusuf had already taken another step towards the process of adulthood. However we think that this process has not been completed yet. Under the controlling eye of the mother, there is a long way to go. Which other photographs of Yusuf, who is a trace in the past, could mother Zehra have put in a frame or would like to? Of course his wedding photograph; to put it another way, the visual record of another puberty ritual. So we can confirm that the mother's trajectory is getting stronger in the film's narration. She wants to know that her son is happy although she is off-screen. So, the audience can expect a love affair in the film's story.

Yusuf in the photograph is almost the same age as the boy looking at him. When Yusuf goes downstairs the "mirror" effect gets stronger, Yusuf repeats the boy's facial mimics. Ayla sends the boy to check the nesting box. The boy shouts "There is none". Ayla tells him to look carefully. This time Yusuf is watching the boy, as if he is watching his own childhood, since the space has its own memory. As Bachelard (1996) states, even if time can not refresh memories, space can (p. 37). Yusuf finds himself looking for eggs in the nesting box. Yusuf and the boy, his reflection in the mirror, both take place in the same slice of time. Yusuf's childhood has not vanished, it is tangibly there:

He speaks of duration as the continuous progress of the past gnawing into the future. Pure present is "invisible". And here memory is directly connected with duration: memory is the prolongation of the past into the present, the very basis of becoming. (Quoted from Bergson by Game, 1991, p. 97)

Bergson's quest for memory and duration reveals the concept of preserving the past. "He claims that there is no limit to the preservation of the past: memory, or the 'piling up of the past upon the past', occurs at every moment, it is the essence of duration..." (Quoted from Bergson by Game, 1991, p. 98). Game (1991) thinks that one of the problems here is the question "In what sense, then is the past preserved?" (p. 98) At this point the writer refers to Freud.

For Freud, of course, the past is preserved; but, importantly, as memory traces, that is, in the system of unconscious. Bergson argues that memory "is not a faculty of putting away recollections in a drawer, or of inscribing them in a register. There is no register, no drawer". He argues that notions of a container and the storing of memories come from thinking of memory in spatial rather than temporal terms. Thus, the psyche or unconscious is

not a thing, and does not retain....In Bergson's theory of memory and duration the past lives, not in the sense of either a going back to a past moment, or a representation of it, but in the permeation of moments that moves us forward. (Quoted by Game, 1991, p. 98)

The scene we watch also shows that Yusuf's past lives in the present. Yusuf finds himself, his past in the boy's search for eggs in the nesting box. Yusuf's past living in the present and permeating the moment leads him to face his fears and finally a journey to his soul. First of all he has to deal with his fears.

Yusuf's Dream

In a Tire morning awash with green meadows and fog Yusuf tries hard to get out of a well by holding tight to a rope. However, he can not hold the rope and falls back into the well. So we can say that he is facing his childhood fears. He shouts "IS THERE ANYBODY OUT THERE" so loudly that he wakes himself up. "O Joseph! The rope has come, so grab it with both hands. Don't be neglectful of the rope, since it's become late" (Masnavi, Volume 2, line: 1278). He is not ready to hear Rumi yet, gets out of bed and walks down the stairs.

According to the Quran the religious legend says that Yusuf's brothers, getting bored of their father's love for Yusuf, throw him into a well in order to establish a peaceful society. Then, they tell their father that Yusuf was eaten by a wolf and hand his shirt covered with blood to the father. What falls on the father's shoulders is patience. Yusuf is rescued and sold as a slave, the wife of Yusuf's owner desires him but Yusuf is punished despite being innocent. Thanks to the gift given to him, he interprets the dreams of fellow prisoners in the dungeon. Later on he becomes a very close friend of the king and the *protector* of his treasure. In order to become a "Protector", Yusuf needs to interpret the king's dreams, in other words he needs to "read himself". Yusuf's dream could be viewed as a second invitation to face himself and his past. The first recollection of his childhood had taken place in a nice way when he met the boy in the graveyard watering his mother's grave. Now he is vis-à-vis his childhood fears.

Yusuf's dreams about the well are full of fear. It looks as if Yusuf is locked up with this fear. "Human beings continuously summarize themselves in an old myth and the number of those myths are abundant, enough to fit everyone" (Canetti, 2004, p. 110). Yusuf's "lock" is the dreams he has about the well. In order to free himself from this dream he wants to go back to the Centre (Istanbul) but the centre he has to go back

to is indeed himself. “Human existence starts with prosperity” says Bachelard (1996) but once you lose your prosperity, you are locked in a myth that deeply penetrates into sleep, the one to unlock it is only yourself, but you need to feel the need and have the power to do so. This power rests in the house where Yusuf stays:

We don't need to mention the physical conditions that lead to the safety that had penetrated our sleep. Home, just like imaginary home and imaginary home just like home do not know about the hostility of the world if we could have dug the root of our dreams. Human life begins in deep sleep and all eggs in the nesting boxes are hatched. If we manage to join the safety of the home in the beginning of our dreams, we really live in the safety that had already resided in that home. (p. 123)

The writer suggests that a home, even a temporary one, leads to a safety dream. However, you need to live in the home so that it will cuddle you like a pod: “First you should live to build a house not to build a house to live in!” (Bachelard, 1996, p. 126). But this living is closely related to self reliance. When the wish to go back to Istanbul is dominant, how can you trust life and consequently the home!

When we watch the home we find ourselves at the threshold of trusting the world, we feel the effect of that trust and are invited to the mood of a cosmic trust. How would it be possible for a bird to build a nest without the instinct to trust the world? (Bachelard, 1996, p. 123)

So, the dream must be related to home or nest. What sort of home is this then? Since Yusuf is in the “well” instead of home, he does not acknowledge his own power because he does not possess the necessary knowledge. Someone (Ayla) very close to him has the qualities he is looking for, but Yusuf can not see them. Because those qualities belong to “the underground part of his personality, they are hardly audible just like the strokes of a miner buried in a deep well” (Reik, 2006, p. 119). The qualities he can find in the object of love are held by Yusuf as well, but he is not in a position to realise this because dreams full of fear are dominant in Yusuf's life. Fear does not leave any space for love. Only when you clean off that fear, there will be some space for love. That “cleaning” will definitely take place but Ayla must be patient for that. In fact Ayla does not intend to pick up Yusuf on purpose. She does not build her actions and deeds on obtaining her lost object. She just functions as a mirror by staying what she is.

The book in Yusuf's hand is the one that the director thinks of shooting the film of. The title *Bal* can be clearly seen on the book. It is the last film of the trilogy the director is planning to shoot. The director refers to himself and the film he is going to

shoot by posing an intertextual relationship and makes himself visible through a metonymical connection.

The concept of “intertextuality” suggests, at the same time, that every text forms an intersection of textual surfaces where other texts may be read. The literary word, according to Bakhtin, “is aware of the presence of another literary word along side it”. Every text as Kristeva calls “a mosaic of citations” which absorbs and transforms other texts. (Stam, 1992, p. 20)

This concept connects the film to self-reflectivity which is considered to be one of the basic features of “art” films and modernist art practice. “Reflexive fictions defiantly call attention to their own artifice and operations, refusing a transparent self-effacing language that opens quietly onto the world (Stam, 1992, p. 129). Self-reflectivity could be described as the text’s making its creation, production conditions more visible. Thus, director Kaplanoğlu puts his own voice and image in the film not directly but in the piece-whole relationship context.

Journey to the Sacrifice Place

Yusuf and Ayla leave for the sacrificial site and they arrive in Birgi in a foggy evening to learn that the herd was taken to the meadow at night. Yusuf asks an “answerable” question.

*Shall I take you to Gölcük?
Gölcük? Yes!*

Ayla’s answer is such a “yes” that it sounds like a yes to a proposal. Yusuf postpones going to Istanbul one more day. The herd’s being in the meadow is a reason all right but Yusuf has already started to believe in the sacrificial tradition. So he approves staying there one more night and completing the ritual the next day. They go to a hotel and Yusuf checks in. Ayla looks at the pictures on the walls. Yusuf gives her the keys to her room and tells her to eat something. Ayla prefers to discover the hotel instead, gives the billiard ball a kick as a gift, and she picks out the roller polishing machine and shines her shoes. As she climbs up the stairs, a bride and a groom passes by her in the corridor, then she follows the noises and quietly she goes into the crowd. A man and a woman are dancing to a folk song on the dancing floor. Now Ayla’s eyes are the eyes of the camera. She follows the young man and the woman then her looks change direction, as there is one more object to follow as well. Ayla looks at that object

bravely and finds Yusuf. Yusuf has become the object of her look. She looks at him once again. Yusuf smiles *slightly*. Should Yusuf write a love poem now?

“The word *spleen* that is the title of a series of poems by Baudelaire could be translated as boredom or tediousness” says Gürbilek (2006), in a chapter about the poet in her book titled *Son Bakışta Aşk (Love at Last Sight)* (p. 116). The title of the poem Yusuf Köksal wrote is the “well” motif that causes boredom. But the poem does not include the word boredom. Did Yusuf write a lyric poem like Baudelaire? Considering the fact that a lyric poem has its roots in mythical stories (2006) and its first examples were written on the Aegean coast, Yusuf could also have embraced the lyric style. We might say that he is interested in themes on individuality; love, separation, longing. Both Yusuf who writes lyric poems and the director who tells us about the journey Yusuf makes to his soul, are making meditative art. In an article when Sontag analyses Bresson’s spiritual style she says: “Reflective art is art which, in effect, imposes a certain discipline on the spectator-postponing easy gratification. Even boredom can be a permissible means of such discipline” (Sontag, 1982, p. 180). *Yumurta* on the other hand, deals with the boredom hidden in the spirit, in wells and dreams. The “well” motif in tradition is found in “data intermingled” (Benjamin, 2006, p.118) rather than in “a unique situation” in Yusuf’s memory intermingled with that data. How will Yusuf solve this complex “well” image intermingled with each other? We reckon that he will remember slowly. When the issue of memory arises, we would like to apply to Proust’s (Quoted by Benjamin, 2006, p. 118) concept *memoire involontaire* (memorising involuntarily). Proust counter poses this sort of remembrance with voluntary memory that is under the command of the mind. He also adds that at the moment when he put forward this term, he could hardly remember the town Combray where he spent most of his childhood. Until one afternoon, when the taste of *madeleine* (a kind of cookie that he mentioned a lot), brought him back to the past, he had to do with what his memory offered him. He thinks it is useless to remember the past voluntarily. It is a fruitless effort of the mind. And the past resides *in any real object* that has gone away. But we do not know which object that is (Benjamin, 2006, p. 119). After his mother’s funeral Yusuf takes a “magic” quail egg in his hands and this involuntary remembrance brings him back to the past even to a “confrontation”. He comes back home from the funeral and after eating local food of Tire, things that happened in the past, his father, relatives and Ayla who is going to be in his life in the future all come out from his memory. Thus *vita contemplate* (contemplated life) (Benjamin, 2006, p. 118) also becomes *vita pura*

(pure life) in our terms. “*Purus*” is an adjective having connotation with many words related to “cleaning” and “purification” like clean, holy, purified, spotless, innocent, honourable, open and virtuous. So we think just as described by Maurois, a poet with *vita pura* would be suitable for *cinema pur*. And *Yumurta*, an example of *cinema pur*, frees us and the poet (Yusuf) from judging and anger, and takes us closer to what is poetic. And the poem is unique with its aura and it belongs to the provinces.

Yusuf has written a poem titled “Well” for his ex girlfriend and the word “well” is reminded to the audience through dreams. The word “well” “drifts away” the spectators, the word looks at the spectator and the spectator remembers Yusuf under the thin veil (the sura in the Quran) and the story of his being pushed into the well. Thus the actor playing Yusuf regains his *aura*. Valery (year?) considers that the perception in dreams is an *aura* perception and claims that an equal relationship is established in the dream (Quoted by Benjamin, 2006, p. 149). Yusuf regains his *aura* in his fearful dreams.⁴ As for Ayla, she was born with her *aura* because of her name.⁵ Just as emphasized in the Bible, visual signs created by the time image enable us to see behind the visible thanks to their aura. “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, Chapter: 4).

Sacrifice

Ayla and Yusuf take the ram in the boot to the place where sacrifices are offered. Yusuf directs it by pulling the string and paying attention so it does not get hurt. We also see the women making preparations for slaughter and chopping the meat. Ayla looks at the women. Yusuf tries to calm down the victim. Ayla watches Yusuf. Yusuf finds someone as a proxy for the sacrifice. Sacrificing is an organized action, it does not develop randomly. Girard (1977) describes ordinary violence as follows: “The original act of violence is unique and spontaneous” (p. 102). However sacrificing an animal is quite different. “Ritual sacrifices, however, are multiple, endlessly repeated. All these aspects of the original act that had escaped man’s control-the choice of time and place, the selection of the victim-are now premediated and fixed by custom. The ritual process aims at removing all element of chance and seeks to extract from the original violence some technique of cathartic appeasement” (Girard, 1977, p. 102). One of the functions is to bless the blood to be shed and thus purify the violence. This

violence could also be emotional violence as well. The spectators do not witness Yusuf applying physical violence. Violence is deep down. The victim is sacrificed.

Sacrificial rites serve to connect the moral and religious aspects of daily life, but only by means of a lengthy and hazardous detour. Moreover, it must be kept in mind that the efficacy of the rites depends on their being performed in the spirit of *pietas*⁶, which marks all aspects of religious life. (Girard, 1977, p. 20)

During the ritual, Yusuf watches Ayla. When the proxy puts some blood of the victim on Yusuf's forehead he gets irritated, because he has been watching Ayla who led him to this ritual. Blood is put on Yusuf's forehead. Yusuf is confused, just like a tree whose tiny little branches are jumbled. Yusuf looks at that tree with jumbling, trembling branches.

All three trees, under which three women in white scarves pray, imply their difference with their look. They seem to be full of holiness. It is not clear that they are close to the centre of the earth but it is clear that they impress Yusuf. As Three is the second odd number after One (God), we also would like to emphasise "being content" while analysing this scene. The contended women submissively pray and Yusuf is observing it. If he is observing he should not feel alienated from this world.⁷ Matter and soul are about to unite in Yusuf. Yusuf is surrounded by the space and Yusuf prefers to besiege the environment along with the inner space after so many years. Violence had to be removed and a victim had to undertake the violence instead of Yusuf, so that Yusuf could have reached this moment. Now peace can come along as the price has been paid.

Blood of the victim is put in the middle of Yusuf's forehead, which we might describe as the third eye. The blood of the victim is considered *immaculate* and *innocent*. At this very point we might conclude that holiness is contagious as well as contamination. So Yusuf will get his share of the blood that is put on his forehead. Here we see bilateralism. "The victim is sacred, it is criminal to kill him-but the victim is sacred only because he is to be killed" (Girard, 1977, p. 1). Yusuf is not covered with blood and this kind of practice does not take place in the ritual but it is interesting to see where the blood is applied. From then on Yusuf will not lead his life as "blind". Now his "eyes" are open.

Both are influenced by the sacrifice experience. Yusuf wants to learn why mother Zehra could have wanted him to experience this. He asks Ayla and she says she does not know.

*Do you know why my mother consecrated?
I don't know.*

Yusuf knows the answer. Upon her answer, he looks at Ayla, and in that look the question “How come?” is hidden. He is surprised that Ayla is not aware of his mother’s arrangement. Ayla cannot say “In order to unite us”! It is impossible for someone who grew up in Tire or Birgi (provinces) to say such a thing. So, saying “I don’t know” is the easiest way.

Girard (1977) claims that “the basis for the practice of sacrifice is substitution” (p. 3) and sacrificing in the film is organised for Yusuf by his mother. Although it is clear that a victim is sacrificed to obtain something desirable, this desire is never explained. Of course Yusuf’s question is very hard to answer. The mother wants to unite two people (her children) she loves and also consecrates her son whom she wants to protect from violence, and get purified. Mother Zehra who is identified with her protective feature wants to sacrifice a victim instead of her son just like the prophet Abraham. The ram that saved Isaac’s life will save his son too. The substitution Girard mentioned has taken place. Moreover, if sacrifice is based upon the principle “I am giving to you and you give it back” (Örnek, 2000, p. 89), then both mother and Yusuf have the right to expect an award. “Holiness” is contagious and the one who sacrifices also prevents randomly spreading violence. So it is the person’s right to expect purification. Mother Zehra’s preliminary objective could be her son’s purification. Mother also expects the victim to purify her son from all negative feelings. A shallow reading would make us think that mother chooses a girl for her son to marry, but a deeper reading would lead us to the concept of “purification”. The son will choose Ayla when he is purified anyway. First all hostile elements should be eliminated. That is why Yusuf cannot go back to Istanbul. The dog we have been hearing since the beginning of the film becomes visible now.

Purification

The dog’s barking accompanies the rural images in the scene where Yusuf comes across the dog in the dark. When the sun starts to set the shepherd and his protective dog come back. Yusuf stays in that “Great Darkness” for one night. It is not very easy to be alone in the darkness and to choose self-questioning and breaking into tears to express regrets for what cannot be recovered. However, things could get better with the company of a shepherd’s dog.

The legend says that young Christians, who did not want to become pagans again, took shelter in a cave in Tarsus Mountains while running away with the fear that King Dakyanos would kill them. A loyal shepherd dog called Kitmir joins them as well. Dedicated and decisive to find the right path, youngsters risk dying in the name of Christianity. They sleep a long time in the cave⁸. They wake up to learn that a new era has begun. The dog protects them and Yusuf (Seyhan, 2005, p. 286).

In *Yumurta* spending a night with the dog, Yusuf can not take it any longer and cries. The dog utters a weird noise, as if it pities Yusuf. Yusuf is aware of the night he spent; he washes away his sorrow, worries and fears with his tears. One can only get rid of the “burden” of the past by facing with it. And Yusuf manages to have a critical look at himself and his past in the solitude of nature. He faces what he has to face. Yusuf will go back to Tire, and to Ayla with this awareness.

That night is a night of patience. “You are like beautiful Joseph and this world is like the well. And this rope of escape is patience with God's commands.” (Masnavi, Volume 2, Line, 1277). Finally Yusuf holds the rope tight. When he starts a journey to his childhood through the neighbour’s son, he also sets sail to his soul. The conflict is solved in the dark of the night (in the cave). He does not lock himself in the “provinces”; he just lets the lock to be unlocked. He does not write a poem for Ayla but that night he writes his own “book”. Instead of creating images, he creates his own choice.

Yusuf, who does not believe in the sacrifice ritual, is distressed by the boredom of the provinces and expresses this as indifference. He is the opposite of Ayla, who believes in the sacrifice ritual and purifying violence. Yusuf can not resist her anymore. Thus, the conflict between those who believe-and those who do not believe in purifying violence is eliminated. This elimination is also the elimination of depression, indifference stemming from depression and the boredom of provinces. This purification has made Yusuf a free man. Now he can live in Tire or Istanbul, because violence in his inner world has disappeared. The belief that victim has undertaken the purification issue is really important; once this belief has been identified the dilemma is eliminated. Yusuf let them put a few drops of blood on him; he waited for one night for this ritual, stayed in a hotel.

Whereas all the previous acts of violence compounded the violence, the violence directed against the surrogate victim banished all trace of violence....Because the violence directed against the victim was intended to

restore order and tranquillity, it seems only logical to attribute the happy result to the victim himself. (Girard, 1977, p. 85)

Having felt the breath of a dog all night long, Yusuf spends the night full of fears and tears. The noises of the herd could be heard from far away and finally the sun rises. Yusuf wakes up to a new day, refreshed. The sky is cloudy in patches. Yusuf sits at the breakfast table. Ayla comes back to the kitchen holding an egg she collected from the nesting box; she looks as if she is looking for someone. When she sees Yusuf she gives it to Yusuf. Yusuf takes the egg; they smile at each other and have breakfast. As if they are a newly wed couple. As if they are refreshed. Thunders are heard, it is about to rain. The film ends with breakfast. Tingling sounds of the tea spoon covers the whole kitchen. The film's ending with breakfast accompanied with the egg coming from the nesting box refers to the whole narration, the name of the film and the basic event in the film. This ending reminds the spectator that life goes on. Just like drinking tea or breakfasts life will go on. Experiences are not merely memories left in the past. Life will be maintained by building connections with the past and the present. The scene fades out, closing credits are shown, but cutlery noises and rain continues. The film comes to a closure with the same noises just as it started. So the spectators are not deprived of noises. First bathed in tears, Yusuf is now purified with rain. Being in the future causes fear, being in the past causes sadness and pain. However the moment brings well-being and peace.

Conclusion

Yusuf's "story" is built upon long shots which enrich the spectator's eye thus s/he is invited to meditate. Pure optical and sound situations unfold themselves without destroying the flow of life. But the story of Yusuf is told as well. His trajectory begins by the death of a neglected mother. And he returns the home in Tire which has been neglected for years. Vehement denial of past in provinces (Tire and Birgi) leads him to return to memories of his adolescence. Whenever he tries to return to Istanbul a distant relative Ayla reminds him that he should go to Birgi to sacrifice an animal according to his mother's will. Journey to Birgi *returns* to a journey to the soul in the provinces.

The story that is woven in the film narrates the journey of Yusuf to his soul in a well-contoured form. But the motifs of the journey are "pervasive and penetrant" just like Kracauer's designations. All those motifs are combined and form the theme of the

film: the journey Yusuf makes to his soul. The story of the film develops into a “self-contained whole” by the aberrant movements of the camera on time. The purely optical and sound situation in the film leads the protagonist to meditate.

He just sits and contemplates the vastness of hatred and provincial boredom. The hatred for mother and provincial boredom hidden in the spirit go out from the “well” in the darkness of the night. Thus *vita contemplate* (contemplated life) returns to *vita pura* (pure life) in our terms. So a poet with *vita pura* would be suitable for *cinema pur*. And *Yumurta*, an example of *cinema pur*, frees the spectator and the poet (Yusuf) from hatred and anger, and takes us closer to what is poetic.

Notes

¹ By giving Yusuf the surname Köksal, director Semih Kaplanoğlu refers to the script writer as well. Köksal means settling down in Turkish.

² This information is based on the explanation of the script writer Orçun Köksal makes in the DVD.

³ <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/index.htm>, 15. 04. 2010.

⁴ Freud thinks that dreams reproduce the neurosis. These kind of dreams “by developing the worry whose probability caused a traumatic neurosis, try to compensate managing the warning” (Quoted by Benjamin, 2006, p. 122).

⁵ Ayla means *corona, aura, nimbus* in Turkish.

⁶ *Pietas*: Religious respect.

⁷ We would like to remind that number four is considered to be wholeness. Lets consider that number three is masculine, wholeness will be realised when feminine number four (Ayla) will be a part of his life.

⁸ This cave that has been searched for in different parts of Anatolia, is called as Ashab-ı Keyf (Seven Sleepers) .

References

Bachelard, G. (1964). *The poetics of space* (E. Gilson, Trans.). Boston: Beacon Press.

Bazin, A. (1951). *What is cinema* (Vol. 1) (H. Gray, Trans.). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Benjamin, W. (2006). *Son bakışta aşk (1924-1928)* (N. Gürbilek, Trans.). İstanbul: Metis Yayınları.

Bonitzer, P. (2006). *Kör alan ve dekadrajlar* (İ. Yasar, Trans.). by İstanbul: Metis Yayıncılık.

-
- Bonitzer, P. (2007). *Bakış ve ses* (İ. Yasar, Trans.). İstanbul: Metis Yayıncılık.
- Canetti, E. (2004). *İnsanın taşrası: 1942-1972* (A. Cemal, Trans.). İstanbul: Payel Yayınevi.
- Deleuze, G. (2000). *Cinema 2: The time image* (H. Tomlinson & R. Galeta, Trans.). London: The Athlone Press.
- Game, A. (1991). *Undoing the social: Towards a deconstructive sociology*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Girard, R. (1977). *Violence and sacred* (P. Gregory, Trans.). London: The Athlone Press.
- Gürbilek, N. (2005). *Yer Değiştiren Gölge*. İstanbul: Metis Yayıncılık.
- Holy Bible*. (1978). Nashville: the Gideons International.
- Holy Quran*. (1938) (A. Y. Ali, Trans.). Retrieved on April 15, 2010 on <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/index.htm>.
- Kaplanoğlu, S. (Producer and Director). (2007). *Yumurta (The Egg)*. Türkiye - Yunanistan: Kaplan Production.
- Kracauer, S. (1960). *Theory of film: The redemption of physical reality*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kracauer, S. (1995). Boredom. In S. Kracauer (Ed.), *The mass ornament: Weimar essays* (T. Y. Levin, Trans.). Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Kristeva, J. (1982). *Desire in language: A semiotic approach to literature and art*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Mevlana. (2003). *Mesnevi tercümesi* (Ş. Can, Trans.). İstanbul: Ötüken Yayınları.
- Mutlu, E. (1994). *İletişim sözlüğü*. Ankara: Bilim ve Sanat Yayınları.
- Örnek, S. V. (2000). *100 soruda ilkelerde din, büyü, sanat, efsane*. İstanbul: Gerçek Yayınevi.
- Reik, T. (2006). *Aşk ve şehvet üzerine: Romantik ve cinsel duyguların psikanalizi* (Ş. S. Kaya, Çev.) İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları.
- Seyhan, M. F. (2005). *Kâinatı aydınlatan Kur'an-ı Kerim'den İnciler* (Vol. 1). İzmir: Birleşik Yayıncılık.
- Sontag, S. (1982). Spiritual Style in the Films of Robert Bresson. In Sontag (Ed.), *Against interpretation and other Essays*. New York: Octagon Books.

Stam, R. (1992). *Reflexivity in film and literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.