

A Look in the “Story of the Eye”

[...] you constantly got the feeling that you’re observing through the dark. That in a way, almost stealthily, you’re becoming an accomplice. And that probably happens, because the “Story of the Eye” - or perhaps the eroticism story in its whole - is the story of guilt.

The Bataille reading experience, and the “Story of the Eye”¹ in particular, bears a striking resemblance to the experience of visiting a vintage cinema. What stands predominantly is darkness. A darkness that spreads itself gradually and tranquilly calls you to plunge yourself in it. Soon after, the senses loosen up and extend their capacity for imagination to recreate the world with whole new materials.

Thus, from night and darkness, the

¹“The Story of the Eye” is one of Georges Bataille’s primal works and is a part of a tetralogy along with: *Le Mort*, *Madame Edwarda* and *Ma Mère*.

book adventure begins, since “Auch”, which is the pseudonym Bataille used to publish the “Story of the Eye”, means - other than anything else - “nocturnal shepherd” or “watchman”, in old German language. It additionally means the very moment before dawn, which according to what is known, is the darkest point during the night.

When reading the book, you constantly got the feeling that you’re observing through the dark. That in a way, almost stealthily, you’re becoming an accomplice. And that probably happens, because the “Story

of the Eye” - or perhaps the eroticism story in its whole - is the story of guilt.

... “But as of then, no doubt existed for me: I did not care for what is known as “pleasures of the flesh because they really are insipid; I only cared for what is classified as “dirty”²

It’s not at all coincidental that in almost every erotic scene of the book there is a voyeur.³ In order to create sexual stimulation between characters, there

² Georges Bataille, “Story of the Eye”, introduction and rendition/metaphrase
³ Simone’s mother, Marcelle, Ser Edmund, the Priest.



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has to be a non-involving eye, which will observe and judge. It will reach a verdict about the size of vulgarity. Through this challenge to the voyeur comes a rupture with guilt and contraction which imprison the very existence in seclusion with itself.

"...for the corpse was irritating her, as though she could not bear the thought that this creature, so similar to her, could not feel her anymore. The open eyes were more irritating than anything else. Even when Simone drenched the face, the eyes, extraordinarily, did not close. We were perfectly calm, all three of us, and that was the most hopeless part of it. Any boredom in this world is linked, for me, to that moment and, above all, to an obstacle as ridiculous as death."⁴

It is that very eye that incurs the whole story. The eye that is observed, controlled, defined by God; society; reader. That eye must be rendered useless, humiliated, plundered, for the desire to be clarified in its integrity, with a long distance from the mark of guilt.

⁴ Georges Bataille, p. 98

Therefore, we initially have the scrambled eggs, Marcelle's dead eyes drenched with urine, the matador's eye nailed by the bull's horn, the dead bull's testicles "same as an eyeball" plunged into Simone's vagina and of course the dead priest's extracted eye in the final climax caressing all of Simone's body as she concludes the bloody orgy.

This is about the desire of being liberated from the eye slavery, in other words from the control intertwined with guilt. This is the conflict with the superego. or in a more psychoanalytic approach, the conscience which punishes unacceptable behaviours and desires with guilt feelings. As Oedipus is blinded punishing himself for his mistake, here too the look turns into a battlefield between logic and desire. If this fundamental schism does not occur, how will be life set free out of the debris of moderation and normativity? How will ecstasy be

achieved, so that the person "access its schizoid other self and relieve its despair"⁵ as Lloyd de Mause mentions while talking about religious function. In a universe deserted by God, human beings are the ones who must be offered as a sacrifice to themselves and the world. And the body is that very temple, in which that sacrifice is being conducted. Here, by using the word sacrifice, we are referring to the waste of oneself, the extravagance and the offering which also create a closeness to death. As D. Dimitriadis - who translated the book and wrote the introduction - says: "The eroticism is nothing, if it is not a conflict with death and an endangered waste of human. The hedonism does not jeopardize anything, does not bet -

⁵ Lloyd de Mause, Psychohistory. Excerpt from the internet.

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therefore, doesn't lose - anything, and the only thing it does is to accumulate the delights and preserve the values, fortified behind them. That though, is the arranged, measured and secured life of almost all people - rebels or not - who, in the moment that they secure themselves in some automatism of their mind and body, do not anymore dare to make even a tiny step outside of it and restrict themselves dandily in rhetorics, declarations and iterations, which are the worst kind of spiritual death."⁶

Oneself's waste is used as means to attempt a rupture of boundaries between a person and the outside world; boundaries which are defined by the body. Therefore, the body must be stripped naked and offered through its excretions, its spasms, its screams and trembling. It's the unorthodox existence which wastes itself in a world finding meaning in self-preservation and mere survival. Thus, the eggs that sometimes crack on Simone's thighs and other times plunge deep in the toilet bottom are the ovules, cancelled reproductions

⁶ Georges Bataille, Introduction, p. 21

which signal the definitive disconnection between eroticism and reproductive function.

The "Story of the Eye" is, on a first level, a story about eroticism as transgression of reality, as a non-land, where dreams will encounter with nightmares, life will encounter death, pain will encounter pleasure. And through this multilateral junction, affirmation with our very existence will be achieved. This is the moment when a person ceases to be a narrow unit and releases itself to chaos; the world. In this case, eroticism reconnects the self with a generally hostile environment, in the same way imagination does; or through imagination itself.

"Ethics forces the body to lose its dignity. Religion makes it lose its sanctity. Politics makes it lose its complexity and finance makes it lose

the depth of its reserves. In a world which increases its wealth even during a person's sleep, the body loses its treasures. The industrial society forces it to automatize, belittle itself and has it committed in the world's necessities. When the body is excluded from the danger, its destination is amputated and the body turns into an incarnated foolery which roams between its excretions and crises. Could the contemporary person even conceive - let alone believe - that there is another state for the body, a different one than what it is experiencing today?"⁷

⁷ Georges Bataille, Introduction, p. 24-25

