Sidney Lumet's Humanism: The Return to the Father in *Twelve Angry Men*

Twelve Angry Men (1957), Lumet's first feature film after seven years of outstanding television production, stands to this date as one of his most thematically rich and cinematically evocative films. Treating such typical Lumet concerns as the necessity for personal responsibility if democratic processes are to survive, and the tendency for man's illusions, guilts, and prejudices to endanger his legal systems, *Twelve Angry Men* goes beyond the well-intentioned "message picture" to make a remarkable cinematic statement on the nature of the limitations both of the American jury system and of the American democratic process itself.

Reginald Rose's screenplay (expanded considerably from his 1954 teleplay) treats the jury deliberation in a murder trial of an 18-year-old minority youth accused of the premeditated killing of his father. We do not hear or see of the trial itself beyond the judge's direction to the jury. Nor do we witness the boy on trial except for one wordless shot of him near the beginning of the film. Lumet is uninterested in the legal attack and defense system, in the sometimes pyrotechnical emotional displays by both counsel and witness in American courtrooms. To the contrary, as is so frequent in his film, Lumet is far more interested in human character, in the nuances of the ways that people make up their minds about things (or think they do), than he is in the more obvious spectacle level of such legal melodramas as *Kramer vs. Kramer* or *And Justice For All*. *Twelve Angry Men* takes place in one small room for almost all its length, a jury room in which sit twelve ordinary men, chosen at random by a human institution that entrusts them with a decision that determines the future of a human life. To all but one of the jurors (all but two of whose names are never known to us), the boy seems clearly guilty as charged on the abundance of circumstantial evidence, and their responsibility seems obvious—to put a guilty man into the electric chair, despite his youth and the impoverished environment from which he has come and which may well have contributed to his alleged crime. But Juror #8 (Henry Fonda), a softspoken architect in his outside life, is not certain that the evidence is sufficiently clear or ample to establish, beyond reasonable doubt, the boy's guilt. To the surprise of almost all the other eleven jurors—and the anger of a few who feel that the case is so clear that they should be permitted to be about their business—Fonda insists that the case be discussed for awhile, that a little of their time is called for before a terminal decision is made regarding a human life.

For the approximately one and a half hours of the film (congruent with the elapsed time of the jury's deliberations), Lumet reveals the processes of thought and feeling of the twelve men as they grapple with the facts of the case, facts that seem to become

less clear, more elusive the more carefully they are reflected upon. Ultimately, the young defendant's guilt or innocence is never conclusively known to them, nor to us. To Lumet the boy's eventual fate, important as it is, is less significant than the ways in which it affects the minds and sensibilities of the twelve chosen to decide that destiny. Lumet's storied skill with actors is evident even in this early film, as all the jurors—even those with smaller speaking parts—emerge as recognizable human beings with whose conflicts and weaknesses we can identify. Though a cross-section of middle-class and lower middle-class New Yorkers, they are individualized by Lumet's unobtrusive yet sharply probing camera eye, sometimes seen from behind Fonda's shoulder as the man of reason and deliberation attempts to argue some jurors out of their prejudices and to persuade others out of their unconsidered conformity or fear. Several of the jurors (John Fiedler, Edward Binns, Martin Balsam, Jack Klugman), are "average" men, some more intelligent and reflective than others, who wish justice to be done, yet whose natural tendency to follow others leads them often to defer to the ill-considered judgments of the impatient and careless (Jack Warden, Robert Webber), the intemperate (Ed Begley), or the deeply conflicted (Lee J. Cobb). As pivotal to the decisions and conflicts of these less self-realized jurors is E. G. Marshall, whose greater insight and intelligence sometimes is as endangered by his own preconceptions and illusions as by the dogmatism and prejudice of those more fearful and dependent than he. A superior actor's picture, *Twelve Angry Men* provides a fine contrast "between alliances formed for intellectual reasons and for emotional needs".[1]

At a sociological level, Lumet's film clearly reflects strong concern with the constituent parts of a living democracy, as the wiser and more emotionally stable jurors must responsibly lead those men with less self-awareness and self-knowledge than they, if democracy is to have any chance to work fairly and justly. Though there is little doctrinaire preaching on the subject of democracy, the audience is led to respond favorably to those jurors—Fonda, Sweeney, Voskovec—for whom reason, the liberal vision of the world and of man, are paramount. Nowhere is Rose's screenplay more subtly eloquent than in the scene in which Voskovec, an East European immigrant watchmaker now proud of his American citizenship, berates Warden, the successful marmalade salesman, for casting a crucial vote out of no more considered motive than simple indifference and haste, so that he can get to his baseball game on time. Whenever Voskovec speaks of democracy he does so simply, out of the harsh experience of a man who has seen another political system up close and has found it wanting. He insists that if men are to govern themselves and their social relationships fairly and reasonably, they must be guided by principle. As he forces Warden for the first time to state his convictions for casting his vote, to ask questions of himself, Lumet frames Voskovec coming toward Warden's seat into an extremely tight close-up, but with the camera tilted only slightly up at the watchmaker, as if to minimize the European's "heroism" and to make him less important than the convictions for which he stands. The subtlety of this low-angle shot in an emotionally heightened scene underscores visually that though Voskovec may regard Warden with contempt, he does not consider himself—nor does Lumet consider him—intrinsically superior to the all-American baseball fan.

Earlier in the film, as a few of the jurors take a break from the sometimes angry debate, Lumet's meditative camera follows Fonda and Binns to the washroom, where Binns, an earnest working man who honestly disagrees with Fonda, states his conviction of the boy's guilt. After a critical comment about the irrationality and unfairness of some of the jurors who support his own position, Binns says, "I'm not used to supposin', I'm just a workin' man, my boss does all the supposin'." Yet he calls Fonda back as he is about to return to his seat in the jury room with, "But supposin' you do talk us all out of this and the kid really did knife his father?" The well-intentioned juror misses the point, of course, in that the entire thrust of the jury system is at least as much to protect the innocent as to convict the guilty. Holding Binns in steady

mid-shot during this brief scene, Lumet suggests more, however, than the intellectual vacuity of this decent man, the fact that men who do not exercise their imaginative faculty, who do not "suppose," make weak cogs in a social system based supposedly upon the imaginative use of reason. That this sequence takes place in the most mundane location of the film underscores the basic importance of the theme of democracy in *Twelve Angry Men*. Lumet further emphasizes his concern by the last shot of this sequence, as Warden chatters aimlessly to Fonda about baseball and his success selling marmalade: as Warden talks on, Lumet holds Fonda in frame left, standing at the wash basin, cleaning his nails so long that it seems almost obsessive. Lumet plays no favorites in *Twelve Angry Men*; here its "hero" shows a penchant for fastidious cleanliness. It is not the character of Juror #8 that Lumet celebrates in the film, but rather the man's reasoned use of principle.

Lumet visually enhances his concern with the workings of the liberal democratic system early in the film when, having walked into the barren, sultry jury room Warden and Binns manage, with a difficulty emblematic of the film's action, to raise the window together. Moments later, it is Robert Webber, a slogan-spouting advertising executive in private life and one of the least sympathetic of the jurors, who hits on the democratic idea that each of the eleven convinced of the defendant's guilt present their reasons in turn and in order in an attempt to convince Fonda of the rightness of a guilty verdict. But it is the four-minute opening sequence of the film that most impressively and succinctly (and wordlessly) represents the principles of reason and liberalism that *Twelve Angry Men* upholds. After an establishing shot of the city courthouse, Lumet's camera tilts very slowly upward at its four framing pillars, with a huge lamp hanging down from the exact center of the frame, at the top of which is seen a motto carved in stone: "Administration of Justice is the Firmest Pillar of Good Government." Against the background sound of city traffic noise, Lumet cuts to an equally slow downward tilt from inside the courthouse, from a large chandelier at ceiling level down to the center cupola, again perfectly framed between four inner pillars. Pausing at the second landing level, the camera observes five people passing slowly near one another from several directions and converging at a point directly beneath the hanging chandelier. Their carefully orchestrated passage, reminiscent of the ballet-like passing sequence in Welles's *Magnificent Ambersons*, offers a symmetrical arrangement that parallels the carefully framed backdrop against which they move; by his formal composition and intra-shot montage, Lumet suggests a tone of almost classical stateliness and rationality to the forthcoming action. The extraordinarily leisurely camera movements featuring but one cut in almost four minutes, ending in a slow tracking shot to the outside of the courtroom where the boy's trail is being conducted, imply that the course of human justice is glacially slow, and that only the classical values of ordered, reasoned, meditative inquiry will possibly defeat the irrational prejudice that we are soon to see dominating the jury room. Typically, Lumet's cinematic technique does not call attention of itself here, but its union with the film's thematic and moral meaning serves to remind the film viewer that the point of technique in any art form is less for spectacle than for serving the thematic values of the work of art itself. Rarely a pretentious, self-conscious artist, Lumet here reveals, quite early in his directorial career, that his central aesthetic interests lie in joining artistic content and form as closely as possible into a mutually integrative web of meaning.

Part of the subtext of that meaning throughout *Twelve Angry Men* is the notion of the significance of personal responsibility if a just, civilized order is to continue and flourish. A central concern in many of Lumet's films—*Prince of the City, Serpico, Network, Just Tell Me What You Want, Fail Safe*—the responsibility of the individual is especially pertinent in *Twelve Angry Men* in the characterizations of Fonda, Voskovec, Sweeney, and Balsam. Fonda risks censure and ridicule by all his peers on the jury for his initial stand that, "Well, I guess we talk . . . it's not easy to raise my

hand and send a boy off to die without talking about it first." Throughout the first half of the film, he continues to risk the sneering disapproval of Warden and Begley, and even the implied violence of Cobb, whom he goads and satirizes on occasion to try to show him his own potential for violence that subconsciously prejudices him against the youthful defendant. Fonda occasionally pontificates on personal responsibility (one of the film's few aesthetic weaknesses); a more subtly crucial sequence involving the theme concerns Martin Balsam, the jury foreman. Trying to organize the proceedings, he is called "a kid" by Begley. When he challenges Begley that someone has to chair the jury and asks him to take the first chair, Begley promptly backs off assuming the responsibility. When Webber, trying to smooth over the rift, denies the importance altogether of the principle of jury leadership, Lumet cuts to Balsam seated twisted in his foreman's chair, in extreme close-up right profile, with Warden's offscreen unintentionally ironic condolence, "You stay in there and pitch," emphasizing his feelings of powerlessness and disgust. After Fonda attempts to salvage something of his pride and of the group's order, Balsam is again shown, face turned away from the jury table, saying, "I don't care *what* you do," resignedly chewing his nails.

Shortly after this, Fonda gambles on a second ballot—this one secret—and Sweeney, the oldest member of the jury by many years, changes his vote.[2] As Lumet cuts down-angle at him to stress his function and not any sense of self-importance, Sweeney speculates about chance and possibility, and defends Fonda's motives for standing heretofore alone against the group. But as he speaks, Warden insults the old man by leaving the table for the men's room; as Sweeney demonstrates against this indignity, Fonda says softly, "He can't hear you, he never will." Here Lumet interweaves, as he does often in the film, a motif of fathering that becomes an important visual correlative to the theme of the necessity for personal responsibility in an increasingly depersonalized, bureaucratized world. The boy is on trial for the primal crime, the murder of the father, the crime that Freud posits as underlying all other feelings of guilt and so much human misery. Throughout his attempt to induce fairness and reason among the jurors weighing this alleged crime, Fonda—and to a lesser extent Sweeney, Voskovec, and E. G. Marshall—become fathers to the other jurors, disclosing to some of them to some degree, at least, the sources of their irrational responses to the issues in the trial. Lumet, always sensitive to psychoanalytical motifs in his films, enhances the dramatic and visual power of *Twelve Angry Men* through the use of these motifs.

Our first image of fathering (aside from a brief glimpse of a man carrying a child in the wordless four-minute sequence that opens the film) is hardly reassuring: Lumet cuts from the opening sequence to a close-up of a bored-looking judge, instructing the jury on the law of premeditation in murder. As the judge concludes his comments with, "You're faced with a grave responsibility; thank you, gentlemen," his right hand is propping up his cheek as with his left he reaches for a glass of water; and we sense that, although he is languidly adhering to the forms of the law, he is ignoring its spirit and thus setting a poor example for at least some members of the jury. (Lumet at this point pans very slowly over the jury panel for the first time: Warden and Cobb seem not to pay any attention to what the judge says.) As the jurors leave, Lumet stages one of his memorable sequences in the film: shot from over the defendant's (John Savoca's) right shoulder, as he must perceive them, we see the twelve jurors file out towards the jury room. Some are seen looking back at the boy nervously, but Webber just flips his lapels to cool off while idly glancing at the youth, his mind obviously made up, his guilty vote cast before he reaches the jury room. Lumet then cuts to an extreme close-up of the defendant's face, an unforgettable image that Lumet holds for twenty seconds. He is a boy looking younger than his eighteen years. He is perhaps Mexican or Puerto Rican, but is quite light-skinned. (Soon after this shot, the bigot Begley will rant that it's not surprising that "these kids" murder their fathers.) Most memorable are the boy's eyes. They stare out at the courtroom, not angrily but

passively; whether all-knowing or uncomprehending we never know. For the final seconds of this shot, Lumet gradually superimposes his face over the empty jury room where his judges will decide upon his life. As the superimposition occurs, his eyes are sharply downcast; the entire shot is from a slightly down angle as if to accentuate his vulnerability at the hands of these fathers.

As the men mill about waiting to convene, Binns approaches the men's room door to summon Sweeney, then helps him into his chair, treating the elder with respect he will show him throughout the film. Here, Sweeney does not yet fulfill the father role psychologically, but merely chronologically, until Fonda's courage and determination—which initially place Fonda in the role of father to Sweeney—enable the older man to assume a leadership role beginning at the time Sweeney changes his vote to not guilty. Particularly interesting is Lumet's handling of the relationship between the Fonda-Sweeney axis and Juror #3, Lee J. Cobb. Cobb, who has driven his own son from him because of his barely suppressed violence many years before, is the juror most in need of fathering and the most irresponsible in terms of his ability to exercise rational judgment in an issue that calls up dimly realized personal associations for him that are highly charged with subliminal energy. Cobb runs a messenger service (early in the film he hands his card to businessman Marshall saying he "started with nothing"); his occasional turning to Marshall for reassurance, particularly when his emotional gaps have been exposed by Fonda or Sweeney, suggests that Cobb himself has experienced an unfortunate relationship with his own father that has soured him to the extent that he has become dictatorial and unforgiving in most of his human relationships. One of the subtlest camera movements in the film occurs just as Marshall gives his opening arguments against Fonda near the start of the film. Cobb, having finished his statement to the group (which concerned the old man who testified he lived in the room beneath the scene of the crime and heard everything, walks slowly around the table toward the slowly backward tracking camera toward the water cooler, looking intently at a small photograph—we learn later it is his estranged son—as Marshall's voice off-screen says that he feels it's not the jury's business to go into the reasons why the defendant "grew up the way he did." At these words, Cobb, now in extreme closeup, looks up sharply from his son's picture. Though he says nothing and the camera almost immediately shifts to another juror, Lumet swiftly etches the first touching of the film's rawest nerve. Moments later, as Marshall is discussing the exhibit murder weapon—a switchblade stilletto—the camera tracks slowly, following Marshall back to his seat at the table; just at the instant that Marshall recounts that the defendant allegedly has had another fight with his father, Cobb alone of the other jurors is visible in deepest frame behind Marshall.

During the episode where Fonda attempts to disprove the testimony of the old man who said he heard the crime committed in the room above his, Sweeney movingly attests to the old witness's possible motive for testifying, leaving unspoken his own fears of his own existence as a forgotten, unknown old man. As Cobb berates Sweeney for his sympathy to the old witness, Lumet cuts to Sweeney twice in reaction shots that key Binns' defense of Sweeney, whom he is beginning to appreciate for enlightening him. Binns threatens Cobb, reminding him that he "ought to treat an old man with respect." Sweeney continues with an argument that gets at the heart of why Cobb and the other jurors who possess minimal self-understanding have such difficulty in acting responsibly: that the old witness because of his loneliness, his need for a moment in the sun might have come to believe his own story. Lumet for the first time treats a theme he is to return to again and again in his films, man's propensity to delude himself, to become so immured in his illusions that he comes to be bound by them, even to the extent that he is unaware of his self-induced imprisonment. In the latter half of the film, Cobb is seen as increasingly isolated from the rest of the jurors because of such psychological unawareness. Particularly effective is the shot, after Fonda has goaded Cobb into rushing at him in an attempt to show him how close to

the surface are men's impulses, in which Lumet isolates Cobb from the group so completely that he is out of the frame, as the rest stare into a seemingly non-existent plane of space. Moments later, as Cobb tries to regain lost prestige with the group, by giving his demonstration of how the angle of the knife's descent could have been down and in, even allowing for a seven inch height difference between the murdered father and the smaller son, he unwittingly becomes son to Fonda's father as in one of the film's tensest moments, he approaches the camera (Fonda's point of view), slowly raises the knife from a stopped posture, then quickly starts his hand, as Lumet switches to a two-shot, before slowly dropping the knife into Fonda's breast pocket. While seemingly he has gained status and relieved his emotional blocks by this thought-murder of the father, Lumet's visual irony catches Cobb, reducing his stature considerably below that of Fonda, metaphorically as well as physically. Cobb's performance here as throughout is superb, as his voice breaks as he says, "Nobody's hurt . . . down and in, down and in." But Lumet holds the two-shot long enough for the calm Fonda to repeat his words, thus emphasizing Fonda's own superior role in the tortuous process of teaching Cobb self-awareness and, with it, social responsibility.

In addition to the fine performances by Cobb and Fonda, Lumet elicits superior performances by all the members of his cast, both individually and as an ensemble. Balsam speaks movingly of the joy he gains from his high school coaching job, Klugman of his nurture in the city's ghettos. Lumet's skill and care in extensive rehearsals produces a gem by Voskovec. When Webber patronizes Voskovec by this suggestion that the finest watchmakers come from his part of Europe, Voskovec's courtly, barely discernible little bow perfectly ironizes the ad man's unconscious penchant for consistently adopting the very jargon and hypocrisy he publicly scorns. Webber's performance enhances the motifs of the imprisoning power of self-delusion, as at the start of the jury's deliberations, he is seen to adjust his collar and tie carefully, as if he thinks he is at a meeting of account executves. This self-proclaimed liberal amuses himself during his debate with polishing his sales pitch for his company's newest breakfast cereal, games of tic-tac-toe; his unconscious and cheapened liberalism is the focus of Lumet's most sustained visual satire in the film.

E. G. Marshall's performance is one of the film's most compelling and restrained. As the enlightened, rational, responsible conservative, he is Fonda's most formidable adversary, for in him Fonda does not oppose undue prejudice nor a careless mind. Juror #4 is a highly educated, judicious, and cultured stockbroker; he is convinced of the boy's guilt primarily because the boy cannot remember what he did after his father allegedly struck him twice the night of the murder, and because of the testimony of a woman who said she saw the killing through the windows of a passing elevated train from across the street. In another of Lumet's superior visual presentations in *Twelve Angry Men*, Marshall, ever the composed wasp, wearing his coat and tie through the oppressive summer heat even when a sudden storm forces the closing of the windows, is challenged by Fonda to remember his own movements of the last four evenings. Although Marshall calmly replies to Fonda's questioning that even under great stress he could remember exactly what he was doing at any recent time during his past (and thus he implies that the boy from an unprivileged class should be able to remember, too, if he were innocent), Fonda finds details that Marshall cannot recall, albeit the stockbroker's life is a comfortable one, with little stress. The sequence begins with a cut to Fonda over Marshall's right shoulder—a frame that Lumet uses often in the film to accentuate the cramped existential space man sometimes has for the working out of his problems and dilemmas. Then Lumet cuts down to Marshall over Fonda's left knee and elbow, a shot that seems to trap Marshall by further reducing the space in which he must think and try to remember. As he struggles to recall the title of a movie he saw a few evenings back when he was completely relaxed, Lumet frames Marshall against the window against which beats the rain from the storm. During cuts between the two men, the wooden sill below the window in

deep rear frame passes behind Marshall just at his neck, suggesting the distancing of his cognitive faculties from his abilities to feel into the greatly stressed emotional condition of a boy who has been seriously underprivileged since early childhood. Fonda, however, is completely framed by a door far behind him, suggesting his greater emotional spaciousness and psychological integration. Further, Lumet gradually increases the sound of the rain driving against the window during his cuts to Marshall and the background windowsill in this sequence, as Marshall comes to learn from the wiser juror something of the difficulty—particularly for the less privileged classes—of containing life's mystery, its constantly changing impressions, into comforting fixities. As Marshall makes these discoveries, Lumet's final extreme close-up reveals a single bead of sweat forming on his forehead.

At other points in the film, Lumet uses the jury room window and its connotations of psychological spaciousness as a backdrop for other small learning experiences in the jurors' paths to greater self-knowledge and responsibility. Early in the film, Webber comments to Fonda as both stand at the window that, even though he's lived in New York all his life, he never realized the Woolworth Building was exactly there. When Begley, the bigoted garage owner, after demeaning Balsam for trying to conduct the jury's discussions according to some principles of order, gains a glimmering of awareness that he fears the responsibility of himself acting as foreman, Lumet positions him at the window as he makes this unpleasant self-discovery. Fonda gazes out the window as he gambles on a second, secret ballot, hoping to find at least one ally in his fight for the boy's life. Just as the thunderstorm breaks late in the film, Balsam and Fonda close the windows and Balsam gives his moving speech about the joys he gains from his coaching work.

Director of Photography Boris Kaufman, one of the most distinguished cinematographers in black and white, and Lumet's most frequent cinematographer through the middle sixties, praised Lumet's "fine and sensitive . . . feel for camerwork,"[3] in an article dealing with the great difficulties of making the film dynamic given such a small working space. (Other than for the opening sequence, and the final sequence as the jurors leave the jury room, the entire film takes place on one set—the cramped, barely furnished jury room, "a room no larger than an average hotel room.") Lumet and Kaufman decided to make an advantage of the cramped space by making the sense of confinement an integral part of the visual mood. As the film's tensions mount, Lumet changes lenses to give the effect of crowding at the table over which the jurors argue. The lighting gradually grows darker as the thunderstorm approaches and as issues and men reach a breaking point. During the long take as the men first enter the jury room—to that point in his career, the longest, single continuous take in Kaufman's career—Lumet introduces the psychological characteristics of the jurors as they mill about the room, bump into one another, and through revealing gestures (Fonda's meditative tapping of his fingers as he stands at the window) and casual comments (the frustrated Begley's cynical comments about the defendant, Warden's clichéd talk about baseball) that seem irrelevant to the case, presages the inner nature of the combatants, twelve men, said Boris Kaufman, "whose backgrounds, attitudes, problems, and reasons behind their decisions had to be shown photographically as well as in the dialogue."[4]

Lumet has often been criticized by auteurist critics such as Andrew Sarris for being too "literary,"[5] yet has steadfastly refused to consider film as a wordless medium, while at the same time adhering to the principle that, as Kaufman said, in "good cinematography the camera should never distract the audience from the basic theme and never move without justification."[6] In a *New York Times* interview, Lumet spoke with typical *brio* about his distaste for the self-consciously "tricky" film. He vetoed having a glass top on the jury table to allow trick camera shots, and added:

> "Some people have suggested that the picture needs jazzing up. For instance, somebody had the idea that we should explain that all the regular jury rooms are occupied and

> have this in the basement, where we could show the exposed pipes and maybe the furnace in order to provide pictorial contrast. But we threw the idea out."

Speaking to the actors during rehearsal, Lumet commented:

> "There's going to be no artificiality in this. You are going to be the whole picture. This is not a tract. This is not a pro-jury or anti-jury thing. It's . . . about human behavior. No glass table tops. No basement room. Just you and the fullness of your behavior."[7]

As this remark indicates, Lumet's directorial significance is precisely his union of cinematic technique with literary and thematic moral meaning. Lumet may not always move the camera in ways that call immediate attention to themselves (thus his low ranking in Sarris' hierarchies), but, as shown above, his frame is rarely static but always full, busy with life's detail and flow; though the camera work is seldom spectacular, its controlled movement is subtle and filled with the movement of human event. Some critics habitually, and impressionistically, criticize Lumet for weak visuals and over-dependence on dialogue;[8] yet their reaction to a stunning Lumet shot is often that the shot has been created by the writer or the cinematographer. It is noteworthy here that Lumet creates all his own frames and shots, and has done so since the beginning of his directorial career.[9]

Indicative of Lumet's originality is the greater depth of characterization and theme in his finished film when compared to both versions of Reginald Rose's play of the same name.[10] For instance, Lumet represents the character of #9 (Joseph Sweeney) as stronger and more emotionally durable than Rose's original characterization of him as "long since defeated by life and now merely waiting to die." (114). As directed by Lumet, the foreman (Martin Balsam) is far more sensitive and aware of ambiguities than is indicated by Rose's original depiction of him as "impressed with the authority he has . . . petty . . . dogged." (113). Lumet's direction of Cobb (#3) brings out in full the messenger service owner's latent sadism barely hinted at in the play. The memorable shot of the defendant's face in extreme close-up for thirty seconds has no correlative in Rose's play; likewise, Lumet's brilliant early visual presentation of the hall of justice is absent in the play except for a bare reference to the play's judicial setting in the expanded version.[11] Most crucial, however, is the deletion in the film of the sentimentality that now and then surfaces in the play: early in the action when Sweeney remonstrates with Begley's bigotry (p. 120), Lumet omits reference to this flowery passage: "Somehow his (Fonda's) touch and his gentle expression calm the old man. He draws a deep breath and relaxes." Gone as well in the film is Rose's unnecessarily sensational episode where #3 advances upon #8 at the end of the play with the exhibit knife as if to stab him, and #8's grabbing the knife from him. Lumet also mercifully omits the closing close-up to "a slip of crumpled paper on which are scribbled the words 'not guilty.' " Indeed, even the longer version contains but three references to any sort of camera movement or technique.

Twelve Angry Men also reflects a strain of persistent liberalism in Lumet that is out of fashion among many of today's academic intellectuals as well as auterist film writers. Lumet has never favored radical-chic style or content in his films, and his strong penchant for psychoanalytic themes has also not endeared him to the film critics' establishment. Nowhere in the film is there deference to, for example, Webber's shallow liberal view that the American adversarial system is a perfect institution. Lumet's films are much like the basic themes in this film: the evidence is to be respected, theory is less trustworthy than the thereness and particularity of each instance of reality as the characters perceive it. Lumet refuses to make films that, as a group, easily fall into easy categories. Of course, consistent categories and theories make headlines, and so the Godards gain more fame as compared to the Frankenheimers, even though work without the easy theoretical supports may possess the greater excellence. Given Lumet's strong commitment that the technique must suit the theme of the particular work of art, his cinematic style has received much less attention than

it deserves and certain recurrent motifs and themes throughout the *oeuvre* have been unjustly ignored.

But although Lumet is an "old-fashioned" liberal committed to looking at themes of personal responsibility in many films, and to looking at each situation on its own terms, he refuses to give his audience what some liberals did in the 50s: the comforting illusion that there are relatively easy answers to complex questions. (See the ambiguities and unresolved situations at the end of *Prince of the City*, Lumet's recent crime drama, as we are moved both to applaud and despise the police informer played by Treat Williams.) All Lumet offers us in *Twelve Angry Men* is that, given the preponderance of unreason in this society in the 1950s (as perhaps best represented by Warden and Begley), the liberal and humane solution represented by Fonda is just possible on a limited basis, case by case. As it was in Emerson's time, democracy is still an individual, personal concern with no easy answers; just hard work and patience against the chicanery and ignorance all about us. This great theme—distinguishing Lumet's work from *Twelve Angry Men* and *Fail Safe* through *Serpico, Network,* and *Prince of the City*—is, of course, no more fashionable in the age of Godard than it was in the day of Emerson, for as the *Time* review noted, "The law is no better than the people who enforce it, and the people who enforce it are all too human."[12]

Perhaps Lumet's fine conjoining of theme and visual technique is most evident in the film's final sequence as Cobb caps his wrenching performance by admitting his frustration and sorrow over his past treatment of his son, as he tears up the boy's picture and sobs out the final "not guilty" that will clear the defendant on the existence of a reasonable doubt of his guilt. Lumet shows Cobb against the window of reality, of flux and change, as he cries out his symbolic confession. After Fonda helps Cobb put on his coat as the jurors get ready to leave, Lumet shows the anonymous jurors—with the significant exceptions of the film's prime fathers, Fonda and Sweeney, who momentarily introduce themselves—slowly coming down the steps beneath the columns seen in the opening sequence and one by one going their ways, some across the street into a park across from the courthouse. Cobb is the last one down the steps, walking very slowly, glancing at Fonda who disappears into frame right, boxed in by the two rows of stair railings in frame left, as if made partially aware by the events of the trial that he has yet far to go to reach the park across the street into the serene spaciousness of which the others have blended.

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NOTES

1 A. H. Weiler, New York Times 27 Apr. 1957, Sec. 2, p. 1.

2 The then 73-year-old Sweeney had first acted on Broadway in *The Klansmen*, which gave rise to *Birth of a Nation*. Lumet had first acted with him as a child actor and chose him specially for this part because of his "special inner energy." (Interview with Sidney Lumet, Aug. 1981).

3 Boris Kaufman, "Filming *Twelve Angry Men* On a Single Set," *American Cinematographer*, 37 (Dec. 1956), 724-625.

4 Kaufman, p. 725.

5 See Sarris' typically impressionistic account of Lumet's career in *The American Cinema* (New York: Dutton & Co., 1968), pp. 197-98.

6 Kaufman, p. 725.

[7] Don Ross, "A Dozen Happy Actors Become 'Twelve Angry Men'," *New York Times* (15 Jul. 1956, Sec. 4, p. 3.

[8] See Pauline Kael, "The Making of *The Group*," in *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1968), pp. 65-100.

[9] Interview with Lumet, August 1981. See also Dale Lucianao, "*Long Day's Journey Into Night*: An Interview with Sidney Lumet," *Film Quarterly*, 25, No. 1 (1971), 20-29.

[10] In his TV version, roughly half the length of Lumet's version, Rose had to cut much dialogue that gave dimension to character. (Rose, *Twelve Angry Men*, in *Six Television Plays*, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1956, p. 157). Rose comments: "As a motion picture . . . I think that *Twelve Angry Men* has grown in stature . . . much of the extra time has been spent in exploring the characters and their motivations for behaving as they do toward the defendant and each other." in an "Author's Commentary," Rose says that *Twelve Angry Men* is one of his most difficult plays to read, as it's the visual element that enables the audience to delineate the characters, since he labeled them only by number, and included only thumbnail descriptions of their characteristics.

[11] In William I. Kauffman, ed., *Great Television Plays*, Dell, 1969.

[12] *Time*, 29 Apr. 1957, p. 94.