About Elly ... and Polyneices or The Misfortunes of Postmodernity A Comparative Psychoanalytic Study of Sophocles’ Antigone and Asghar Farhadi’s About Elly

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Abstract

This paper attempts a psychoanalytically informed comparative study of Sophocles’ Antigone and Asghar Farhadi’s About Elly. Both pieces, the author believes, revolve around the problem of mourning. More specifically, the modern film and the ancient play both deal with the concern for a subject’s honour and standing after death (Elly and Polyneices respectively). By contrasting these two works, the author considers the differences between ancient and modern/postmodern tragedy as elaborated by Jacques Lacan. The latter’s reflections on the relation between tragedy and psychoanalysis will form an integral part of the paper’s focus. Moreover, Žižek’s re-appropriation of Lacan’s work on Paul Claudel as well as Patrick Guyomard’s critical work on Lacan’s reading of Antigone will pave the way towards a deepened original engagement with Farhadi’s film. What can this film, read in light of psychoanalytic theory as well as contemporary philosophy, tell us about our late modern predicament? More specifically, what light can About Elly shed on the decline of the “master signifier”, the heightening of the injunction to enjoy, the waning of the sense of shame as well as the increased difficulty to mourn in late modernity? Finally, the paper will consider what Farhadi’s film and Sophocles’ play can teach us about the desire that drives psychoanalysis.

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Introduction: On the Misfortunes of Courage

Ancient tragedy testifies to the centrality of a higher principle or “master signifier” as the primary directive for the actions of heroes and heroines. Where Oedipus’ master signifier lay in his unbending search for truth, Antigone’s tireless war waged against Creon was driven by her concern for her brother’s dignity and honour beyond death, the master signifier she places above the sanctity of her own life. Like Sophocles’ play, Farhadi’s About Elly centres on the lead character’s (Sepideh) distress around the legacy of Elly’s posthumous name. The title of the film overtly reveals its principal focus: what will be said and thought about Elly after her death? The theme of courage is central to Sophocles’ Antigone (tragedy in general), Asghar Farhadi’s About Elly and psychoanalytic theory and practice. Like Antigone which is about the courage to bury the dead with dignity, About Elly also revolves around courage in the face of death. The film ends with a moment of truth where Sepideh is confronted with an abyssal ethical decision. Will she, like Antigone, act beyond fear or will she succumb to the pressure of the symbolic big Other, represented by her bourgeois Iranian classmates (the happy few), urging her to drop all concern for the deceased Elly in favour of a utilitarian calculus placing their own well-being above all else. Finally, psychoanalysis is also about the courage and passion to face subjective truth. Is the courage for truth in psychoanalysis the same as the courage of Antigone? Can Antigone or tragedy in general, as Lacan thought, provide a model for the desire of psychoanalysis? What can the comparative study of Antigone and About Elly teach us about the differences between ancient, modern and postmodern tragedy? More importantly, what can we learn from About Elly concerning our own late modern predicament characterized by increased injunctions to enjoy and the deterioration of the master signifier? Has the time of higher principles expired in late modernity? Has our “postmodern” condition terminated our passionate attachment to a cause binding us to a master signifier above the petty calculations of the management of existence thereby opening the space for a cynical and sinister “psycho-administration of everyday life”? What are the destinies and vicissitudes of truth, honour, fidelity, mourning, filiation and exogamy in the melancholic constellation of postmodernity where the loss of the master signifier and, concomitantly, the loss of shame and courage have transpired with neither notice nor chagrin?

Sepideh’s Lies or The Misfortunes of Truth

Throughout Farhadi’s film we witness the numerous lies of the protagonist Sepideh. At the start of the film she lies about having found proper accommodations for their holiday. She also lies to the villagers about Ahmad and Elly, claiming that they are on their honeymoon (this lie, intended to facilitate securing accommodations, would come back to haunt her at the end of the film when the old lady referred to Ahmad

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2 For those who have not seen the film or who need to refresh their memory, the following brief synopsis of the plot may be of help. A group of young law graduates go on a weekend getaway to the north of Iran (a common vacation destination). The group is comprised of three couples (Sepideh and Amir, Naazi and Manoochehr, Shohreh and Peyman) and Ahmad who is on a short visit from Germany after recently divorcing his German ex-wife. Accompanying the group are their children (most notably Arash, the son of Peyman and Shohreh, who almost drowns) and Elly, a young schoolteacher (she is the teacher of Sepideh and Amir’s daughter). Sepideh invites Elly to join the group in the hope of setting her up with Ahmad. Under Sepideh’s pressure, Elly agrees to join the group despite having a fiancé. Elly is placed in a deep inner conflict. She has lost interest in her fiancé (Alireza) and is thus a little curious about meeting Ahmad. However, she feels such guilt about being on this trip that she soon decides to return to Tehran. Unfortunately, her efforts to leave are hindered by Sepideh’s insistence that she should stay (Sepideh even hides her bag so Elly is forced to remain). The turning point of the story occurs when Arash nearly drowns in the sea. After rescuing the child, the group realizes that Elly is missing. After searching for her at length, they realize that she likely drowned trying to save Arash. The group decides to advise her fiancé about the tragedy. This leads to a great ethical conflict. Should they tell him that Elly told Sepideh about him thereby absolving her name while risking getting blamed for Elly’s death? Or should they lie and say that Sepideh never knew Elly was engaged thereby tarnishing Elly’s name as a betrayer and liar while saving their own skin? Though the end of the film shows Sepideh’s deep concern with what Alireza will think about Elly, Sepideh cannot muster the courage to tell him that Elly did, in fact, speak of her engagement. This last lie of the film will forever drown Elly’s name in disgrace.
as Elly’s husband in front of Alireza, her actual fiancé). Moreover, Sepideh never tells Ahmad that Elly has a fiancé, a fact that would surely have altered his comportment towards the young woman. Finally, at the film’s denouement, as tension reaches an anguishing climax, Sepideh lies to Alireza claiming that Elly never mentioned him or their engagement. This last scene, however, testifies to a great confusion concerning the thin boundary separating truth from lies. When asked what to say to Alireza regarding their knowledge concerning his existence, they all proudly claim that it would best to “tell the truth”. However, this statement, for all its simplicity, is highly equivocal: what is truth according to Sepideh is not truth according to the rest of the group as she knew about Alireza while they were ignorant of him. The confusion here between truth and lies touches more essentially on a deep psychoanalytic insight, namely that truth can only be expressed in lies. Is Sepideh’s last lie to Alireza a lie or does it better deliver the truth of Elly’s desire? Does Sepideh betray Elly or does she allow her to find some freedom from her fiancé, some space for her oppressed desires to finally manifest posthumously? The alms box, with which the film begins, may represent the idea of making a wish and thereby evoke the theme of desire. At the end of the film, Amir hints that Elly may have used the box thus raising the question as to the possible content of her wish. What does Elly want, one may ask echoing Freud’s famous quip. Is it possible that Sepideh’s last lie to Alireza is closer to the wish Elly cast in the alms box?

Truth and lies are not stringently opposed according to psychoanalysis, something Freud (1905) discovered in his exploration of jokes. In this work, Freud isolates a category of jokes that do not attack “a person or an institution but the certainty of our knowledge itself, one of our speculative possessions” (p. 115). He names these the “sceptical jokes” and narrates the following now famous joke by way of example: “Two Jews met in a railway carriage at a station in Galicia. “Where are you going?” asked one. “To Cracow”, was the answer. “What a liar you are!” broke out the other. “If you say you’re going to Cracow, you want me to believe you’re going to Lemberg. But I know that in fact you’re going to Cracow. So why are you lying to me?”” (p. 115). Freud here explains that the “serious substance of the joke is the problem of what determines the truth”. In this light, he asks crucial questions that resonate fittingly with our own questions regarding Sepideh’s lies to Alireza. “Is it the truth”, Freud asks, “if we describe things as they are without troubling to consider how our hearer will understand what we say?” (p. 115). “Or”, he continues, “is this only Jesuitical truth, and does not genuine truth consist in taking the hearer into account and giving him a faithful picture of our own knowledge?” (p. 115). In the last scenes of About Elly we are certainly not dealing with jokes but undoubtedly the same conclusions can be drawn regarding our speculative possessions”, which are here also deeply attacked albeit in the mode of tragedy rather than comedy. Sepideh’s lies perhaps take better account not only of the hearer, in this case Alireza, but also of the desire of the subject in question, namely Elly. Our analysis of this scene of the film may arguably add a little nuance to Freud’s analysis of sceptical jokes. The content of the second Jew’s truth/lie was his travel destination. With Sepideh, however, matters are a little more complicated as what is at stake is a subject’s (Elly’s) desire. When speaking of desire (one’s own or another’s), the distinction between “Jesuitical” and genuine truth is perhaps even more important; here the technical method of “representation by the opposite” (p. 115) is the general rule rather than a specific case. In other words, one can approach a subject’s desire only through the modality of lie, something Lacan stated unequivocally when he proposed that “there is no truth that, in passing through awareness, does not lie” (Lacan, 1977, p. vii).3

3 The connection between truth and lies also constitutes a central aspect of Heidegger’s thought. For Heidegger (1967), truth is intricately bound to untruth in the same way that “concealment” and “unconcealment” also form a loyal pair. Heidegger returns to the ancient Greek term “aletheia” – composed of the word “lethe” meaning “oblivion” prefixed by the negation “a” – in order to show that from the outset of the earliest philosophical conception truth and untruth were intimately and internally connected rather than stringently opposed in a simple relation of externality. Bentham’s earlier theory of truth as fiction, central to Lacan’s theorization of truth, also did much to rob us of our “speculative possessions” (for a detailed overview of Bentham’s theory, see Žižek (1993)). The work of Lévi-Strauss (1949) on myth also contributed greatly to Lacan’s conceptualization of truth in terms of myth, fiction and/or lie. Interestingly, Lévi-Strauss here argues that in an analytic cure, “the patient constructs an individual myth with the help of elements from his/her past” (Lévi-Strauss cited in Lacan, 2007, p. 115). This influence came to fruition in Lacan’s (2007) re-reading of Freud’s Ratman in light of Lévi-Strauss’ theory of myth.
Psychoanalytic Discourse

A Comparative Psychoanalytic Study of Sophocles’ Antigone and Asghar Farhadi’s About Elly

Sepideh’s Pure Desire or The Misfortunes of Honour

In Seminar VII, Lacan puts forward the controversial claim that Antigone provides a model for psychoanalysis. Tragedy, he argues, is at the heart of psychoanalytic experience not so much because of Oedipus as because of “the key word” (Lacan, 1986, p. 286) catharsis evocative of the dimension of purity, a notion central to Lacan’s theorization of desire in The Ethics of Psychoanalysis. In this seminar, Lacan reminds us that Antigone opposes Creon because of the irreplaceability of her brother (ibid: 324) since, as she puts it, “But when father and mother both were hidden in death/ no brother’s life would bloom for me again” (Sophocles, 1991, p. 216). By contrast to Goethe, who hopes someone will demonstrate that this passage was later interpolated (Lacan, 1986, p. 298), Lacan holds that it sheds crucial light on Antigone’s passion. When Antigone simply iterates that “my brother is my brother”, Lacan takes this tautology to mean that Antigone maintains the unique value of Polyneices’ being beyond anything he may have actually done (p. 325). From this tautological statement Lacan establishes the purity of her desire. Antigone is said to be “autonomous”; she is driven by a pure unbridled desire. Antigone’s pure desire has a very evident master signifier, namely her brother’s dignity in death. Likewise, Creon is also driven by a pure desire. His pure desire too has a master signifier, namely to protect the sanctity of his power and authority as well as the integrity and peace of the city.

Much like Antigone and Creon, Sepideh blindly follows her unbridled desire beyond castration. The film testifies bountifully to this in various instances listed below:

- The film begins with Sepideh screaming out of the window as the car speedily rushes through the dark tunnel. Ironically, these law school graduates behave unlawfully and dangerously with the puerile recklessness of teenagers.
- She spills coal on the rug as she erratically grabs the shisha pipe away from the men forcing them to join the ladies in the house.
- When asked to return the volleyball to the group, she playfully kicks the ball out of bounds insouciant of the annoyance caused to her husband and other players. Like a child needy of attention, Sepideh is unconcerned about whether her silly pranks are of any amusement to others. She is the only one entertained by her own shenanigans.
- She refuses to let Elly go, depriving her of the very autonomy that she herself abuses in abundance. She even hides Elly’s bag making her departure impossible.
- Sepideh’s lack of subtlety and understanding of boundaries is metaphorically represented by her decision to place toilet paper at the dinner table, something that Ahmad comments on flippantly. Is the ill-placed toilet paper testament to Sepideh’s lack of shame and her will “to shit where she eats”? The least one could say is that the awkwardly placed toilet paper symbolizes Elly’s unease among Sepideh’s friends, a young school teacher amidst a group of evidently wealthier professionals. Arguably, the toilet paper foreshadows her eventual status as waste object, a dead body enveloped by a black shroud. She transitions from the object a captivating everyone’s desire and curiosity to the object a as waste product cast into the sea.
- Sepideh has been compared to Austen’s Emma (Kreilkamp, 2015), a woman arrogantly meddling in other people’s business, usually people of lower social classes like Elly.
- Amir calls Sepideh “sarkhod”4, something that can be likened to Antigone’s autonomy.

The essential difference between Sepideh and Antigone is that the former’s desire has no master signifier. Where Antigone was driven by honour and the passion for virtue, Sepideh is compelled solely by the matchmaker’s puerile jouissance; no higher principle above petty jouissance governs her desire. This crucial difference will form the basis for distinguishing ancient, modern and postmodern tragedy from one another.

4 This Farsi word literally means self-willed or independent without the positive valence usually attached to these words in English. Rather, the word implies a kind of narcissistic unconcern for the consequences of one’s actions on others and an inability to consult other minds before making an erratic and impulsive decision.
Elly’s Gift or The Misfortunes of Fidelity

According to Lacan (2001) and perhaps even more explicitly Žižek (2016), an important gap divides ancient from modern tragedy. Where the former testifies to a higher principle for which the hero is willing to die, the latter, by contrast, attests to a radical absence of such a master signifier such that the death of the hero (if one can even speak of a hero) remains uncannily without redemptory justification or meaning. According to Žižek (2016), Sophocles’ Antigone does not simply throw herself into death; the story is not about a simple wish to die as nobler concerns guide the course of her actions and the unfolding of the narrative. As a result, rather than embody an extra-symbolic real, Antigone stands for the proper burial of her brother, an unambiguously symbolic mandate. The purity of her desire is unequivocally tied to the purity of the master signifier of this burial.

In Either/Or, Žižek (2016) explains, Kierkegaard puts forward a proposal for a modern Antigone where the conflict would be entirely internal. There would thus be no need for Creon. Antigone would love her father Oedipus while knowing the truth about his incest and murder. Her deadlock would consist of the fact that she cannot share this knowledge with others. By contrast to Sophocles’ Antigone, she is unable to act and the unbearable burden of her secret drives her to death, her only respite from being deprived of sharing her pain with others. Žižek contrasts this Kierkegaardian modern Antigone to his own suggestion for a postmodern version where Antigone publicly denounces her father and brother. However, the key is that she does this paradoxically out of love. Her public outcry would, as it were, blemish her image and make them look better, as the “innocent” victims of her violent condemnations. This, Žižek explains, would isolate her even more as no one would understand that her act was committed out of love. Her predicament would be akin to that of Judas enjoined to betray Christ and pay the price. Following Lacan’s (2001) seminal commentary of Paul Claudel’s L’Otage, Žižek argues that all that would remain signalling that Antigone’s act was one of love would be a small tic distorting her face. According to Lacan, there is no beauty at the end of Claudel’s play. The heroine’s (Sygne de Coûfontaine) only feature distinguishing her from others is a little tic contorting her mien. This tic, Žižek argues, is the trace of her resistance, the last insignia minimally suggesting that her sacrifices were not all in vain. One could argue that Žižek’s postmodern Antigone robs us of yet another “speculative possession”, namely our certainty concerning the abyss that would allegedly separate fidelity from betrayal.

Transposing these reflections on ancient, modern and postmodern tragedy on About Elly renders a complicated picture. In this film, we see that Sepideh is also deprived of sharing her pain with others. She is forced to keep the secret (regarding the fact that Elly did in fact tell her about her fiancé) and silently watch as Elly is disgraced after death. In her case it is not even about sharing pain or suffering but about sharing her guilt not only for the death of Elly but also for defiling her name. If Nietzsche is right to claim that suffering is easier to bear than guilt then About Elly may represent a “post-postmodern” tragedy about a subject who cannot bring her guilt (rather than suffering) into the open, into the field of the Other. About Elly would thus testify to the paradox of a melancholic forbidden the right to indulge in self-complaint. In Mourning and Melancholia, Freud speaks of the tireless self-complaints of melancholic subjects noting how “far from evincing towards those around them the attitude of humility and submissiveness … they make the greatest nuisances of themselves” (Freud, 1917, p. 248). Sepideh is deprived of even that as the big Other (her friends) explicitly refuses to hear anything of her guilt. Peyman overtly tries to exculpate Sepideh by confronting her with the thought that Elly was responsible for her own decision to join them for the holiday. He thus hopes to absolve the group of any responsibility in the tragedy.

Alireza’s predicament is somewhat like Sepideh’s insofar as he too may not be able to share his pain within the realm of social otherness as it may be too humiliating to admit that he was so despised by his own fiancée. However, unlike Sepideh, he is spared guilt. The dishonour he imagines has been inflicted on him dispenses him of responsibility. At the film’s denouement, Sepideh and Alireza are left entirely alone,
outside the domain of Otherness. Alireza is alone in his car haunted by the Louis Vuitton bag staring at him through the rear-view mirror while Sepideh buries her head in her arms eternally separated from the rest of the group by her abysmal guilt. He is left in pain, while she is left with guilt – this is what warrants characterizing her position as “post-postmodern”. The line that separates Alireza’s predicament from Sepideh’s plight (also the line demarcating the postmodern from the “post-postmodern”) is represented by the Louis Vuitton bag, a veritably over-determined symbol. For Alireza, the bag is the object-gaze reminding him of what he did not have to win Elly’s love, namely the social status of Ahmad (a lawyer living abroad). However, if love is “the gift of what one doesn’t have” (Lacan, 2001) then the bag’s irreducible presence may contribute to a growing cynicism in Alireza who may henceforth resentfully cling to the belief that his lack was the ruination of love rather than its condition of possibility. Indeed, we may generalize and define cynicism in love (a most contemporary cynicism) as the tragic inability to acknowledge the ineradicable tie linking love to lack. The bag thus becomes the object-gaze shaming Alireza by revealing to him, so to speak, his unbearable “lackness” of being. In so shaming him, however, the bag frees him from guilt. The danger for Alireza is that he risks eternally taking up the position of a wounded beautiful soul, one who was wronged and who thus owes nothing to the world. The blow he delivers to Ahmad’s face signals this potential lack of scruple. Alireza’s wrath will destroy not only Elly’s name and shame but also the memory of his love. When asked whether he would relay the news to Elly’s parents he dismissively tells the group “do it yourselves!” revealing that he has no care to share closure with her family. For Sepideh, by contrast, the bag, which she impudently hid from Elly, is a signer marking her guilt and weighing heavily on her conscience, a heaviness symbolically rendered by the car ponderously stuck on the beach. Moreover, her guilt must remain withdrawn from Otherness relegated to a post-postmodern silence and finding expression only in isolated ambiguous symptoms difficult to decipher (coughs, nausea).

Elly’s plight, like that of Sygne de Coûfontaine, is entirely postmodern as she too sacrificed much for Alireza without any recognition. She stayed with him despite not loving him, kept her engagement ring on throughout the holiday and chose to significantly curtail her time away. Sadly, however, nothing remained as a sign of her fidelity and sacrifice. She will be remembered as an absolute betrayer. Like Toussaint Turelure in relation to Sygne, Alireza begs the group (Sepideh in particular) for a sign of Elly’s fidelity. However, the only signs he receives are Sepideh’s aforementioned tics and Naazi’s slip of the tongue. The latter could have provided him with what he was longing for, proof that Elly spoke of him. Sadly he misses this signal and Sepideh, pressured by the group, refuses to grant him an explicit sign even though Elly, Sepideh and Alireza’s salvations all depend on it as Elly would be saved from dishonour, Sepideh from guilt and Alireza from wrath. Elly is disgraced as her name is drowned in shame as her body in the sea. In the end, all of Elly’s efforts and sacrifices to maintain her integrity become superfluous. There is, indeed, no beauty here as we are confronted directly with the real. Sepideh becomes uglier as the film unfolds. She is in a state of constant nausea always about to vomit. Elly too becomes ugly as her death, unlike Antigone’s, is not cloaked in the splendour of the master signifier of honour. The last remnant of beauty (the fake Louis Vuitton bag) only evokes for Alireza his developing conviction of Elly’s inner ugliness. If, according to Žižek’s Antigone, the heroine’s fidelity to her father and brother consists most essentially of her betrayal and public

5 This punning allusion to The Unbearable Lightness of Being (Kundra, 2005) is not the mere result of an accident of language without deeper signification — Freud has taught us well that no such “mere” accidents exist. If, in this work, Kundera critiques the “greatest weight” Nietzsche hopes to cast upon existence through his doctrine of the eternal return (see Nietzsche, 1974, p. 273), my play on Kundera’s title is intended to emphasize Lacan’s thesis that love is b
denouncement – just as Judas’ treason would be an act of highest loyalty – then Elly’s assumed unfaithfulness completes the long series of her sacrifices as this alleged betrayal dispenses Alireza of all guilt at the expense of drowning her own name in eternal infamy and revealing to us once more that duplicity is sometimes more loyal to fidelity than fidelity itself.

Of the Primum Vivere or the Misfortunes of Mourning

In his study on Antigone, Patrick Guyomard (1992) develops a perspicacious critical engagement with Lacan’s reflections on the relation between tragedy, Antigone in particular, and psychoanalysis. Guyomard establishes the distinction between desire and castration as the focal point of his analysis and critique. Without castration, he reminds us, desire becomes indistinguishable from fantasies of omnipotence (Guyomard, 1992, p. 20). At the centre of Guyomard’s critical engagement with Lacan is the latter’s controversial claim according to which “the only thing that one may feel guilty about, at least from a psychoanalytic perspective, is to have given way with respect to one’s desire” (pp. 112-113). Guyomard recognizes in this statement a kind of triumphant defiance over castration and a false promise of a realm beyond guilt (p. 113). For Guyomard, it is Lacan’s intemperate praise of Antigone that culminates in this phrase. Antigone, like other tragic heroes/heroines, does not give way to her desire (p. 113). In this regard, Guyomard speaks of Antigone’s “narcissistic autonomy”; it is an autonomy that refuses all symbolic debts other than to the closest, namely her family and, more particularly, her brother (p. 44). According to Guyomard, it is here important to distinguish between two kinds of autonomy where one involves responsibility while the other entails the tragic impossibility of recognizing a law other than that of the family and thereby freeing oneself from the grips of incest. The question that Guyomard asks in light of Lacan’s praise of Antigone is whether the latter’s behaviour testifies to an acceptance or refusal of castration understood as an autonomy concomitant with responsibility. Guyomard is worried that Lacan may advocate an ethics beyond guilt and castration. More specifically, he feels that Lacan’s notion of “pure desire” does not do well to distinguish desire from unbridled escalations of jouissance (p. 26). More controversially still, some years later, Lacan argues that “the analyst does not give way with respect to his desire” (p. 113). Is this a viable ethics for a psychoanalyst or an analysand? Guyomard is wary of the idea that Antigone could be a model for psychoanalysis. He feels that we should maintain the abyssal gap separating desire and its interpretation (p. 20); if castration is on the side of interpretation, desire risks merging into omnipotence and jouissance when it manifests as a pure striving. In this light, it may be arguably stated that the death drive is desire manifesting in its purity “uncontaminated” by interpretation or castration.6

In light of Lacan’s reflections on Antigone and Guyomard’s critical engagement with these, the following questions could be raised. In what way could About Elly and Antigone provide a model for psychoanalysis? Are Sepideh and Antigone’s “pure desire” a model for a corresponding pure desire of the analyst? For Guyomard, Creon represents, at the end of the play, the moment where one thinks of what just happened. In light of Lacan’s Presentation on the Transference, we could say that this moment represents a crucial dialectical shift where the Hegelian beautiful soul (a term equally apt for Antigone and Creon) recognizes his/her involvement in what he/she bemoans. Sophocles’ play begins with two master discourses (Antigone and Creon, masters and beautiful souls alike) pinned tenaciously against each other. The play ends, however, with the advent of an analyst’s discourse represented by Creon’s decision to change his attitude and begin to mourn the devastating consequences of his blind will. Following Rimbaud, Lacan (1998) holds that a change of discourse is always accompanied by a sudden advent of love. Accordingly, Creon’s love of Haemon and Eurydice accompanies his decision to finally abandon his sovereign stance in favour of pensive reflection. With the play’s ending we testify to Creon’s ability to display his guilt to the big Other, a move that marks the relinquishing of his innocence. It is important to note, however, that the emergence of the analyst’s

6 This statement could be read as a more general rendition of Lacan’s (2004) definition of acting out as “transference without interpretation”.
discourse requires, first of all, a master signifier. In other words, the master’s discourse needs to be in place before it can switch to its opposite, namely the analyst’s discourse. In as much as Sepideh’s pure desire is without a proper master signifier, the possibility of an eventual turn to psychoanalytic desire is radically reduced in About Elly.\(^7\) There is thus no space for reflection in this film. Psychic space is nearly entirely absent, something well captured by the numerous instances evoking the unleashing of the acephalic drive: the kite flying wildly in the air as Elly runs joyfully on the sand, the turbulent waves in the sea as well as the fast driving in the tunnel. Is there an analyst’s desire in the film? Interestingly, two scenes seem to allude to psychoanalysis directly. The first involves Naazi and her husband Manoochehr speaking about their emotions with respect to Elly’s tragic death. They manage to find, in their car, the minimal space required for associating reflectively away from the mayhem of group hysteria. Naazi lies down on her pulled back seat suggestive of an analytic couch and even mentions having had a dream. Sadly, we do not hear the content of the dream and the exploration of grief is abruptly halted. The little space for mourning that was about to open was soon closed off by the mania of collectively unacknowledged guilt. The second scene occurs at the end of the film where Naazi’s slip of the tongue points to this guilt but is quickly hidden over. Rather than an analyst’s desire opening the space for thought and symbolic reparation, we have, in this film, three subject positions each foreclosing the possibility of mourning in distinct ways:

1. Sepideh’s deep melancholia testifies to a space where guilt cannot be spoken and where, as a result, the space for reparation is barred.
2. Alireza’s anger is an obvious hindrance to working through. If, according to an object-relations approach, the belief in the “goodness” of the object is a necessary condition for mourning, then Sepideh’s lies have deprived him radically of this possibility.
3. The rest of the group busies itself with pulling the car out of the sand, senseless toil designed to numb the senses in the service of the passion for ignorance.

All three instances testify to the closing of the paths of mourning. The car in the sand, another over-determined signifier, can thus be read as the symbol of the weight of Elly’s corpse on everyone’s conscience, a burden barring the possibility to mourn. In the heated final scenes where the group debates over what to say to Alireza, the question of Elly’s honour finally comes up. To this burning question, perhaps the central concern of the film, Peyman nonchalantly replies “she is dead, what does she want honour for”. This blatant rejection of the rights of the dead is tantamount to an outright disavowal of the importance of mourning. Such a crass declaration testifies to the lack of a master signifier, a loss concomitant with modernity.\(^8\) Nothing is important to Peyman other than that which is simply useful in the given circumstances. Miller (2006) christened the domain of the purely practical with the expression “primum vivere” meaning simply “first life”. In this domain of the calculus of utility, all that matters is survival irrespective of honour or shame. This is in stark contrast with the ethics of Antigone where the massive weight of the highly prized master signifier (Polyneices’ honour) weds the heroine to the realm of the dead (“My husband is to be the Lord of Death” (Sophocles, 1991, p. 213)). Where the master signifier is inoperative, life is reduced to an instrumental utilitarianism where the rights of the dead are deemed a lofty concern better ignored. In such a space, mourning is evidently impossible. Unlike her ancient counterparts Polyneices, Antigone, Haemon and Eurydice who each perished for a central master signifier,\(^9\) Elly dies without the redemptory power of a higher principle. During the police interrogation we find that the group does not even know Elly’s real name; she will remain “nameless”, a predicament cruelly testifying to the extreme eradication of the master signifier. Mourning requires a master signifier the eventual loss of which is worked through. Antigone’s

\(^7\) This possibility is further annulled by the fact that love (synonymous with the analyst’s discourse, for Lacan) too meets its “misfortune” in this film (see footnote 3).

\(^8\) For a more detailed account of the waning of the master signifier in modernity see Miller (2006) and Laurent (2006).

\(^9\) Polynices died in battle fighting for what he believed in, Antigone died for the latter’s honour, Haemon died out of love for Antigone and, finally, Eurydice died of a mother’s undying devotion to her son.
master signifier is her brother’s honour; it is a signifier that she takes to her death. Hanging herself, she dies standing thus beautifully evoking for us her desire to never fall, to never allow the collapse of her master signifier. She refuses to mourn anyone (mother, father and brother) as she steadfastly clings to her master signifier. Instead of mourning she persists in melancholic identification with the dead, an identification commensurate with her undying passion for her master signifier. Creon’s master signifier is power, authority and order in the city. His mourning begins when, at the denouement of the play, he drops his master signifier and begins to question himself.\(^{10}\) By the most blatant contrast, About Elly testifies to an absolute absence of a master signifier. Here we are veritably in the cynical domain of the “nothing to lose” where, amidst the dominion of the \textit{primum vivere}, the dead have no claim over the living.

\textbf{The Zone Between-Two-Deaths or The Misfortunes of Filiation}

In \textit{The Ethics of Psychoanalysis}, Lacan argues that Antigone lives in the zone “between-two-deaths”. Sophocles’ play begins with Antigone’s statement concerning her devotion to the rights of the dead and ends with her own death. The play thus begins with a symbolic death culminating in a real one at the close of the narrative. In between the two, throughout the unfolding of the play, Antigone persists in the in-between zone. This is a zone where, as we have seen, the master signifier looms large, so enormously that it symbolically kills the heroine forbidding her the usual undertakings of the living such as marriage and procreation.\(^{11}\) This zone between-two-deaths starkly contrasts with the aforementioned \textit{primum vivere} which, according to Miller, marks late modernity’s loss of shame and honour. Does About Elly not also stage a symbolic space between-two-deaths? Much of the symbolism in the film is suggestive of such a space. After Elly’s disappearance, Sepideh is shown lying in the car on the beach as dawn rises. The camera’s focus on the interior of the car initially looks like a coffin, something that strongly evokes the idea that henceforth Sepideh, much like Antigone, will live in the realm of the living dead (dawn itself, a liminal time between night and day also evokes the realm between-two-deaths). Moreover, the way Sepideh throws herself into the wild sea unconcerned of the danger she poses herself casts light on her devotion to Elly and her radical divorce from the trivial concerns of everyday \textit{primum vivere}. Also, the use of foreshadowing implicitly suggesting the gloomy events to follow casts the shadow of death on the idyllic exterior created by the group of young professionals on holiday. We get the ominous sense that these masters of the \textit{primum vivere} will soon fall from their false paradise into the realm between-two-deaths symbolized in turn by the broken glass passed from Elly to Ahmad, the decrepit state of the dirty home, the wild sea threatening the children’s safety as well as the German proverb quoted by Ahmad according to which “a disastrous ending is better than a disaster without ending”.\(^{12}\) The first camera shot of the film is from inside an alms box. The dark space illuminated with only a feeble ray of light coming through the hole is strongly suggestive of the liminal frontier separating life from death. This motif is recaptured in the next shot as the camera shifts out of the alms box onto a tunnel, another place of transition that is neither inside nor outside, neither life nor death but an “extimate”\(^{13}\) space evocative of the realm between-two-deaths.

Is psychoanalysis, like tragedy, also situated in this in-between zone? The importance of castration, setting limits, the “depressive position” as well as loss and mourning undoubtedly leads to such a conclusion.

\(^{10}\) Some (van Haute, 1997) have argued that Creon is in fact the tragic figure of \textit{Antigone}. What this view fails to acknowledge is that the very tragic nature of ancient heroes (Oedipus, Antigone etc.) consists of their unbridled fidelity to their master signifier which forbids access to mourning. At the play’s end, Creon relinquishes his master signifier and thereby opens a margin for thought where mourning can commence. This is in strict opposition to the tragic figure who remains forever wed to the purity of his/her desire.

\(^{11}\) In Antigone’s own words: “I am alive but Hades who gives sleep to everyone/ is leading me to the shores of Acheron,/ though I have known nothing of marriage songs/ nor the chant that brings the bride to bed./ My husband is to be the Lord of Death” (Sophocles, 1991, p. 213).

\(^{12}\) The original German quotation cited in the film is “Besser ein Ende mit Schrecken als ein Schrecken ohne Ende”.

\(^{13}\) The word “extimate” is a portmanteau word (combining “external” and “intimate”) coined by Lacan in order to evoke such liminal spaces.
There is, however, a very different rapport with death in psychoanalysis and in tragedy insofar as in the former the subject is urged to drop the master signifier. The moment this is achieved is a moment of mourning and a moment of shame, the affective correlate of the dialectical shift theorized in *Presentation on the Transference*. In tragedy, the hero clings to the master signifier in order to uphold the purity of a desire beyond guilt and shame. If Antigone’s master signifier is so inextricably bound to her incestuous wishes (arguably all master signifiers bear a connection to incest) then it may be argued that the relinquishing of her master signifier would require overcoming infantile attachments. This, however, is precisely what Antigone refuses to do. Her attachment to her father and brother forbids the possibility of moving towards the procreation of a new generation. She refuses to marry Haemon and rejects all prospects of maternity. For Antigone, the only available symbolic position is that of sister and daughter. As Alexandra Papageorgiou-Legendre (1990) would put it, there is, for her, no possibility of a “symbolic permutation of roles” insofar as the transition from child to parent is made impossible by the fervent attachment to the past. The zone between two deaths, burdened by the weight of the master signifier, is an incestuous realm where the subject lives between two generations, an ancestry to which he/she is undyingly devoted and a progeny that cannot be.

In this vein, for Guyomard, *Antigone* is about the rejection of maternity and filiation. He reveals the etymology of the name as composed of “anti” meaning opposed and “gone” referring to motherhood and generation. Could the same be said regarding *About Elly*? Here too we witness a kind of failure of the symbolic permutation of roles where the parents’ neglect of their children leads to the close drowning of Arash. Sepideh is more concerned with playing the matchmaker than attending to maternal duties. The infantilism of the adults testifies to an incestuous attachment to their own childhood, more specifically their own youth as law students. As Lacan has argued, “there are no other children in the family but the parents” (Lacan, 2006, p. 482). The adults in this film are truly children; their infantilism is attested to massively in the following numerous instances:

1. Omid’s serious face is a major contrast to the dancing of the adults.
2. The children have to tell the parents about Arash drowning, while the parents are busy playing volleyball.
3. While playing charades Peyman chooses to congratulate the law school students ignoring the fact that Elly is thereby excluded. Interestingly his choice of phrase involves the Persian idiom “dame maa garm” meaning “long live us” (literally “may our breath remain warm”, i.e. may we continue to live and breathe). In light of the events yet to unfold, this phrase takes on a particularly repugnant sense as the very person excluded from the self-congratulatory “long live the law students” is the one whose breath would soon be silenced and whose body would be frosted by death.
4. All the joking about Ahmad and Elly is reminiscent of the puerile teasing and mockery of grade school children.
5. They decide that men and women should sleep separately. They avoid the sexual relation like children and gain greater satisfaction talking about the potential love of others (Ahmad and Elly) like children curious of adult sexuality.
6. Amir repeatedly rolls his eyes at Sepideh whenever he cannot get his way. Moreover, he acts like a spoiled child when he felt that his voice was not heard during the vote concerning where they should stay overnight.
7. The police complain about having to interrogate the kids concerning the tragic events as no adult can provide a satisfactory testimony.

Likewise, Antigone will not grow up; she remains “the kid”, as the chorus has aptly christened her, and incestuously pulls herself out of the transmission of life (Guyomard, 1992, p. 64). Haemon, outraged by his father’s hard-headedness, calls him a child. When Antigone says, “my brother is who he is”, Guyomard suggests that an analyst could hear in this claim her own message in an inverted form: “I am only his sister, I am only a sister”, namely an eternal girl-child that will never become a woman (p. 55). Can something similar...
be said of Sepideh? What is her message in inverted form? The lack of a master signifier makes this much more terrifying. Sepideh may have no message that we could return to her in inverted form. This is elegantly rendered when, scolding her for meddling in Ahmad’s life, Amir rhetorically asks her “who are you to him? Are you his mother, his sister, who are you to him?”. The lack of an answer here is clearly to be distinguished with Antigone’s tautological “my brother is my brother”; in the latter case we have the full certainty of an unequivocal affirmation while in the former case we have the absence of a possible response testifying to a lacking master signifier. Where Antigone is driven by a sense of honour making up the splendour of a beauty that still fascinates us today, Sepideh is simply a nosy matchmaker snooping senselessly in the lives of others.

**Betrayal or The Misfortunes of Exogamy**

What is at stake when a subject accuses others of betrayal? For Guyomard, the cause of betrayal must always be sought in ourselves rather than the Other. In similar light, Adam Phillips (2012) has elegantly argued that we often lead others to betray us. An unconscious tendency would lead us to tempt others into betrayal deploying them as instruments of our own narcissistically fantasied martyrdom. The reproach of betrayal made to others, Guyomard argues, is often an envious malediction towards those who have successfully exited from incest (Guyomard, 1992, p. 91). It is the fact that life moves on without us that appears as a betrayal; filiation and the transmission of life become the unbearable objects of cynical envious reproach (p. 91). Peyman swiftly accuses Elly of betrayal and jumps to the erratic conclusion that she deceived the whole group for her own gains. With his customary self-congratulatory tone, he claims on behalf of himself and the group, a kind of collective beautiful soul, that “we are so innocent and naïve”; it is as if he were to exclaim that “we are the “cathars”, we are the pure, we are the law graduates, the law is with us, justice is with us, may we live long and prosper, may our breath retain its warmth!” Elly is quickly vilified as a liar who allegedly misled the group about her engagement. Such an accusation and impudent plea of innocence testifies, in light of Guyomard and Phillip’s reflections on betrayal and incest, to the incestuous ties linking the law students together and their consequent inability to welcome a new member and create novel exogamic ties. Accordingly, the car stuck in the sand may be also indicative of this inability to escape incest. The group’s self-satisfied impertinence and total disrespect for the deceased Elly reaches its climax as they all decide to make her the culprit of their errors to ensure their own peaceful coexistence, an act done in agreement with the law of scapegoating, isolated by René Girard (1972), according to which a social group will condemn one subject as the sole placeholder of all guilt in order warrant peace among its remaining members. What is worse is that the symbolic sacrifice of Elly’s name (captured also by the fact that her literal name remained anonymous) will stay forever unknown as the group has implicitly agreed that this sacrifice (done for the sake of saving their own skin) remains a secret. Unlike the ancient sacrifice accompanied by ritual and public recognition, everything here remains hidden with only a tic on Sepideh’s face (marking her guilt) as a last vestige of the sacrifice of Elly’s honour. Strictly speaking, this lack of public recognition means that her name was not sacrificed but simply killed, a predicament akin to Agamben’s *homo sacer*, “the person whom anyone could kill with impunity” but who “was nevertheless not to be put to death according to ritual practices” (Agamben, 1998, p. 72). Sacred and accursed, Elly embodied, at once, the woman as prized object of exchange14 and the disgraced *homo sacer* soon to be shelved away at the morgue amidst the countless dead.

**Conclusion: On the Misfortunes of Shame**

It is my hope that the intertextual comparison with *Antigone* will bring into relief, by way of contrast, the postmodern (and, at times, even post-postmodern) elements of *About Elly*. A number of important

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14 According to Lévi-Strauss’ (2002) structural anthropology, patriarchal society is based on the exchange of women as objects of desire. For a general philosophical critique of Lévi-Strauss’ structuralism see Derrida (1967) – the chapter entitled “La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines”). For a more specifically feminist critique drawing on Derrida’s aforementioned engagement with Lévi-Strauss see Butler (2000).
paradoxes structure the film radically severing its narrative from any conception of ancient tragedy. The first of these is the existence of incestuous attachment without a master signer. Earlier we noted that the attachment to a master signer is always an incestuous attachment; it always involves an over-fidelity that achieves its fervour from the remnants of infantile sexual devotion to the earliest love objects. If Antigone is the definitive testament to the ineradicable bond linking the master signer to incest (the rights of the dead for which Antigone stands are entirely inseparable from her love of Polyneices), About Elly attests to the paradox of incest without a master signer as passionate attachments are here not steered in the direction of any higher principle. This lack is what makes the group of lawyers so deplorable. Ironically, Antigone, which deals with actual incest, holds us in fascination while About Elly, which involves only a figurative incest, is more hideous and repulsive to our sight. It is as though Antigone’s master signer were capable, by itself, of transforming the horror of incest into the splendour of beauty while About Elly, despite excluding literal incest, left us in revolt faced with the abysmal lack of a master signer. The second paradox of the film consists of the fact that it stages a zone between-two-deaths without excluding the primum vivere by contrast to Antigone where the former explicitly bars the latter. In fact, this should follow de rigueur for how could one perdure in the morbid realm between-two-deaths while living in the frivolous land of the primum vivere? Thirdly, the film testifies, as we have seen, to a sacrifice without ritual where Elly’s name is ruthlessly disgraced for the wellbeing of the group without this sacrifice being ever recognized let alone repaired. Fourthly, Sepideh’s final predicament testifies to the terrifying paradox of melancholia without self-complaint. Unlike the tragic melancholic of yesteryear (e.g. Hamlet), Sepideh must seal her guilt within the secrecy of her bosom unable to vent openly even against herself. Just as Žižek feels that his own version of Antigone is postmodern by virtue of the fact that the heroine cannot share her pain in social space, I argue that About Elly heralds a post-postmodern tragedy insofar as guilt here takes the place of suffering. Finally, the fifth paradox concerns fidelity’s deterioration into betrayal. Elly’s faithfulness to Alireza registers in the symbolic Other as duplicity while Sepideh’s fidelity to Elly (her panicked concern for what Alireza thinks about Elly) dwindles in the hour of truth into a cowardly lie intended to save her own skin as well as that of her equally gutless peers.

About Elly thus arguably stages an incestuous region between-two-deaths outside the auspices of any master signer; it is a paradoxical coincidence of this in-between zone and the primum vivere, an ugly convergence of the bourgeois lightness of being and the heavy burden of un-mourned loss and unspoken melancholic guilt, a place where sacrifices go unperceived and where fidelity dreadfully amounts to betrayal. The corpse of the young Elly in the morgue is the unseemly reminder of the postmodern predicament here staged beyond classical tragedy. This film (much like Claudel’s trilogy and Žižek and Kierkegaard’s reconceptions of Antigone) subverts the usual strategies and devices of ancient tragedy as it opens a space where the absence or, at the very least, the meekness of a higher principle marks the futility of sacrifice, the impossibility of mourning as well as the abolition of beauty. We are veritably in the space of the homo sacer where bare life is taken away with impunity. What is the significance of the gated villa by the sea? Is it a paradise of enjoyment for these sovereign masters of la dolce vita? Or is it a space akin to a concentration camp (“the biopolitical paradigm of the modern” according to Agamben (1998)) where, at the end of the film, we see men and women reduced to senseless toil (pushing a car in sand) as death looms over their conscience? The camera shot showing them labouring at a long distance powerfully renders their insignificance. They too are “bare” life as fear has made them all conspire to lie. If late modernity is the time of the primum vivere it is because it is also the time of bare life, life that cares only for survival or, at most,

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15 Incest should be considered as a general mode of relating to others rather than restricting it to the literal passionate attachment to kin. One may thus speak of incest whenever a group of people become overly attached to each other, to the detriment of all other subjects, on the basis of a common trait (in this case they are all law graduates). It may be even argued that this form of “figurative” incest is more dangerous than its literal counterpart as it threatens the wellbeing of the larger social space. The growing popularity of right-wing anti-immigration parties could be seen as national scale incest. In this light, is it a coincidence that Donald Trump, a fervent xenophobe if there ever was one, is also notorious for his inappropriate sexual comments about his daughter? It is indeed true; “incest is fine, as long as it’s kept within the family” (Verhaeghe, 1999, p. 59).
enjoyment. The superegoic injunction to enjoy (Lacan, 1998), central to this narrative, slowly reveals its monstrous other side, namely the struggle for mere survival. Elly’s plight can be seen as a trajectory moving across the two poles constituting the frame of postmodernity, namely the sovereign mandate to jouissance and bare life’s struggle to simply live. The film stages Sepideh as Elly’s superego-jouissance urging her to have fun, stay longer on holiday and flirt with Ahmad such that Elly is deeply burdened by these injunctions and struggles to escape. The end of the film reveals the upshot of this modern insistence on heedless enjoyment as Elly is brought to untimely death with her namelessness further testifying to her status as homo sacer.

If the titles of the sections of this paper allude to Sade’s Justine, it is because a central concern of Farhadi’s film is arguably the critique of the aforementioned culture of enjoyment in postmodernity. Each subtitle refers in turn to a different “speculative possession”, as Freud would have it, dangerously threatened in the manic space of jouissance staged in About Elly. The misfortunes of honour reveal the demise of the master signifier as modernity heralds a time where higher principles sink as the reign of the primum vivere strengthens. The misfortunes of fidelity were intended to show how a subject still wedded to a higher principle would not only die of it (as did Antigone) but would not even be remembered for it, with only a senseless tic left to testify to her fidelity. The misfortunes of mourning reveal a culture lost to the possibility of mourning as the margin for reflection and thought is increasingly stifled by jouissance. With the notion of the misfortunes of filiation and exogamy taken together, I wanted to show the difficulty for postmodern subjects in the grips of jouissance to separate from infantile attachments and achieve a symbolic permutation of roles. Interestingly, the transition to paternity/maternity involves an appeal to the name (Lacan’s “name-of-the-father”) summoned every time a subject acquires a new symbolic position. While the “name-of-the-father” is operative here (we are not in the domain of psychotic foreclosure), it fails to wrest these subjects out of their infantile attachments to one another and thereby also fails to open the space for making new exogamic relations with an equally respected Other. We thus have a crisis of the name or, to evoke Butler, a kind of “nomination trouble” abundantly evoked by Elly’s namelessness. Finally, we began with the misfortunes of truth as we spoke of Sepideh’s numerous lies. There I highlighted the redemptory value of these lies as they opened the space for properly considering the content of Elly’s desire.

Finally, I would like to reconsider Lacan’s claims concerning the relation between guilt and desire. How are we to take this claim? Is it a mere “scientific” thesis stating that guilt arises only when desire is thwarted? As such it would be heir to Freud’s idea (1930) according to which guilt is inversely proportional to instinctual renunciations. Such a reading would remove the controversial bite of Lacan’s claim for it is indeed true that within the space of pure unbridled desire guilt is absent, at least from conscious discourse. Guyomard’s critique, however, targets a potential ethical or ideological dimension of Lacan’s dictum. One must not forget that it was stated in a seminar concerned principally with the ethics of psychoanalysis. Where all psychoanalysts would seemingly agree that an ethics of psychoanalysis, if there is one, should revolve around reflection and thought, Lacan puts forward the idea of an ethics of psychoanalysis based on the purity of desire. What then of the dialectical shifts of Presentation on the Transference? Is Lacan now proposing an ethics of the beautiful soul? What of Lacan’s appeal to the students of May 1968 asking them precisely to abandon the purity of their desire, a desire he interprets as a wish for a greater master? If Lacan opposes obstructing desire through guilt, he is certainly less opposed to silencing desire’s fury through the

16 The only genuine analytic lie of the film was perhaps Naazi’s slip which, in the last instance, failed to register.
intervention of shame. The crux of Guyomard’s critique revolves around the distinction between desire and jouissance, a distinction that he bases on the possibility of guilt. Perhaps it would be wiser to pivot this difference, instead, on shame, namely the veil that could have protected Elly’s modesty. With this, my aim is not to deny the relevance of Guyomard’s apt insistence on the importance of guilt but to simply make the point that without shame guilt loses all reparative quality as it becomes indistinguishable from unbridled jouissance. The image of Sepideh drowned in guilt at the end of the film should suffice to show that guilt alone does not open the space of analytic desire. Freud showed us long ago that the melancholic’s guilt, unhindered by shame, left little room for psychic elaboration and working through. It is Sepideh and her clan’s lack of shame that killed Elly. If “modesty is an amboceptor with respect to the circumstances of being” then the immodesty of the lawyers would violate by itself Elly’s modesty. The film thus testifies to how the lack of shame returns in the real, so to speak, as the cloak of death cast on Elly’s dead body. Perhaps we may then align Lacan’s dictum on desire to the idea that “the aim of psychoanalysis is to produce shame” (Copjec, 2006). If Creon finally bows to psychoanalytic desire at the end of the play, is this not because the purity of Antigone’s desire finally put his iron will to shame? If Antigone and Sepideh’s desire both merit the label “pure”, one must insist on a principal difference. Where Sepideh wanted to meddle pryingly into the lives of others, Antigone sought, by stark contrast, to cast a veil upon her brother’s corpse in order to restore, beyond his death, his unbreachable dignity and privacy. Quipping Julien Green in light of Lacan, one could say that God, unable to make the group of lawyers humble, made Elly humiliated; Elly’s disgraced name is silent testament to their brazen immodesty. The analyst, here showing more resolve and courage than God Himself, must remain unbending in the pure desire to produce shame lest we descend into humiliation.

References


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17 One could make a noteworthy list of the instances where the silly joking of the group brought Elly to pull herself out of the scene thereby seeking solace from their mockery and intrusive snoopy gaze.
18 Lacan uses the term “amoceptor” to qualify entities that occupy a liminal space such that their locus becomes ambiguous. In sexual intercourse, the penis is an amoceptor between man and woman while the breast is an amoceptor between mother and child in breastfeeding. An emotion such as shame is also an amoceptor insofar as it may be readily shared between subjects.
19 The exact quotation from Julien Green is: “God, unable to make us humble, made us humiliated” (Goddard, 2014).